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**LABOR AND SOCIETY IN THE JIU VALLEY AND
FAGARAS REGIONS OF ROMANIA, PART I:
VARIATIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS**

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Executive summary

This report compares the social relations of labor in two Romanian regions, the Jiu Valley, with its hard-coal mining industry, and the Făgăraș region chemical manufacturing zone. It considers how and to what extent such circumstances influence workers' perceptions of control over their lives, and attitudes and behavior about health, the body, and physicality in general. The impetus for this research comes from the disastrous decline in life expectancies and health among East-Central European and, particularly, Romanian middle-aged men (Cockerham 1999). Though many have asserted a relationship between social factors and health conditions (Bobek and Marmot 1996, Watson 1995), few have actually spelled out the precise vectors along which this relationship operates. This research tries to document this relationship by considering how variations in labor conditions shape responses to the post-socialist decline. This report is the first of two dealing with these questions.

Introduction: theme of the research and report organization

This report compares the social relations of labor in two Romanian regions, the Jiu Valley, with its hard-coal mining industry, and the Făgăraș region chemical manufacturing zone. It considers how and to what extent such circumstances influence workers' perceptions of control over their lives, and attitudes and behavior about health, the body, and physicality in general. The impetus for this research comes from the disastrous decline in life expectancies and health among East-Central European and, particularly, Romanian middle-aged men (Cockerham 1999). Though many have asserted a relationship between social factors and health conditions (Bobek and Marmot 1996, Watson 1995), few have actually spelled out the precise vectors along which this relationship operates. This research tries to document this relationship by considering how variations in labor conditions shape responses to the post-socialist decline.

The results of this research are presented in two parts. Part I describes the history, social organization, and trends of labor in the two regions. This section thus generally considers how such trends influence developing social relations and worker social responses to regional decline. The significance of regional decline for workers' senses of control over the conditions of their lives and in social institutions beyond the workplace is also examined. Part I utilizes descriptive, ethnographic, and qualitative data to depict the social relations of labor and its social significance. Part II is more concerned with questions of health and the body as they relate to the conditions of labor. Part II uses statistics to examine attitudes and perceptions about health and considers how and why these vary in different work settings. Taken together, then, these two reports provide an in-depth look at two groups of workers struggling through Romania's economic crisis. Such a comparison, I hope, is potentially illustrative of future trends in Romanian labor, the stability of the social systems influenced by these conditions, as well as some of the factors shaping the health conditions and life expectancies of Romanian workers today.

Contrasting regional production systems

On the surface, the Jiu Valley and Făgăraș regions are alike in many ways. Both had a concentrated mono-industrial production base as the heart of the socialist industrial complex. During socialism both regions prospered and drew labor from other Romanian areas. However, in post-socialism, because of the heavy concentration of a single, economically inefficient, highly centralized, state-based industry – hard-coal mining and chemical manufacture – both regions were targeted for extensive economic restructuring, now resulting in devastating unemployment and active and politicized labor movements.

Today, the Jiu Valley mining industry (*minerit*) is reeling from two rounds of mass “self-selected” layoffs (*disponibilizare*) spurred by severance packages to miners of up to twenty months of pay to renounce their positions (Government of Romania 1997). *Disponibilizare* enabled closure of two of thirteen mines, threatens an unspecified additional number, and has decreased *minerit* employees from 53,446 in 1989 to 18,216 today. The largest part of the unemployed now sit idle in the Jiu Valley, their unemployment benefits having run out in December 1999.

As discussed below, many idled miners who formerly migrated into the region, sought to return to their home areas, chiefly Moldavia, but came back to the Jiu when their prospects did not pan out. Similarly, in the three factories of the Făgăraș region¹ the number of employees declined precipitously from a total of 17,239 in 1989 to 5,636 today. While many of these laid-off workers migrated both legally and illegally to Italy, most remain in the region seeking other sources of livelihood. As of summer 2000, another 300 or so workers were soon to be “disponibilized” from the three Făgăraș factories under consideration.

Political uncertainty, high unemployment and steep rises in the cost of living have galvanized labor in both regions. Jiu Valley miners are, of course, famous (or infamous) for their periodic marches on Bucharest (*mineriade*), whether to support or intimidate various Romanian governments and leaders. Since the fall of socialism, they have threatened Bucharest five times (1-90, 6-90, 9-91, 1-99, 2-99). Despite the renown this brings, such large-scale national actions were in the past eclipsed by local labor grievances where strikes

snowballed to include nearly all the mines, generating group solidarity in the process. Făgăraș factory unions and workers also participated in labor actions at national and local levels, though their actions were less frequent, violent, and universal. In part to stem such actions and address economic needs, the Romanian government named the Jiu Valley a “disfavored zone” according to terms of the so-called Law on Disfavored Zones. Făgăraș’ appeal for this status, was not however approved.² The importance of this law, the extent to which it functions, and the reasons for the different treatment of the Jiu Valley and Făgăraș are discussed in greater detail below.

Despite these overt commonalities, this research suggests that variations in the history and organization of production in these two regions have shaped highly differentiated labor relations which in turn yield diverse socio-cultural responses to Romania’s crisis. In the Jiu Valley, mining is the near sole livelihood. As the mine dominates regional economics and mentalities, mining also shapes oppositional relations between miners and the surrounding community, between miners and superiors, between active and unemployed miners, and in miner households. As polarization grows in each sector of Jiu Valley life in the context of the economic crisis, miners sense declining control over conditions and relations at work, in their home life, and over their own futures. In response, the remaining miners are angry but unable to organize either effective individual or group response.

In contrast, in Făgăraș sources of labor and income are diffused. While the chemical plants were the chief regional employer, Făgăraș workers, to a greater extent, have access to economic alternatives, like rural employment and emigration. This contributes to a somewhat greater sense of control and more stable labor and domestic relations, but also requires constant individualistic strategizing furthering social atomization. Notwithstanding such variation, at the individual and domestic levels, feelings of intense stress are common in each region. And it is this stress that ultimately lays these workers low.

History and social organization of Jiu Valley mining communities: the context of impasse and stress

Popular views of Jiu Valley miners, shaped by the mass violence of the diverse *mineriade*, impute group unity and shared political response. This idea suggests that the mystique and conditions of mine work – the stark boundary between the underground and earth's surface the mine creates, the hard conditions of mine labor, the expectation of sudden death – encourage a natural solidarity and common identity. Furthermore, as the argument goes, miner identity was also furthered in socialism by state material support and the frequent literary and journalistic use of miner images to promote the socialist cult of labor (Bârgău 1984, Pospai 1978). Lastly, miner common identity is allegedly shaped by miners' affinity for their union, the Jiu Valley League of Miners' Unions (LSMVJ, or simply the Liga) and its former leader Miron Cosma.

Such images of unified miners, acting in concert, are far from the truth, however. Any unity growing from shared conditions of mine labor and national politics is itself negated by a range of factors separating Jiu Valley miners from other community groups, segmenting the miners into distinct, antithetical sub-populations, and alienating miners from their union. These forces play havoc with miners' cultural expectations and social institutions like families and social networks. Thus, the unity based on mining as an occupation neither translates into overarching senses of personal control nor does it enable miners to form effective social groups outside the mine or achieve a shared understanding of actions to take to overcome decline. As of today, the Jiu Valley mining community is angry and frustrated, but moribund and completely frozen in its ability to respond to Romania's and the industry's severe crisis.

Valley history and settlement

The particular history and settlement of the Jiu Valley as a mining region contributes to the contemporary impasse. Jiu Valley coal mining brought together diverse groups, each of whom partially blames the other for the Valley's current problems, thus preventing meaningful dialogue and shared planning. The Jiu Valley was settled even in Dacian times, but before the modern era was a zone of dispersed peasants practicing stock keeping and subsistence agriculture. These people call themselves and are called by others *momârlani*, a term derived

from Hungarian for “those left behind,” as they stayed in the Valley after the post-World War I withdrawal of Austro-Hungarian forces.³ In the 1840s, large deposits of hard coal (*huila*) were discovered in the Valley.⁴ The first Polish-owned mines were quickly established and attracted people from diverse Austro-Hungarian ethnic groups. Poles, Magyars, Szeklers, Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, Romanians, and Jews came to work in the mines or set up commercial or craft establishments to serve the mining population (Baron 1998).

The privately owned mining companies were apparently generous to their workers, and mining soon became the occupation of choice and a family tradition within the Valley. Miners were settled in housing (*colonie*) built for them by mine owners. Here they received food, clothing, and energy subsidies. Community life, too, was said to be elevated by the *minerit*. Local bands played in town squares. Theatre groups entertained miners and their families. Ethnic peace reigned. The region’s multi-ethnic nature and vibrant working-class culture even earned it the sobriquet “Little America.” Though the industry was not without its tensions and conflicts, such as the ambiguous Lupeni miners strike of 1929 (Oprea 1970, Țic 1977, Velica 1999), by and large these are said to have been overemphasized by socialist propaganda, or even catalyzed by socialist agitators.

According to the heirs of this “early” Valley population, the advent of socialism and the related population change was the beginning of the end of the Jiu Valley *minerit*. First, Russians came to manage coal deliveries for war reparations, and their influence was soon felt everywhere, from the new high-roofed apartment complexes, like “Dimitrov” in Petroșani, to the metal helmets, mechanized transporters, and forced and planned production in the mines themselves. Romanian socialism further expanded Jiu Valley mining as the demand for coal for industry became insatiable in the 1960s and 1970s. As new mines opened, people from different Romanian regions, like Maramureș and Oltenia, moved into the Valley. Even *momârlani* now began to take up work in the mines.

Forced draft production coupled with declining work conditions came to a head in the first days of August 1977, when, state-mandated increases in the retirement age and the elimination of a pension category for injured miners erupted in a strike of 35,000 miners

(Matinal 1997). Though officials sought to placate them, the unified miners demanded to meet with Ceaușescu himself (Velica and Shreter 1993:188-89). A week later the General Secretary showed up at Lupeni to negotiate the miners' demands. In the end, the miners received all they asked for, including reinstatement of the previous pension law, hot meals, a shorter workday, better work clothing and equipment, and salary adjustments. However, their success was short-lived.

The Jiu Valley world changed after the 1977 strike. The Ceaușescu regime sought to negate miner unity by both punishing those responsible and, more significantly, militarizing production and importing large numbers of workers from other areas of Romania. To attract workers to the mines, representatives went to (mainly) Moldavian communities with stories of inflated salaries and good working conditions. Also, various economic entities were given quotas of workers to be released to the mining districts.

Taken together, these actions resulted in many unqualified workers migrating into the Valley. While many left when they saw what life in the mines was like, others remained to form the main group of miners who predominate in the Valley to this day. As the new mining population fluctuated wildly, military units were also brought in to maintain production. However, these soldiers were minimally motivated and poorly trained, adding yet another factor to the decline of the mines.

The significance of the Moldavian presence is a central theme in the local debate about the decline of Jiu Valley culture and the *minerit*. According to the view of the pre-1977 population, one so rife with stereotypical generalization we could term it "Moldavian Orientalism" (cf. Said 1975), Valley life was decimated by the influx of these poorly educated, socially troubled populations. Furthermore, mining itself suffered since miner training was speeded up, thereby promoting many unqualified individuals to diverse positions in the mines.

Immigrants to the *minerit*, by contrast, talk of how their labor expanded the *minerit* and was critical for Romania's industrialization. Before 1989, they say, miner salaries were deservedly among the highest in the country, and their expenditures supported the entire

Valley population. One miner, a work team head from Lupeni, challenged the idea of the post-1977 decline of culture:

We had all kinds of wonderful things. We went on picnics together. We had good food at the mines. We had sports teams that the miners supported. They would get cheap tickets to come to the games where there was a holiday atmosphere. The big teams would even come and play. But now no one really goes to the games much anymore. They haven't the money or the spirit.

Furthermore according to diverse miners, regional origins matter little in the mines. Though there was always some ethnic banter between individuals, an Aninoasa miner described the daily reality where:

Underground no one is Moldavian, Oltenian, or even Gypsy. We all take care of each other and help each other. If someone is caught in a cave-in you don't stop to think where he is from. You try to save him. If we only called for help for people that we knew and liked, then we would all be in danger.

One significant effect of the bimodal Jiu Valley population is felt in civic life. Because of the disdain in which they are held, and their mutual suspicion in return, there is next to no Moldavian or immigrant presence in Jiu Valley organs of government, education, media, and healthcare. In fact, the representatives of civil society level the most stringent critique at the post-1977 population. While there may be a kernel of truth to their argument, the constant replay of the past only maintains a yawning gulf between those in need of services and those empowered to provide them. This intensifies miners' feelings that they are scapegoats and deprives them of possible political and economic allies, even as it provides rationales for Jiu Valley authorities for the lack of regional change.

This gulf also affects Jiu Valley approaches to national politics. Both the miners generally, as well as the "pre-1977" non-mining Jiu Valley population (less so), feel that Romania's recent center-right governments have failed to turn around the problems of the Valley. Both groups also suggest that the government consciously discriminates against the Jiu Valley in response to past *mineriade*. They point to, among other things, the high cost of

water compared to the rest of the country and the government's failure to apply the Law on Disfavored Zones.

However, the groups disagree as to the cause of the *minerit's* problems. Miners feel that mining would do fine if Romania's governments would let it and suggest that economic policies that close factories and reduce the country's need for energy sit at the heart of their problems. However, the pre-1977 population places the blame squarely on the miners themselves. Assuming the worst about the Moldavian masses, they accuse the miners of poor quality work in an outmoded and ecologically unsound production system. Further, they see them as having been easily manipulated in the various *mineriade*, and wholly culpable for the Jiu Valley's poor image in the rest of Romania and among investors.

These antithetical views thus result in the mining community distrusting the efforts of the civic authorities to develop the region in ways that address the needs of miners and their families. Simultaneously the non-mining community is reticent to bring untrustworthy miners into their councils and plans. With the community so divided it is hardly surprising that little in the way of effective change occurs or is in the offing. Nor can the miners take action in their own right. Their own social relations and those with their union are also fraying, leaving them few outlets in the crisis besides meaningless, reactive hunger strikes and internalized recrimination.

The miners, their unions, and the political process

Today, the storied labor activism of Jiu Valley miners is in eclipse, and the alleged close relation of the Jiu Valley miners to their union has come undone. Though one may question the extent to which union identity was compelling in the past, the decline of the Liga certainly contributes to the miners' sense of isolation and loss of control over their lives. The decline of organized labor relations and actions in the Jiu Valley is easy to trace. The miners propensity for striking was first limited by passage of Law 15/1991, designed to restrict labor unrest by establishing rules for strikes and mechanisms to mediate labor disagreements (Brehoi and Popescu 1992, Bush 1993, Ockenga 1997, Parliament of Romania 1991). More significantly,

however, the miners were reduced in number by two-thirds by the “disponibilization”, and those who remain clearly fear for their jobs. Furthermore, mine union leaders, of questionable worth to begin with, have been removed or compromised and the union itself is increasingly a tool of leadership as opposed to effectively representing miners. Finally, as a last straw, miners marching in support of union leader Miron Cosma, the union, and their own demands, were strafed and gassed by government troops in January 1999 as they headed toward Bucharest. This appears to have been the last gasp of miner union activism.

Thus the persisting received wisdom about miner solidarity with their union is a sentiment left over from the *mineriade* and from their constant and generalized strike behavior in the first years after the Revolution. Then, strikes were mainly over benefits and working conditions. Others occasionally demanded the replacement of mine directors and administrative personnel, i.e. TESA.⁵ As in 1977, in the early 1990s when miners from one mine struck, the other mines followed suit, occasionally walking out first before they even knew the precise reason for striking. Strikes were sometimes even generated by internal competition between separate mine union locals and/or wildcatting miners. When one mine received a specific benefit, the other units also expected them.

Cosma effectively mobilized the miners by conceptually linking national level political events and processes with security and income levels of mine employment. He also legitimized himself through patronage, dispensing gifts, money, and favors to his followers. He thus conflated his own power with the well-being of the miners, but also threatened others who challenged his absolutism. His tactics were effective until mass “disponibilization” and government resistance to mobilized miners intersected in January 1999 on the march toward Bucharest. Though the Liga at that time sought to mobilize great numbers of miners to show their numbers in protest against threatened mine closures, their presence was greatly reduced from previous *mineriade*. Many who had not been “disponibilized” worried about preserving their jobs. Many of the already-“disponibilized” were alienated from the union. Others meanwhile had already left the Valley. Thus, by February 1999, the end of miner union-based

activism coincided with the arrest of Cosma and the failed *mineriade* interrupted at the Oltenian town of Stoieniști.

Today, though many miners still speak of Cosma as a demi-god, in the aftermath of Stoieniști, most others feel manipulated by him for his personal gain. A typical response when asked their feelings of him is that “he did both good and bad.” Furthermore, since Cosma’s arrest and imprisonment,⁶ most Jiu Valley miners have begun to disengage from their union. Almost none of Cosma’s support has carried over to his successors. Costel Postolache is the current head of the Liga and president of the Lupeni mine union and Victor Bădărcă is now president of the national miners confederation. Both are mainly seen as uninterested in the needs of workers or as hopelessly corrupt and compromised.⁷ For example, most miners speak regularly of their leaders’ use of members’ dues (1% of one’s base salary per month), to support their own consumption.

People rarely participate in union activities. The decreased benefits of union membership, or the decreased ability of people to pay their pro-rated share for other union benefits, like the 20% for the cost of a “ticket” for a Black Sea coast vacation or a spot at a health spa, contribute to this disengagement. One Lupeni mine union steward said it is hard to get people involved in union activities and he, himself, was giving up his position due to frustration after one two-year term. His views were supported by my observations at a few weekly “appeals” (which, in fact, were barely held every other month) at Lupeni mine where the union president stood on the staircase of the *sala de punctaj* (the large hall where miners receive their daily work orders) in his suit and tie looking completely estranged from the blackened miners exiting the mine. He was trying to speak to the assembled miners about a change in planned vacation dates, but they virtually ignored him. Similarly, according to a Lonea miner:

There hasn’t been a union meeting (to deal with a substantive issue) since 1990. We are only called when they have elections. We were called to a meeting once in 1996. They gave us food to eat and also to drink. They called us in order for us to vote for Cosma for Senator.

Most miners would agree with the sentiment of a mechanic from Aninoasa mine who, when commenting about poor mine conditions, said:

The Liga is especially at fault here. They should be more attentive to the miners' needs. But as far as the Liga leaders are concerned I only have black feelings about them. They just want to fill their own pockets. To buy villas and have foreign cars. Our leaders just have a lot of desires. They are people who serve much as Ceaușescu did, that is for life. Constantin Iliescu is our union president. He is a friend of Cosma. He was a colleague of mine...just like me. But now he's at least three times as rich as I am. If we try to change this there will be no effect. If anything, I would even put my job at risk by doing so.

"Disponibilization" also contributes to the decline in union sentiment and effectiveness. The 35,000 employees of the Jiu Valley *minerit* that left their jobs are no longer entitled to union representation. Unemployed miners are especially embittered about the union's lack of concern for them, while union officials reject the unemployed and claim that must knew what they were doing when they "disponibilized".

Given their alienation from the union, from local politics, and civil society, the miners increasingly, and to the horror of the region's non-mining population, turn to the presidential candidacy of Ion Iliescu as their one possible salvation. It was in Iliescu's service that they "invaded" Bucharest in September 1991 to overturn the government of then Prime Minister Petre Roman. According to most miners, life was better when he was president, and Iliescu regularly panders to this notion by promising state intervention to keep the mines open if elected again.

Such political sentiments were visible at Miner's Day at Lupeni Mine in August 1999 for the 70th anniversary of the Lupeni strike. Only Iliescu, of all major party representatives, showed up. He spoke later at the monument to the 1929 strikers, as the crowd carried placards with slogans like "Criminal Government, 1929-99," "Workers need workplaces," "Miner Unity," and "Freedom for Cosma." In his speech, amid chants of his and Cosma's name, Iliescu emphasized the heroism of the miners' past actions and condemned the current government's failure to provide new jobs. In so doing, however, he created the impression that Jiu Valley mining would be maintained at its previous strength and thus further encouraged miner inaction as they wait for the November elections.

Labor, unemployment, social relations, and identity in the *Minerit*

Relations among colleagues: Even more than their relations with their surrounding community and union, the social relations among miners themselves are also deteriorating, destroying the very social substrata on which their identity and locus of control depended. To miners, their work team colleagues (*ortaci*) are closer even than family. However, “disponibilization” and the restructuring of production throughout the *minerit* has resulted in wholesale change in the composition of work teams such that the close relations between individuals, built up over the years, are threatened. Until these recent events divided those with and without work, distinctions between *miner la front*, miners who work underground (*în subteran*) at the coalface, and auxiliaries employed in surface (*la suprafața*) and other mine occupations like signalman, mechanic, or transporter (*miner la întreținere*) were the major distinctions among different miners.⁸ These too are on the increase.⁹

Legendary miner solidarity was really mainly found at the coalface. There, depending on qualifications, one is a miner, assistant miner, wagon tender, or unqualified worker. No matter one’s formal category, for safety and production’s sake, all team members at the work site (*abataj*) must follow the miner’s commands. Solidarity is further reinforced when, after the shift, coalface teams go drinking together, occasionally joined by others from their brigade work groups.

In contrast to coalface miners, auxiliaries like transporters, explosives experts (*artificieri*), and mechanics, live and work, for all intents and purposes, in separate worlds. They have fewer demands placed on them at work. They have their own dressing areas (*vestiar*). They drink among themselves after their shifts. They have different levels of education. There are even rural-urban aspects to this difference. Auxiliaries are often *momârlani* (mainly men, but some women) who work chiefly at mines close to rural areas.¹⁰ As peasant-workers they have access to rural products, but need time for that production. Consequently, they often give mine administrators produce to gain employment at surface work sites or to take off work in times of intense agricultural activity.

Though miners and auxiliaries aver mutual respect, considerable distance has developed between the two groups, which robs the mining population of its potentially most effective spokesmen. Working conditions and pay were never issues of dispute between these two groups, but now the uncertainty of mine jobs and the rising cost of living have brought these front and center. Miners contrast their working conditions with the easier ones for auxiliaries. As miners say, they “hold three (or six or nine, depending on whom one talks to) of these (non-productive) workers on (their) backs.”¹¹ Meanwhile, auxiliaries decry their lower salaries compared to miners, though they say they face equally difficult work conditions. Most important, their potential unity breaks down as miners and auxiliaries participated differentially in the various *mineriade*. The former are more accepting of Cosma, while auxiliaries claim to have not participated at all and say that such labor actions were ultimately a mistake.

“*Disponibilization*” in the Jiu Valley: Of all the conditions impinging on miner social relations and crushing their perceptions of control over their own lives, none is as significant as “disponibilization”. Jiu Valley social relations are structured on the distinction between miners and others. This was intensified as “disponibilization” divided active miners from ex-miners, the unemployed. Different explanations abound about why the “disponibilized” quit work; whether forced or by volition.¹² Most active miners and administrators suggest that they left willfully. They say some saw no future in the *minerit*, but most wanted to return to their region of origins, or were motivated by greed. In contrast, “disponibilized” miners suggest there was a degree of force or manipulation by administrators to remove them. Many also say they were lied to and promised other work or a chance to return to the mines after a few months of unemployment. As one Lupeni miner said:

The idea circulated that anyone with more than three charges of unmotivated work, or those who drank, would be kicked out...I heard a rumor about a list with the names of unmotivated workers scheduled to be let go from work. And people were constantly checking you out. Later this list changed. I don't know why, because on it there were also good guys (i.e. hard workers).

The chief engineer of another mine verified such views saying:

Everyone had access to the same information and left of their own accord. Still, there was a bit of selection as we took aside good workers and asked them to reconsider if we knew they were thinking of “disponibilizing” but we didn’t do anything to discourage bad workers from leaving.

Whatever the actual reason why some left the mines pursuant to the Ordinance in 1997, miner social divisions emerge as one significant factor. Thus, many who left seem to have had few social network supports at their work place, which implied they lacked information, or were partially excluded from the ranks of their brigade colleagues. Meanwhile, many Momârlani also left the mines to devote full attention to their rural households.

More than the uncertainties surrounding “disponibilization”, the unemployment of thousands of individuals in two years’ time had other extreme effects on miner social relations and undermined what remained of miners’ traditional solidarity and sense of professional group membership. As one former Lonea miner said:

In the moment in which they started “disponibilization” I signed up on the list for transfers from the Transport section to an actual brigade... and in that moment I left, and didn’t wait for them to tell me ...you know what it means to move to another location; it’s like you’ve lost a part of your life.

Another former miner said:

As a “disponibilized” person I am no longer one of the fellows (*ortac*). Your fellows were like your wife. We would share everything and we would always reciprocate. Now you’re alone; it’s like you don’t have a family.”

Furthermore “disponibilization” also induced a sense of shame (*ruşine*) resulting from the loss of identity provided in work. This was especially so as the “disponibilized” derive largely from rural environments where labor is accorded special significance. Thus, when they returned to their natal communities, they were stigmatized as they had not only lost their jobs, but their identity as proper persons, their cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977:89). One said of a good friend:

After he left the mine, he went back to Moldova, but there they sicced the dogs on him. Then his father told him: “You should have stayed at the mine until the director put a lock on the door of the place.”

The wife of an unemployed miner said:

(My husband) hasn’t gone back to his village since he was “disponibilized.” You’d think he wasn’t even (his parents’) child any longer. We go back to my parents’ place often, but my parents don’t know he was “disponibilized.”

There is also significant debate about what those who left did with their severance pay packets, which sometimes amounted to five to seven thousand US dollars. Non-miners generally accuse the “disponibilized” of wildly inappropriate economic behavior. It is said they rapidly spent their pay on expensive or luxurious food, clothing, and household appliances and did little practical with the money. Much of these items, say the non-miners, were intended as show in the natal communities to which many miners thought of returning.

However, according to the “disponibilized” themselves, while there were certainly excesses of spending due to pent-up demand, most families had few other sources of income and so used a large portion of their pay for basic expenses. Furthermore, the families we interviewed typically had significant health problems and expenses that commanded a large portion of this income. Few used their severance pay for investment or to establish businesses. Few even thought about doing so. In any case, most of the few businesses begun have gone bankrupt for lack of markets or fell apart due to squabbling between business partners. The wildly fluctuating housing market was a final drain on their economic status. Since so many sought to move from the Valley at the same time, housing costs fell drastically, forcing some miners to sell their apartments for barrels of beer.

Political economic responses to the current crisis in the Jiu Valley

Given the nature of the mining economy, the alienation of miners from politics and civil society, and the declining power and effectiveness of their own social networks, miners are pulled in opposite directions in response to the crisis. They are enraged about what they see as the “end of the world as they know it” but incapable of mounting any sort of practical response to the decline in their conditions. With few other economic alternatives and income sources, and with large consumption expectations due both to their former salary levels and the cash received in “disponibilization,” both active and former miners see few alternatives to the *minerit*.

In fact, there is some truth to this view. Rural labor is foreclosed to them, as Momârlani largely satisfy their own needs. Emigration is discussed but mainly in unrealistic ways, such as the mine fire fighter or the assistant miner who only thought this possible if they won a large sum of money in the many Bingo games that vie for people's attention and money. Some "disponibilized" miners perform occasional labor for private businesses, but generally reject the low salaries and uncertain conditions in this work. Most now survive by economizing; collecting mushrooms and fruit from the forests, working in food stores for pay in kind, bringing food from the villages, house painting, or selling small amounts of coal or other possessions in the market. Where there is economic initiative, it only furthers social distinctions. Thus, it is auxiliaries, who have generally greater education and social pretensions, who usually speak of emigration to Hungary for mining jobs or other kinds of job training.

Still, most "disponibilized" miners generally dismiss such strategies, as they wait for occupations with salaries nearly as large as in the *minerit* that they claim have been promised them by various governmental representatives. Their typical response when these are not forthcoming is to express their anger and frustration and to threaten and shame local authorities by organizing public hunger strikes, like those in Lupeni in autumn 1999 or Vulcan in summer 2000.

In the former, an original group of 267 people, many "disponibilized" from the Lupeni mine, camped out for about three months around the monument to the 1929 strike in the center of town. They threatened to immolate themselves, appealed to international organizations about the trampling of their human rights, and visited and had visits from high-level delegations. They chiefly demanded the right to work in good jobs, by which they meant those paying over one million lei per month. They claimed they would emigrate anywhere, including "Bulgaria, Albania, and Russia," so long as they received the right to such jobs. To be sure, they had been occasionally promised jobs that didn't materialize, sometimes owing to a striker's Roma identity. However, they had also frequently refused jobs paying one half to three quarters of a miner's salary.

Such strikes are met with stopgap measures by local authorities and with total disdain by most in the local population. In response to them, officials from the local labor directorate and town hall usually work together to find a few part-time positions for a critical mass of individuals sufficient to take the air out of the strikers' sails. Such positions are generally only for three months or less and are thus not even enough for the newly engaged worker to qualify for additional unemployment compensation. Often, some jobs that are "found" disappear when one goes to actually apply. Furthermore, the visibility of the strikers only further alienates the general Jiu Valley populations, thus deepening distrust. People often suggest that many of the strikers are Gypsies and others who have never worked anywhere but who have attached themselves to the other strikers to profit at their expense.

The Romanian state and international agencies have also begun to involve themselves in the resolution of the miners' economic problems, but with few results to date. The Romanian National Agency for Professional Organization and Formation (ANOFP) has funded a number of job training programs in the Valley and the Romanian Parliament, as discussed above, passed the Law Regarding Disfavored Zones.

Both these interventions have failed for various reasons. ANOFP programs are rejected by former miners since they only offer a minimum salary, are free only to those who continue to receive unemployment compensation, and are not available to youth or women who have not formally worked in the past. The Law on Disfavored Zones meanwhile has piqued the interest of some possible investors, but they bring their own workers when they set up shop in the Valley and shy away from hiring the politically suspect former miners. Furthermore, the Ministry of Finance has blocked other investors, despite provisions contained in the Law, from importing duty-free foreign machinery.

The atmosphere in the Jiu Valley at present is less tense than deflated. With benefits for most "disponibilized" ending in December 1999, there was general concern about possible political actions in early 2000. However, except for the occasional hunger strike, such action did not materialize. There is intense anger among some, but with Cosma in prison, and the miners torn by "disponibilization", there will be no organized, large-scale protest. More

significant than the lack of political action, however, is the general decline in miners' social life and living conditions, which contribute to the downturn in health.

Miners' domestic life and domestic responses to the crisis

In the midst of decline, miners' family life also has begun to unravel. Rather than providing a source of comfort and succor in these hard times, the household and family are increasingly problematic institutions whose decline intensifies the miners' sense of loss of control over their lives. Like political economic conditions generally, the dominance of the mine in Jiu Valley life also influences the quality of domestic institutions.

Specifically, the spatial and symbolic separation of the mine from earth's surface also separates the mine and the household, the miner and his wife. June Nash saw the division of labor between Bolivian tin miners and their wives as symbiotic, integrative, and effective in helping galvanize oppositional labor action (Nash 1979). However in the Jiu, though miners and their wives are mutually interdependent, their relationship is separate and, whether or not strained, not conducive to shared economic or political strategizing. Furthermore, this separation has only increased in recent years.

There is great role distinction between men and women in mining communities. They have different interests, friends, conversations, avocations, and household responsibilities. Stories abound of poor communication between miners and their wives resulting in domestic problems. A recent variation tells of how both employed spouses separately decided to "disponibilize" but neglected to tell their partner, resulting in the loss of all family income sources.

In fact, most miners' wives have generally not worked. The lack of other industries gave them few alternatives. Miners' salaries were, until recently, sufficient to support a family. And miners' families generally had large numbers of children, requiring women's attention. Furthermore, given the predominance of men in the mines, women who work are also criticized. One wife of a Lupeni miner who worked at the Lupeni mine offices said:

At work I always had problems. They would tell me that "your husband works at the mine, so (I) should stay home." I don't know what worth this discussion had. It mainly created divergences between me and my colleagues...that I was greedier because I worked at the mine. I certainly don't agree with this, because I was hired here even before my husband was.

Miners still expect to live as previously; i.e. where the miner brings in income and his wife budgets and spends; where he is the autocratic head of the household and, when at home, his family attends his every word and need. In the current crisis this mindset has had a range of problematic results in miner communities.

Miners' households are under severe stress. Some families have begun to dissolve under economic pressures while others wilt under health problems. The frustration of miners at work and of the unemployed has also encouraged an increased incidence of spousal abuse and other family violence.

Statistics from the local Judiciary office show that cases of family abandonment almost doubled to 63 in 1998-99, compared to 67 cases in the previous four years.¹³ There has also been a slight increase in the divorce rate from 463 cases in 1993 to 473 in 1998¹⁴ and a large decrease in the number of marriages from 407 in 1997 to 230 by October 1999. Even more people would divorce, people say, but for the prohibitive costs.

Families, and especially miners' wives, are also under internal pressure to maintain the standards of consumption to which they were accustomed. In the Jiu Valley a high premium was and is placed on looking well and dressing in a modern urban style. This includes leather jackets for men and women and good quality "training" suits for youth in school. Given its importance in family and female identity, in particular, the costs of this style, increasingly hard to bear, are nonetheless difficult to give up.

This and other stresses have provoked a rise in emotional illness. Though there has been a great increase in miners consulting for emotional difficulties, there have been sharp decreases in hospital self-admissions due to the fear of taking medical leave lest one lose one's job. Emotional difficulties are especially prevalent among women in Jiu Valley communities. With their households in disarray and lacking money to maintain their function in the

community, women feel a loss of purpose. Many claim that they rarely socialize as they did previously on market days, since they no longer have the resources to linger at market.

The loss of control over one's life is a generalized phenomenon in the Jiu Valley that traces to the singular importance, and now clear-cut dissolution, of the mining industry. Stress is apparent in virtually every sector of miners' and former miners' lives, but in particular in the work experience. However, owing to the particular history of settlement in the *minerit*, the position of the union in the lives of miners, and the nature of miners' social life and institutions, there is little responsiveness on the part of the mining community to the few new types of job opportunities available in the region. The future of Jiu Valley miners is problematic at best, and their health and life expectancies give clear evidence of this.

Contexts of labor in the Făgăraș region

Because of the diffusion of labor in different sectors throughout the region, Făgăraș chemical workers have faced different conditions than the Jiu Valley miners. Still, though Făgărașeni have greater access to a wider variety of resources than Jiu Valley miners, the diverse resource bases of the region also requires that individuals and households scramble and compete. Thus, compared to the collective anger, torpor, and anticipation of the unemployed mine worker, the tenor of Făgăraș society is one of constant stress, strategizing, and individuation.

The Făgăraș chemical industry began in the inter-war period with the founding of the Nitramonia Chemical works in 1922 (Herseni et al 1972). It expanded intensively after World War II when Nitramonia and the incipient Victoria Chemical Works were nationalized and renamed the Combinatul Chimic Făgăraș and the Combinatul Chimic Victoriei. The UPRUC was also built in the mid-1950s to manufacture fittings for use in the chemical industry. The number of employees in the three factories grew rapidly through the 1980s but since 1989 has declined steadily. Viromet employed 4,258 in 1982, fell to 4,210 in 1989, and in 1998, after two rounds of "disponibilization", only 2,398 employees remained. Similarly, Nitramonia had its greatest number of employees, 8,283, in 1989, but by 1999 this number had fallen to

2,113.¹⁵ The UPRUC in its first year, 1958, employed 318, achieved its greatest size in 1978 when it employed 4,991, fell to 4,746 in 1989 and by 1999 had only 1,070 employees.

These numbers tell only part of the story of economic decline. Though Viromet and Nitramonia continue to employ three shifts of workers to maintain the continuity of various production processes, the two factories frequently furlough their workers. As much of their production is defense-related and in the national interest, furloughed workers are only “technically unemployed” and receive 75 percent of their salaries to stay at home, available for immediate recall. Meanwhile, as of autumn 1999, all remaining UPRUC sections now work a single shift, but even that is often too much and its dwindling work force is occasionally sent home due to insufficient orders.

The steady drip of unemployment has made access to other resources much more significant in Făgăraș. Many factory workers continue to obtain considerable resources, if not income, from village pursuits. This is not a new pattern. Workers in Făgăraș and Orașul Victoria and their families in the cities’ village hinterlands have long been tied together in a network of social and economic exchange, facilitated by the region’s compact size, dense settlement pattern, and fairly well developed transportation infrastructure. Thus, compared to the miners’ singular preoccupation with the *minerit*, Făgăraș region households, whether rural or urban-dwelling, more readily adopt peasant-worker/worker-peasant strategies. Though there are considerable numbers of people in the cities with few rural ties, more often, some kind of relationship is maintained. In some instances, workers reside in the region’s villages for all or part of the year or at least send their children to their parents’, siblings’, or other relatives’ homes.

Still, village relations are a two-sided coin. They enable Făgăraș households somewhat greater access to food stuffs and provide a source for part-time income, but also require attention to these relations and considerable extra work. Many Făgăraș and Victoria workers decry the time they must spend attending to village relations in order to secure the potatoes, pork, or other produce that, in this time of unemployment and high prices, make the difference between comfort and deprivation.

Many individuals also mention difficulties with family members who have inherited the village natal household and who are niggardly with the resources they are expected to supply to their urban siblings. In fact, rural dwellers with sufficient land and agricultural inputs have little need for the services of their urban family members, as they did in the time of rationing under Ceaușescu. Markets penetrate into all but the most remote villages, and villagers have easier means of transportation to city centers to access other needs.

Another resource for Făgărașeni is participation in emigration for labor. Emigration, too, creates both possibilities and problems. People from Făgăraș have long emigrated from the region. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries Făgăraș youth, lacking other economic possibilities in the small, over-populated, and agriculturally poor zone, streamed out of the region to Bucharest, other Romanian cities, but especially to the United States, where they formed the core Romanian population in cities in America's northeast and near Midwest (Kideckel 1993).

Today, the destination of choice is Western Europe, especially Germany and Italy, but now emigration is mainly illegal. People often enter guided by *călăuși*, entrepreneurs who make the transportation arrangements, pay off the police and officials, and otherwise facilitate the illegal migrants first experience abroad.¹⁶ Entire families will save their money in order to send one of their members as an immigrant. Generally, after a year of underground work in the Italian economy, the state offers them amnesty, they receive their various papers, and are free to go and come as they will.

Though in the past it was mainly men who were the core immigrant group, today both men and women work in the Italian economy, the former in construction and the latter as domestics. Most hope to return to the region. However, they often plan to scrimp and save for a decade at a time in order to have sufficient resources to return permanently to the Făgăraș area. In the interim they remit occasional funds, return periodically on vacation or to celebrate family rites of passage and even buy houses and apartments in Făgăraș, Orașul Victoria, or the region's villages. These remittances, like rural resources, are critical to the economic health of the region and the physical health of its citizens. But, like rural labor, they have their costs.

Remittances of regional emigrants drive up prices for land and housing. To emigrate, either legally or illegally, also costs a lot and intensifies family strategizing or economizing to enable one of their own to leave.¹⁷ Next to alcoholism, labor emigration is mentioned as the most frequent cause of divorce. Furthermore, emigration increases social tensions, as those with access to emigrant remittances clearly live better than those without. The sacrifices of the emigrants are also legion. Often seven or eight men or two to three entire families will live in a single one- or two-room apartment. Some single men live in automobile junkyards in the abandoned cars. All are at the mercy of unscrupulous employers and live in constant fear of state authorities. And yet, most Făgăraș men, if given the chance, would continue to brave these conditions, since they have little opportunity in their home region.

Work relations in Făgăraș factories

To a great extent, Făgăraș factory relations are ambiguous. Făgăraș workers have close affective relations with each other due to the long-standing ties they share. Many workers have remained in the same section, working with the same individuals for close to twenty years. Also, as in the mine, factory relations are occasionally many-stranded, as when two co-villagers work in the same section of the same plant or when both a husband and wife are employed at the same factory. And, since the factories have rarely hired new workers over the last seven years, there is even greater dependency among those who continue on the job.

Contradicting this tendency, however, is the diffusion of employment, resources, and income throughout and beyond the compact Făgăraș region. With the waning of the factory's importance as a predictable source of income, these other social relations take precedence over the factory and the factory work-team. While this enables access to diverse resources, it also takes energy to maintain, energy which is diverted from the factory collective and labor activism.

A number of other factors also weaken the collective identity of workers in Făgăraș zone. Privatization in particular has affected collegial relations in Făgăraș factories. Thus, for example, the UPRUC has now been divided into six separate sections, each of which has

become its own enterprise with separate management. Not only does this separate workers from each other; it also forces them to compete to keep their own section open and healthy compared to others. The uncertain economic environment also enables and/or encourages factory administrators to play off one group of workers against another or use their position for personal advantage. Thus, according to one UPRUC worker, when the UPRUC began to lay off large numbers of workers in the mid-1990s, one former director “favored his former section with the orders that came in and said that since our section had no orders it should be closed.” Finally, the greater possibility for Făgăraș workers to emigrate as legal or illegal guest workers in Germany and Italy also intensifies competition and jealousy within factory networks.

Finally, the pressured social relations of Făgăraș workers show up in the greater degree of inter-and intra-union conflicts in the region. Thus, each of the three institutions where research was carried out, Nitramonia, UPRUC and Viromet, had problems with such competition, manifesting in a weakened union movement, even though workers were less alienated from their union than were miners from the LSMVJ.

Another ambiguous factor in Făgăraș labor relations was the great extent of female labor. As mentioned, in the past, husbands and wives were often employed in the same factory, if not section, though this has diminished with recent “disponibilizations.”¹⁸ The employment of women in the region’s factories was in keeping with their significant role throughout history in the social and economic life of the Făgăraș region. However, as women were integrated into the factory system, their presence made the factory less of a symbolic boundary between work and domestic life and thus de-emphasized the unity of work teams even as it enabled more effective male-female relations. In a positive sense, relations between men and women in Făgăraș factories as well as in society generally were put more on an even keel. As one woman worker said:

We have pretty good relations at work and talk easily with both our men and women colleagues. We have men at our shift and we are all packers. We fill up sacks and they take them and put them in the trucks. We talk amongst ourselves about everything, what are we cooking, what work we are doing, how we are feeling.

Surprisingly regional and/or ethnic differentiation does not significantly alienate Făgăraș workers from each other despite the intense and problematic history of Romanian-Hungarian relations in the Făgăraș zone. To be sure, Ceaușescu's ethnic policies encouraged a somewhat greater mutual suspicion in Făgăraș than in the Jiu Valley. However, this rarely influenced behavior on the shop floor. For one thing, there is appreciation among Făgărașeni for skill in labor that transcended any type of ethnic politics. Furthermore, though Moldavians and workers from other Romanian regions migrated in large numbers into Făgăraș and other parts of Brașov County through the 1960s and 1970s,¹⁹ until the factories began laying off large numbers these differences rarely counted for much. Moldavians were better integrated into Făgăraș life than in the Jiu Valley by intermarriage and by rising in the ranks of work categories. As in the Jiu, however, such differences became somewhat more important under the intense pressure of unemployment and "disponibilization". When the factories were laying off workers, Moldavians and other regional immigrants, with less access to land and other rural resources, often banded together to criticize local workers, women especially, telling them they ought to quit to leave the positions open to those like themselves who needed them. Still, despite this rhetoric, there is nothing in Făgăraș that compares to the differentiation of regional "natives" and immigrants found in the Jiu Valley.

Over-all then, compared to the clear distinctions of labor and social relations in the Jiu Valley, the Făgăraș zone is ambiguous in its economic life. There are greater possibilities but greater demands, greater quality of life but greater competitiveness.

Făgăraș responses to contemporary decline

The ambiguity of Făgăraș socio-economic conditions enables a greater degree of latitude for surviving, sometimes even prospering, in Romania's economic downturn. However, it simultaneously creates other stresses to which the region's workers are less able to adjust. In this way, then, though on the surface the people of the Făgăraș region are less "disfavored" than their Jiu Valley counterparts and have a richer cultural life, the implications for their physical and health conditions are equally problematic. These conditions and responses are considered below.

Responses of organized labor: Like the miners, Făgăraș workers are in a period of declining labor activism and declining effectiveness of the actions they undertake. The reasons for this, however, differ from that of the miners. Whereas the miners are increasingly inactive due to alienation from regional power holders, the torpor of "disponibilization", and increased social distance between categories of miners, in Făgăraș the diffusion of energies as people strategize to make their lives lies behind declining union activism. As one UPRUC worker suggested:

People are basically saturated (with the union) and they don't come to meetings any longer. People are divided. Not all are as worse off as others. There are some that live from other sources, from relations outside the factory. Many have children that have left to other countries. And it's sufficient for them to get sent \$100 a month.... Others have left the union because they think the dues are too large. Why should they give this money foolishly when nothing is done with it?"

Făgăraș labor activism in particular has suffered from inter- and intra-union competition that has affected work conditions in all three factories researched for this report. Thus, in Special Section Five of the Nitramonia plant, which manufactures explosives for the Romanian military, the union leaders split off from the main factory union, the "Sindicatul Liber Nitramonia-Rompiro," to join as a branch of the "League of Jiu Valley Miners." They wanted to have a greater degree of independence from the Nitramonia union and have more influence over their own work conditions. However, their separation considerably weakened the effectiveness of the union in the Nitramonia factory. Similarly at Viromet in Orașul Victoria, the union has been largely ineffective and silent and, for the first years after the end of

socialism, was largely in the pocket of factory administrators as workers shied away from activism.

Perhaps the worst situation of union fragmentation was at the UPRUC where, until Spring 2000, two unions competed for the right to represent the factory's workers. The Independence union was formed by engineers and administrators and largely represented their interests whereas the Unity union was more a creature of line workers themselves. The two unions thus competed over the years to the detriment of worker unity. Unity, in particular, adopted a more confrontational approach with UPRUC management and some individual workers who had joined "Independence" because of their personal relations with one or another engineer, were even sanctioned by their friends.

This situation intensified even more due to the process of privatization that UPRUC has gone through over these last few years. Finally in Spring 2000, Independence, hemorrhaging members, called it quits and was disestablished. Still, despite the end of Independence, the conflict between the two caused difficulties for UPRUC workers, which was graphically brought out in an interview with a husband and wife, both of whom are UPRUC employees. The husband went on at length about union tensions at the UPRUC:

Now in the factory people are not as united as we were previously or as, for example, like the union headed by Cosma, the union of the miners. That was a united union but the mafia types (i.e. the Romanian government, d.a.k.) have caused its decline. It would be great if all the unions were as united as the miners or the railroad workers. When they organize a strike it means something. But in our factory we are lucky if we obtain 10% of what we ask for and that is because people do not much sign up to strike because they are not so united. In our factory there are two unions... Our union, Unity, has about 500 to 600 members while the other only has about 100, and the rest of the employees in the factory (about 600, d.a.k.) are non-unionized. After 1989, they formed the union "Independence." But most of its members were mafia types too and it was really bureaucratic. It approved every decision of the factory director. Because of this in 1993-1994 we started the Unity union. People have much greater faith in this union than the other. The other one agreed to everything. For example, if the former director said we would only get a 5% salary increase, that's what they agreed to...5%, without even negotiating or even looking at the factory accounts of its income and expenses, like Unity does now.

Unemployment and "disponibilization" in the Făgăraș region: Făgărașeni have also responded to the circumstances of their unemployment in a largely different manner than Jiu Valley miners. Whereas the miners were riven by the intense and rapid process of

“disponibilization”, in Făgăraș there was less anger but more petty jealousy about the process. Făgărașeni are more used to unemployment, as it has steadily increased in the years since the Revolution. Unlike the miners, they did not entertain notions of their industry’s durability and were not encouraged to do so by their union leaders. In the entire town of Făgăraș, with a population of about 45,000 of whom about 20,000 were working during socialist years, there are now only about 5,000 people formally employed. Consequently, though there were some tensions associated with the earlier rounds of unemployment from 1990 through 1996, by the time of the “disponibilizations” unemployment had become normalized.

Făgăraș “disponibilization” in 1997 and 1998 tended to be somewhat more volitional than the process in the Jiu Valley. Those lining up to leave their work included young men hoping to go to Italy as guest workers and older individuals near their pensions. There was such a widespread desire to leave that unions and management worked hard to convince workers to remain. Jealousy arose in certain instances where people were actively prevented from quitting work. Furthermore, the “disponibilized” were also not very differentiated ethnically or regionally from others in the general population.

Still, despite the greater degree of volition, there was also manipulation of Făgăraș workers by factory administrators, though the acrimony and the social distinction set in motion by the process paled in comparison to the Jiu Valley. As one chemical operator at Nitramonia said:

Before (“disponibilization”) they announced they were going to close our section and those who wanted to, should sign up for the “disponibilization”. They put a list on a desk in an office for those who wanted to sign up. It is normal that people were afraid that the section would close and, if they didn’t sign up for the “disponibilization” they would just become unemployed. So they thought “better the Ordonanta because then I can get a few extra million and get by one way or the other.” And so they signed up...willingly, unwillingly, they signed up to be “disponibilized.”

Though the 1997 and 1998 “disponibilization” was more or less voluntary, the current (summer-fall 2000) process is quite different. Though some of the 300 workers from Nitramonia and 150 from Viromet will “disponibilize” of their own accord, more are being let go unwillingly. At Viromet, for example, most are either from the Nitro-Cellulose or Sulfuric Acid Sections of the factory, which are to be closed due to lack of sufficient orders. Many of these

individuals are absolutely desperate about their circumstances, as was the 43-year-old electrician with whom I spoke. Though he wanted to move to another section, factory administrators prevented him because, he said, he was in an upper pay category. He was unable to see virtually any option for himself and his family. Furthermore, his wife was likely to lose her job due to a nationwide reform in educational employment. Discussing his declining prospects, he began to cry profusely and asked to be excused from the interview, for which he had volunteered.

A lack of transparency and a degree of favoritism characterizes Făgăraș “disponibilization”, as was also the case in the Jiu Valley. At Viromet, for example, a number of workers interviewed verified that in every section that was to close all the officials from the foreman level up retained their positions, as did their spouses who were also employed in the factory. Moreover county officials charged with explaining the process lied to workers. To prevent some of the problems of the first “disponibilization” that were caused when workers were given their entire severance pay packets in one lump sum, current regulations stipulate that “disponibilized” workers will receive their severance pay over several months. They can legitimately receive a lump sum of severance only if they submit documents that attest to their plan to use the money to open a business or other productive enterprise. However, all were told that a lump sum payment was not possible, thus foreclosing any entrepreneurial strategy.

This stricture seems inappropriate in the Făgăraș region where people were conservative with their severance pay. Unlike the extravagances of the first Jiu Valley “disponibilization”, most Făgărașeni used their severance pay almost entirely for basic household expenses or for a fund for family members hoping to emigrate. Some invested in cars to more readily get to and from the villages or pooled their resources with village relatives to purchase agricultural equipment and/or machinery. Such investment is no longer possible.

The desperation of the Viromet electrician above is especially compelling and indicative of the hard times besetting the region’s workers, since Făgărașeni attempt to work no matter their formal employment situation. In fact, the labor black market is a profound problem in the region and is one of the few issues that prompted the region’s unions to join together in

protest. They want employers to swear off hiring illegal labor and workers to agree to avoid such positions.

People in the region also are more willing to participate in retraining programs and entertain other possibilities for the few resources that they have than are the Jiu Valley miners. Still, these opportunities have led to a questionable outcome, since the region's application for "Disfavored Zone" status was summarily rejected. According to the new mayor of Făgăraș, this was because the former town administrators were not vigilant enough in pursuing this status. Whatever the reason, the failure to obtain this status will limit the region's ability to attract new investment, even if the law is still applied less vigorously than it ought to be.

Finally, even work on the black market is increasingly difficult to find, prompting the normally staid and conservative people of the region to seek the *deus ex machina* of Euro-Bingo and other games of chance.

Domestic responses: As the household remains the institution most capable of organizing individuals to seek access to diverse labor and income resources, Făgăraș families and households still retain considerable viability in the current crisis, though at increasing cost. Hard times seem to encourage Făgărașeni to stick together, at least at the household level. For example, from 1976 to 1989, there were an average of 212 divorces per year registered at the Făgăraș judiciary (*judectoria*). This rate increased for 1990-1996 to 308 per year, but has declined again from 1997 to the present to 265.

Cases of family abandonment have also steadily declined from 24 cases per year between 1976-1989 to 14 cases per year between 1989 and 1996, to 5 cases annually in the last three years.²⁰ The number of marriages, too, has kept pace with the years immediately following the revolution. In 1992 there were 442 marriages in Victoria, Făgăraș, and immediate villages and in 1998 424 (Direcția de Statistica 1999). August, in particular, is now a prime month for marriage. West European countries, Italy included, "close for vacation" then. Consequently, young Făgărașeni, men mainly, return home to marry and then return to Italy after. This past summer there were 17 August marriages in one week.

Though households are viable, the pressures to maintain them fall unevenly on women. Despite the vast increase in regional unemployment, Făgăraș women are still expected to pull their economic weight. Unlike miner's wives, whose "stay-at-home" life is normal even if their increased isolation is not, Făgăraș women feel continued pressure to bring in household income and are under considerable pressure to find gainful activity. They tend, then, to gravitate to the informal, illegal economy of the labor black market where they are frequently exploited but have no recourse as they try to maintain their meager salaries at any cost. As one Făgăraș woman said:

Even if I make 400,000 lei a month that still helps us to do a little extra for the family. It pays for the telephone or the school field trip for one of the kids. It helps make life a little better, even though my work schedule means that I have to be away from home all the time, even when the children come home from school.

Such pressures have wrought an immense toll on the people of the Făgăraș zone, but women in particular. According to Maria Esan, director of the Făgăraș Association of Women for Defense and Protection, the region has the largest percentage of emotionally ill people in the country, of which 60% are women, few of whom receive any care whatsoever, since the mental health section of the Făgăraș hospital has been closed, and to admit to a psychological condition is still very much a shameful thing in local Făgăraș culture.

Much of this pressure derives from the inability of women to call on their friends and relatives for assistance. Despite their increased importance, Făgăraș network relations are now more attenuated than ever. As in the mining regions, the cost and stress of life in Romania has narrowed the groups of individuals with whom one interacts and severely limits the exchange relations on which Romanian social life is predicated. One Nitramonia worker and his wife spoke of their increased difficulty to ask his sisters for help watching their children. "They have too many problems of their own," he said, "and they are never home anymore either, since they are always seeking work." He went on to described the conditions of network atrophy:

We had friends until just a few years ago, but now we mainly stay in our house with ourselves. People can't afford to have friends these days. We cant afford vacations either. Before (1989), we went to the Black Sea all the time, but we haven't since 1990. The last wedding we attended was (five months previous) and the gift required that we

save for three months. Last year, too, we were god-parents (*naş*) for my wife's cousin, which cost us 7 million in last year's prices. Either way to be asked to be *naş* is a double-edged sword. If you refuse, it is shameful, and if you don't you set yourself back monetarily. We were the third family that the couple asked to be *naş* and we are hardly related to them. At least our god-children (*fîni*) are in better shape than us. They are from a village and have a tractor and a brandy distillery.

Conclusions

What does it matter that those from the Jiu Valley and from the Făgăraş region diverge in their socio-economic responses to stress and crisis? For one thing, most simplistically, addressing regional woes requires recognition of inter- and intra-regional variation for purposes of developing distinct regional programs of investment and kinds and levels of state action. It is apparent that labor law enforcement designed to limit black market abuses is more important in Făgăraş than in the Jiu Valley, while state infrastructure investment is more significant in the latter than in the former. Similarly, the creation of new kinds of employment is more called for in the Jiu Valley while privatization and retooling the chemical plants would likely be more effective for Făgăraş, even though Făgăraşeni would likely be more receptive to job training programs.

Equally as significant, the public health and mental health challenges in the regions can only be addressed when we see the precise vectors and stresses under which diverse Romanian workers operate. The loss of identity and the angry group life of current and former miners do not bring about the same sort of personal crisis that the never-ending strategizing for resources, the personal jealousies, and the denigration of the black market do for Făgăraş workers.

In a second report, we consider at length the health perceptions within each region and how these relate to the particular conditions of labor defined here. Suffice it to say for the moment, however, that no matter what the particular economic possibilities are in each region, the response of miners, workers, and their families to labor-related stress is one commonality manifesting in a host of illness, both somatic and psychological in origin, and in early, untimely death.

In fact, the discourse of death was everywhere in Făgăraș and the Jiu Valley. The miners, of course, know sudden death as a condition of their labor and live with it as a matter of pride. Miners, in fact, are more distressed about the possibilities of early death after retirement than death in the course of working in the mines. To retire with one's pension after 20 or more years in the *subteran* and then die within one or two years of your retirement, a not uncommon experience, was considered by miners the ultimate illustration of their abandonment by society.

In Făgăraș, the experience of death is, like the experience of unemployment, a steady drip. And here, like so much else in this struggling region, it only signifies the sad growth of petty jealousies in the midst of crisis.

One of my buddies at work died at 43 and one of the shop foremen was 41. He died of prostate cancer. About 20-25 of my acquaintances died in the last 4-5 years. The 36-year-old director of marketing at UPRUC died 2 years ago. Another neighbor died at 51 of cancer and then there was an 18-year-old kid who fell from a train. This kind of unexpected death is the worst for the family, because you have to get together the necessary money in just a day or two. If someone is sick for a long time, then at least you can slowly get together money for the expenses that will follow. We think about and talk about death all the time at work. It can't help but affect our work. When you hear of someone dieing at 60 or 70, then you think he had a full life,²¹ but when one dies in their 30s or 40s, this is a great tragedy. When one of our colleagues dies we help in various ways. We dig the grave, we give money depending on what we can afford; but no one says anything if you can't give much, because we are all needy. A funeral costs a great deal of money. You usually invite 200 to a restaurant for soup, beer, and a second course. That used to be meat, but now it's mainly just potatoes and other vegetables. It is still expensive. The total cost of a funeral is about 7 million lei. But you don't change traditions, because people will laugh at you. It is better to bear the financial costs than have people talk about you behind your back.

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Endnotes

Some of the ideas for this paper come from graduate students Bianca Botea and Vasile Șoflău. Raluca Nahorniac also contributed to the section on women in the Făgăraș zone.

¹ These include the Nitramonia Chemical Company and the UPRUC Chemical Outfits company from Făgăraș and the Viromet Chemical Company from Orașul Victoria.

² On the basis of the Romanian government's Ordonanta de Urgenta, 24/1998, a disfavored zone meets at least one of the following conditions: 1) a mono-industrial production profile which employed at least 50% of the labor force; 2) a mining zone where workers were released by collective termination of their work contract; 3) a collective termination of the work contract affecting at least 25% of the local work force; 4) an unemployment rate at least 25% higher than the national rate; and 5) a poor communications and transportation infrastructure. According to many, the Law on Disfavored Zones was passed specifically to address the political volatility of the Jiu Valley. Whether or not this is the case, the Jiu Valley was first to receive this designation. Regarding Făgăraș, as late as mid-November 1999, they were still submitting documents to the government center at Alba Iulia responsible for review. At that time, officials were convinced they could not be denied such status but were worried that political considerations might slow down their application or limit the programs for which they qualify.

³ According to Vasile Șoflău, the appellation *Momârlani*, is not exclusively a term restricted to the Jiu Valley but is also used by and about other mainly rural populations in the larger region, such as in Țara Hațegului to the north.

⁴ *Huila* is coking coal, a quality midrange between anthracite and bituminous coal that is especially useful in the manufacture of steel. The quality of these deposits depend on the extent of water and ash content in the coal. Mines in the eastern Valley (e.g. Lonea, Petrila) have better quality coal but harder-to-work strata whereas the situation is inverse with west Valley mines (e.g. Paroșeni, Uricani).

⁵ The acronym TESA refers to Technicians, Engineers, Service Workers, and Administrators.

⁶ Cosma was arrested and sentenced to 18 years in prison for attempting to bring down the government of Romania in the *mineriade* of September 1999. His reputation was further sullied by numerous stories of his violent nature, including his rape of a Miss Romania contestant and his beating of Petroșani photographer, Carol Gigi Nicolau, for which Nicolau recently won a civil judgement.

⁷ For example, Bădărcă's wife is the owner of a company that provides foodstuffs to the various mine cafeterias. Rumor is that though goods of certain quality are contracted, her firm provides poorer quality fare, and pockets the difference in cost.

⁸ I am using *miner la întreținere* as a generic term for all those who do not work extracting coal at the coal face. Others in this category would include miners developing new shafts and galleries (*miner de investiția*), and those preparing galleries with electrical and telephone connections, and other basic amenities prior to their being exploited (*miner de pregătire*). Given the cut-back on coal exploitation, pursuant to "disponibilization", such activities have largely come to a halt in the *minerit*.

⁹ The separation of underground and surface is also manifested in miner distinctions between work and non-work activities. For example, miners say that when they converse in the mines, they speak about women, but when they are out of the mines, they talk about work in the mine. Furthermore, when miners leave the mine, work of any kind (i.e. in the household) stops.

¹⁰ These mainly include Lonea, Livezeni, Valea de Braz and Uricani.

¹¹ This also refers to TESA personnel.

¹² Vasile Șoflău believes the following argument gives too little credence to the views of the "disponibilized" themselves, which almost universally suggest that they were forced to leave their employment.

¹³ Current conditions have also spawned a minor crime wave. Additionally, there were 27 cases of corporal crimes, such as felonious assault, in 1998-99, compared to 32 cases total in the previous five years. Incidents of prostitution and procuring also show up for the first time in post-"disponibilization" statistics (Judecatorie Petroșani 1999).

¹⁴ These statistics come from a sample of Jiu Valley towns including Petroșani, Lupeni, Petrila, Urican, Vulcan, Aninoasa, and Bănița.

¹⁵ These numbers actually appear slightly worse than they are. Both the Făgăraș and Victoria combines were separated into two enterprises and the number of workers on their payrolls decreased accordingly. Nitramonia is now paired with "Arsenalul Armatei" (formerly Rompiro) and Viromet with the Victoria Chemical Works. Both of these are special sections devoted to the production of military explosives

¹⁶ Făgărașeni believe they are so visible in the Roman economy, a prevailing joke in the region tells how Italians often ask people from Făgăraș where that "country" is, i.e. implying it is an independent state.

¹⁷ One estimate of the costs for illegal emigration is 3,000 Deutsch Marks, a huge expense for most families.

¹⁸ In 1989 at Viromet of 4,210 employees, 1,858 (44%) were women. In 1998 of 2,398, 916 (38%) were women. Corresponding data for Nitramonia were in 1989 8,283 total workers, with 3,184 (38%) women and for 1998, 2,168 total workers with 880 (41%) women. For UPRUC in 1999, of 1,070 workers 778 (73%) were men and 292 were women.

¹⁹ The Moldavian immigrants in Brașov in the late 1960s were poked fun at by the joke which said that you can tell who is a Moldavian in a crowd of people by shouting "wire" and watching who ducks. This was because the Moldavians were so allegedly poor, they couldn't afford a proper train ticket and came into the region instead on the roofs of trains.

²⁰ Other statistical indicators of diverse social conditions in Făgăraș have remained virtually the same for the region from 1976, the first year for which we have this data, through the current period. For example the frequency of violent crimes and corporal offenses have shown only a slight increase as times have become increasingly more difficult, varying from 14 per year in the period 1976-1989 to 17 per year in 1990-1996, to 19 per year in the last three year (Judecatoria Făgăraș 1999).

²¹ Later I asked him whether he really thought 60 years a full life and he responded that he thought so.