THE UNWRITTEN 'LAWS OF MIGRATION': REFLECTIONS ON INEQUALITIES, ASPIRATIONS AND 'CULTURES OF MIGRATION'

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Abstract. Ever since Ravenstein's work on the "Laws of Migration", the determinants/drivers of migration--that is, the question: 'Why do people migrate?' – has been at the heart of migration studies. The exploration of migration/mobility processes also emphasizes the ways that migrants decide to leave and embark on their journey and how migratory practices may orient and motivate the (im)mobility decisions and aspirations of other migrant actors, establishing various 'cultures of migration' and creating new 'imaginaries of mobility' that shape future movements. The paper aims to explore the changing aspirations of migration that influence the migration decision-making of Romanian migrants and the way these are shaped by micro, meso and structural factors in both sending and receiving countries.

Keywords: aspirations, cultures of migration, Romanian migration, territorial inequalities.

Introduction

Ever since Ravenstein's work on the *Laws of Migration* (1885, 1889) sought to explain the motives or factors that lead to population movements - or, put more simply, to answer the question: 'why do people migrate?' – it has been at the heart of migration studies. Since then, many theoretical approaches stemming from different disciplines (economics, sociology, anthropology, etc.) have examined migration processes at different scales (micro, meso, macro) with a view to deciphering the determinants and drivers of migration. Thus, while functionalist, and particularly economic theories, focus on income and employment differentials between origin and destination countries or places and examine the factors that may push or pull migration flows, historical-structural approaches turn their attention to macro processes that shape human mobility. Other approaches combine micro and macro explanations for migration, focusing on the role of networks and the crucial 'meso level' that contributes to the continuation of migration flows. Setting aside the 'thorny question' of whether different migration theories can be combined (de Haas, 2014; de Haas, Castles & Miller, 2020), there is as yet no overall or general migration theory which explains all the processes involved in migration (Massey et al., 1993; Arango, 2000; Castles, 2010; Cohen & Sirkeci, 2011; de Haas, 2014, de Haas et al., 2020). Nevertheless, it appears that there is a general consensus that, given the current complexity and dynamics of migratory flows, the study and

interpretation of migration cannot rely on just one level and/or unit of analysis, or even rely on a single scientific discipline; a combination of scientific fields is necessary (Massey et al., 1993; Faist, 1997), which is to say that macro explanations may be combined with micro explanations in examining migration processes. In addition, the 'mobility turn' in migration studies (Urry, 2000, 2007; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Adey, 2010) emphasizes that migration is no longer perceived simplistically as a linear movement between two countries; rather, an individuals' life course is characterised by a continuum of '(im)mobilities' phases in which different types of (im)mobilities, aspirations and motives are combined. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the rigid and dichotomous view of migration motives and drivers as either purely economic or purely humanitarian obfuscates contemporary explanations of migration, given that migration motivations and drivers can be rather diverse. Hence, the exploration of migration/mobility processes also stresses the ways in which migrants decide to leave and embark on their journey, and how migratory practices may orient and motivate the (im)mobility decisions and aspirations of other migrant actors, establishing various 'cultures of migration' and creating new 'imaginaries of mobility' (Salazar, 2011; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013) that shape future movements.

The main objective of the paper is to explore the changing aspirations that influence the decision-making of Romanian migrants during their migratory journey, and the way these are shaped by individual factors, their networks, and changing structural conditions in their country(ies) of origin and residence. The paper is structured in the following way. The next section provides a brief overview of the academic discussion on migration aspirations, drivers and on the culture of migration. This is followed by an account of the various mobilities of Romanian migrants following the collapse of the communist regime. Then, based on biographical and semi-structured interviews with Romanian migrants in Greece, I explore the various factors that shape Romanian migrants' aspirations and the ways in which these may pave the way for future movements. I conclude that Romanian migrant aspirations and mobility goals may change during their lifetime in response to changing opportunities and constraints in their country of origin and/or residence. In other words, it is argued that migrants act simultaneously in transnational social fields (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004); consequently, migration decision-making is influenced by aspirations and motives as these are reconstructed, not only in the context of the country of origin, but during the whole (im)mobility pathways.

Aspirations, drivers, and 'cultures of migration'

The migration journey often starts with an idea, the thought that a better job, life, livelihood, opportunity – or, in general, increased wellbeing – might be found or achieved somewhere else within the individual's country of residence or beyond it. The term 'aspiration' is often intertwined with wishes, hopes, dreams and desires, and it is theoretically and empirically hard to disentangle the concept of aspirations. Carling and Schewel (2018, p.946) define aspiration as 'a conviction that migration is preferable to non-migration'. Generally, the concept of aspirations has been used in the literature on social stratification as a determinant for social mobility (Portes, McLeod & Parker, 1978); relatively recently, migration scholars have begun to emphasize the role of aspirations as an analytical concept in migration theories (Boccagni, 2017; Carling & Collins, 2018). Currently, there is a growing literature examining the role of migrant aspirations in migration processes (Carling, 2002; Wright, 2012; van Meeteren, 2014; Boccagni, 2017; Scheibelhofer, 2017; Carling & Schewel 2018; Van Mol, Snel, Hemmerechts & Timmerman, 2018; Bastianon, 2019).

There are different types, categories, and dimensions of migrant aspirations. Portes et al. (1978) differentiates educational, occupational and income goals, while Van Meeteren (2014), in her typology of aspirations, distinguishes between investment migrants, settlement migrants and legalization migrants. Aspirations and migration decision-making have been approached from the viewpoint of the country of origin (Timmerman, Hemmerechts & De Clerck, 2014; Van Mol et al., 2018), at the time of arrival in the destination country (Portes et al., 1978), and taking into consideration the perspective of the destination country (Scheibelhofer, 2017).

Nevertheless, it is argued that a life course perspective is required when examining aspirations; such a perspective would highlight the temporal dimension of aspirations and their evolution over time (Boccagni, 2017), as well as the way they are formed during the mobility process (Creighton, 2013; Van Meeteren, 2014). In this paper, aspiration and decision-making – and the way they change during the different phases of Romanian migration – are examined over the life-course.

Migration aspirations are often connected with the so-called drivers or determinants of migration. As Carling and Collins (2018, p.3) argue, aspirations, desire and drivers of migration 'relate to how migration is initiated, experienced and represented'. The search for the determinants or drivers of migration takes centre stage in migration theories, and from the 19th century on an extensive literature has focused on the different factors that can influence the decision to migrate. The core assumption is that disparities and inequalities between two regions or countries drive migration flows from the less developed to the more developed region. Ravenstein's "Laws of migration" paved the way for the consideration of push factors in migration decision-making and pull factors in the country of destination (Grigg, 1977). In general, push-pull models refers to factors that attract or lead to migration from one region to another region and/or country. Lee (1966, p.49-50) classified the factors involved in a person's decision to migrate into four general categories: factors relating to the area of origin, factors relating to the destination area, the obstacles intervening between the destination and the origin, and personal factors. Push factors include demographic growth, a low standard of living, a lack of economic opportunities and political oppression, while pull factors include labour demand, land availability, the availability of economic opportunities, and civil liberties. Despite the criticism that push-pull models have received in recent years, they are still considered a useful framework for explaining the forces that shape migration processes (Van Hear, Bakewell & Long, 2018). Answering this criticism, Van Hear et al. (2018, p.931-932) in their Push-Pull Plus model identify four drivers of migration: a) predisposing drivers such as economic disparities between territories of origin and destination, environmental disparities, political disparities, and geographical factors; b) proximate drivers such as downturns or environmental degeneration; c) precipitating drivers which are tied up with one of spontaneous events such as a drastic rise in unemployment, a factory closure, a collapse in farm prices, etc.; and d) mediating drivers including factors that may enable, facilitate, constrain, accelerate or consolidate migration (such as the presence and quality of transport, communications, information and the resources needed for the journey and transit period). Generally, drivers 'describe the array of factors that may make up the external structural elements shaping the decision space for those considering migration' (Van Hear et al., 2018, p.930), while aspirations reflect, are formed and (re)constructed as an expression of (migrant) agency in response to structural forces. Hence, there is a constant interplay between migrant agency and structural forces that influence decision-making.

The perpetuation of migration flows is usually explained with the development of migrant networks. This theory was initially applied to explain migration from rural to urban areas in developing countries. Later this approach was broadened and adapted to interpret the perpetuation of international migration (Krissman, 2005). Migrant networks "are sets of interpersonal ties that connect

migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship and shared community origin" (Massey et al., 1993, p.448). Migratory networks facilitate the movement of migrants from the sending countries and contribute to their integration into the host countries. Networks increase the information available to migrants about the process of entering a country and about the dangers that may ensue if this is done irregularly. At the same time, it is easier for migrants to enter and settle in the host countries, since migrants who have already settled help them find work, provide financial assistance, transportation, housing, etc. Thus, networks increase the likelihood of international migration to a country, as they reduce the costs and risks involved while increasing the expected benefits of migration (Massey et al., 1993; Faist, 1997; Haug, 2008; de Haas et al., 2020). Migration networks – especially when they consist of migrants' family members and relatives – play an important role in the decisions to migrate, to stay in the host country, or to return to the country of origin. Migration networks are among the most important factors in interpreting the migration process, as they have a multiplier effect on migratory flows (chain migration). From a community point of view, migrant networks may contribute to the establishment of a particular 'culture of migration' in a specific community, when migration becomes part and parcel of its everyday experiences and accepted as one of the paths available toward economic well-being (Cohen, 2004, p. 5). In this sense, migration decision-making is not driven exclusively by economic inequalities, but is rather embedded into the cultural practices of the (im)mobility process. Within the framework of a 'culture of migration', the characteristics and agency of migrants and non-migrants, movers and non-movers, are linked with structural factors such as economic disparities, actual and/or perceived territorial inequalities, and the way these are expressed in the cultural and social practices of the actors (Cohen & Sirkeci, 2011). In the model posited by Cohen and Sirkeci (2011), conflict is considered a key driver for human mobility. Thus, people do not move only in search for a better life; mobility is often driven by conflict, with people moving away from difficulties, oppression and restraints. This approach also highlights the fact that decision-making is not always 'a rosy and hopeful story' (Cohen & Sirkeci, 2011; Sirkeci & Cohen, 2016).

A culture of migration, in which migration becomes the norm, may further strengthen migration aspirations (de Haas et al., 2020, p.69), creating collective horizons that can form the basis for collective aspirations and imagined futures (Appadurai, 2004). Hence, it can be argued that aspirations may be regarded, beyond individual interpretations of structural conditions, as collective desires to improve economic and social conditions.

Dynamics of Romanian mobilities

Since the fall of the communist regime in 1989 and following the lifting of emigration restrictions by the state, migration flows from Romania to other countries have changed considerably. Indeed, since that time, Romania has experienced the highest increase in emigration of all EU countries, and Romanians were the fifth largest group of emigrants residing in OECD countries in 2015/2016 (OECD, 2019). More to the point, between 1990 and 2017, Romania registered the highest increase in its migration stock, at 287%. The UN estimates 3.58 million Romanians live abroad, while there are more than 2.65 million working-age emigrants, who account for about 20.6% of the Romanian working population (Dospinescu & Russo, 2018).

During the last 30 years, Romania has undergone major political, economic and social transformations and different types and patterns of population movements have emerged, combining

internal and international migration. Rural to urban migration and temporary mobility patterns within the country have steadily increased, while international permanent or temporary migration has gained momentum, creating a complex web of transnational relations between Romania and the rest of Europe (Sandu, 2005ab; Horváth & Gabriel Anghel, 2009; Elrick & Ciobanu, 2009; Potot, 2010). Since the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, five basic emigration periods may be distinguished with different mobility patterns, destination countries, patterns in the organization of migration, and motives and intentions for migration (see Sandu, 2005a; Horváth & Gabriel Anghel, 2009). The first period extents from 1990 to 1993, when increasing numbers of Romanians – particularly those of German and Hungarian ethnic origin – either migrated to other Western European countries or sought relocation to Germany and Hungary. Then, between 1994 and 1996, increasing number of Romanian migrants headed to Hungary, Turkey and Israel. The third period is characterized mostly by irregular movements as, from 1997 to 2001, Southern European countries such as Italy and Spain, but also the UK and Ireland, emerged as destinations for Romanian migrants. The years 2002 until 2007 were a turning point in Romanian migration, as Romanians' gained access to freedom of movement within the Schengen region without visa requirements. From 2007 onwards, Romanian migrants benefited from the country's accession to the EU and the free circulation in European countries, which contributed to the emergence of new mobility and employment pathways.

Different factors in both Romania and host(s) countries have contributed to the varying mobility patterns of Romanian migrants in the different time periods. Cultural or historical proximity and ethnic ties – as in the case of Hungary, Italy and Greece – played an important role. Indeed, during the research, the role of linguistic proximity (in the case of Italy and Spain) and of religion (Christian Orthodoxy in the case of Greece) were considered important factors when examining possible destination countries. Equally important, the development and establishment of Romanian migrant networks in Western Europe and Southern European countries are among the main contributing factors (see, among others, Sandu, 2005a; Gabriel Anghel, 2008; Elrick & Ciobanu, 2009; Potot, 2010; Ciobanu, 2015). The establishment of Romanian migrant networks was also facilitated by various policy changes over the last thirty years. Specifically, between 1992 and 2001 Romania signed bilateral agreements on labour recruitment and placement abroad with Germany (1992), Switzerland (1999), Hungary (2000), Spain (2002), Luxembourg (2001) and Portugal (2001) (Diminescu, 2005, p.65-67). In addition, the right granted to Romanians to move freely within the Schengen area in 2002 facilitated circular and seasonal migration patterns, particularly with southern European countries: Italy (Gabriel Anghel, 2008; Ban, 2012), Spain (Elrick & Ciobanu, 2009), Portugal (Ciobanu, 2015) and Greece (Papadopoulos & Fratsea, 2017; Fratsea & Papadopoulos, 2020). Opportunities for acquiring legal work and residence permits offered up by the regularization programs implemented in southern European countries also impacted on the mobility patterns of Romanian migrants. For example, between 1997 and 2007, four regularization programmes were implemented in Greece (Baldwin-Edwards, 2009, p.328), a factor which Romanian migrants took into consideration in their migration decision process. As a result, Southern European countries – particularly Italy, Spain and Greece – were among the main destinations between 2000 and 2010. The political opportunities structure, the economic opportunities in Southern Europe and, more recently, the economic recession also played an important role in the mobility of Romanians. Thus, currently, Germany is in the process of becoming their main destination country, with the UK in second place with more than 50,000 long-term Romanian immigrants in 2016 (OECD, 2018, p.46). Finally, empirical research suggests that individual or household aspirations, and the development of a Romanian 'culture of migration' (Sandu, 2005b; Horváth, 2008), has also shaped migration flows and patterns.

A recent and extensive literature has documented the characteristics of Romanian migration in different EU countries, particularly in Spain (Marcu, 2018), Italy (Gabriel Anghel, 2008; Ban, 2012), Portugal (Ciobanu, 2015) and the UK (Lulle, Moroşanu & King, 2018). However, in Greece, Romanian migration research has been rather limited, despite Romanians being (at 5.1%) among the top three national migrant groups after the Albanians (53%) and Bulgarians (8.3%) (Fratsea & Papadopoulos, 2020). While, in the early 1990s, Romanian migrants accounted for just 1,941 people in the years that followed the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, their numbers have increased: based on the last Population Census, 46,524 Romanians live in Greece.

On Methodology

This paper draws upon two studies carried out in Greece: one investigates the various patterns of migrants' social and spatial mobilities, while the other study focuses on the relationship between migrant mobilities and spatial inequalities. The first study utilized the life history approach as a basic method, looking into the stories of migrants originating from Albania, Romania and Bangladesh who live in urban and rural areas in Greece. During the interviews, the objective was to collect retrospective data on changing meaning(s) during the life course of the respondents in terms of migration aspirations, intentions and decision processes, mobility patterns and experiences and employment histories. The migrant's individual and/or family strategies for improving their social status during the mobility process were also explored. The 'built-in historical perspective' (Rogaly, 2015) of life histories allows for the study of migrants' individual and family trajectories, while both the 'life history approach' and the biographical method are important methodological approaches for examining various social and spatial mobilities (Halfacree & Boyle, 1993; Thompson, 2004; Frändberg, 2008; Bertaux & Thompson, 2009; Iosifides & Sporton, 2009; Adey, 2010; Rogaly, 2015). Particular attention is given to the way(s) in which the opportunity structure of the origin and host countries shape migration decisions and possibly fuel or alter future social and spatial pathways. Certainly, the theoretical and analytical potential of migrant stories and the complex interplay between macro- and micro-level processes revealed through them are eloquently highlighted in Lawson's argument that:

> *Migrant stories can reveal the empirical disjuncture between expectations of migration, produced through dominant and pervasive discourses of modernization, and the actual experiences of migrants. Their stories illustrate that access to labour markets, state assistance or social networks, are not merely unique individual experiences but, rather, are systematically shaped by social relations of gender, class, ethnicity and migrant status (Lawson, 2000, p.174).*

The second study, conducted in the context of the IMAJINE project, focuses on the relationship between migrant mobilities and spatial inequalities and utilizes the semi-structured interview as its core tool for connecting individual and family histories to various local, regional and statistical data. The second study, which is in process, has also included a number of interviews with various stakeholders. The analysis that follows explores the changing meaning of the aspirations and migration intentions of 26 Romanian migrants (17 women and 9 men) aged between 30 and 63 who are living in Greece. Interviews were carried out in Greek and Romanian language. In this paper, the interviewees appear under pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity. Qualitative material was analysed using MAXQDA qualitative analysis software.

Exploring Romanians' aspirations and drivers of migration

Aspirations and a 'culture of migration' in Romania

Clearly, the decision to migrate is rarely taken on the spur of the moment. Migration aspirations and migration decision-making are complex and multifaceted. Different factors contribute to forming the idea of embarking on a migration journey and searching for new and better opportunities elsewhere. These factors differ depending on the individual characteristics of the migrant, his/her personal and household dreams about the potential living standards in the new destination country, the available information from networks of family or friends regarding available employment opportunities and living conditions, the economic context and mobility opportunities at the time of the move, and the influence of a 'culture of migration' – initially coming into being – in the origin country.

For the pioneering Romanian migrants who migrated in the first two or three years after the collapse of the communist regime, the economic situation in Romania, the deterioration of living conditions, and the limited employment prospects all played an important role in migration decision. As Caterina recalls:

It was back in 1992-1993 (…) the factories I was working in were closing down. They were firing people, they were laying people off because they had no work, they had made contracts for outsourcing, and we had nothing to work for, and… I was scared for my future, going out of work and [the idea of] returning to a village where I had nothing to do (Caterina, 50 years old, emigrated in 1994).

Similarly, Nicolae who was working in Bucharest when the Revolution began, recalls:

Many Romanians emigrated after 1989 towards Germany. I didn't. I was thinking, naively, that things would get better soon. And in 1992, when I saw that the economy was not getting better, I decided to leave. (Nicolae, 61 years old, emigrated in 1992)

The decision to migrate was also in many cases a household and family support strategy for coping with the economic hardship in Romania and stemming from individual and household aspirations.

I 'd finished a technical school and I wanted to work. There was no room in my family for further assistance to continue my studies, we were three brothers. I was the older one [and] there were some problems financial [in my family] … You understand, there was no way anyone could help me. (Alexandru, 49 years old, emigrated in 1993)

Alexandru's story makes it clear that, being the oldest son in the family, he has a 'moral obligation' to do something to help his brothers and parents in a difficult financial situation. Which is to say his initial educational aspirations were transformed into economic ones. After working for a couple of years in a nearby city, he thought that 'I say okay, let's risk it', and he attempted to move to Greece. In the beginning, his migration plans were time-bounded: 'I would migrate for one or two years, I would collect some money and I would return to my country' (Alexandru, 49 years old, emigrated in 1993).

Moving within Romania was the first decision Ionela took in order to pursue her educational aspirations. As she relates, 'I had passed the exams to study at the University. But I didn't have any money and I thought I'd move to Sibiu to collect some money [and then continue with my degree]' (Ionela, 38 years old, emigrated in 2001). However, her initial migration aspirations changed in the years to come. Her educational aspirations were 'put on hold' and replaced by economic ones. 'My

sister had moved to Greece, and I said, I'll come too, I'll work and buy a house of my own!' (Ionela, 38 years old, emigrated in 2001).

Pursuing better wages and employment opportunities in order to improve their wellbeing in their country of origin were the initial aspirations and motives underlying migration. Migration is seen as an expression of agency, since the movement itself is not conceived purely as a mechanism for producing better living conditions in the future; more importantly, migration means individuals taking action and charting their own course to achieve their goals.

> *You just say that you did something [to change your current situation]. And I expect to live with the money I earn, and I hope … you leave [your country] with this wish, that you will make it and buy a house, because Romanians in Romania want their own house (…) So I said I'll go and make some money, I'll help my family as much as I can and I will help myself. I will buy a house, a car, the simple things that young people wanted back then. (Caterina, 50 years old, emigrated in 1994)*

Based on the interviews, it seems there was a Romanian 'culture of migration' in-the-making in the years following the collapse of the communist regime. The interviews also make it clear that, from being an untouchable and unspoken issue restricted to only very close friends during the communist era, the 'emigration dream' of leaving for somewhere else steadily became mainstream in the early 1990s. Even though there was a wider discussion regarding the high economic and physical risks of migration, the 'imagined' expected returns resulting from the territorial inequalities between origin and host country seemed, initially, to counterbalance the costs. 'It was like a general wave of emigration; the majority of young people were leaving. They were looking for a better job. Despite the difficulties, because back then you left irregularly' (Ana, 45 years old, emigrated in 1997). Caterina's account is telling '[at some point] we all started back then to want different things. We also wanted those things under Ceaușescu (…) [meaning education, work], they were the first things on young people's minds, because immediately after the revolution things changed in people's thinking' (Caterina, 50 years old, emigrated in 1994).

As the numbers of emigrants increased, movement itself began to seem more and more feasible. When people with an initial aspiration to migrate saw an opportunity to realize their dreams, they took it. As Vali describes: 'I was working in a shoe factory and talking to a lot of people. I was constantly hearing that people were leaving. And I knew a guy who was saying "I'll go to Greece" (…) and I had this dream to collect save and buy a car, and I said "Why don't I go to Greece?"' (Vali, 47 years old, emigrated in 1994). In other words, he viewed his migration decision as an opportunity to change his life.

Family and networks in Romanians' aspirations and decision to migrate

There is an important literature on the role of social and family networks in Romanian migration (Potot, 2008; Elrick & Ciobanu, 2009; Ban, 2012; Ciobanu 2015). Social and family networks provide information on migration routes, employment opportunities in the receiving country and legalization prospects, and are generally considered to serve as a 'safety net', at least during the initial phases of migration. As Ionela says: 'My aunt was already in Greece, my aunt brought my sister here and my sister brought me' (Ionela, 38 years old, emigrated in 2001).

Family networks may also provide the support necessary to make the migration journey.

> *[My sister was telling me:] 'Come here, stay a few years and then go back if you want.' Of course, my brothers helped me [to come]. I have returned the money; I couldn't come otherwise. And my sister was telling me 'come here, the place where I work needs someone else to*

lend a hand'. So, I came, I landed in safety. I mean, I wouldn't have come if my sisters weren't here. I stayed at her house, I went to work with her, I was safe. Even I didn't speak Greek, it wasn't hard for me. (Lacrie, 38 years old, emigrated in 2001)

Some of the female interviewees followed their spouses to Greece after migration. 'My husband left Romania in 2000 and came to Greece. I stayed 4 years back in Romania, with our elder daughter. Then I said to him: "This isn't working. One here and the other one there (Greece)—that is not a family!"' (Dorina, 50 years old, emigrated in 2003).

It seems that family members who have migrated to other countries exert a strong influence, whether it be to urge family reunification in the country of destination, as in the case above, or to motivate siblings and parents to move to the same – or, in many cases – different countries. As Constantin relates: 'We are seven brothers. Me and the eldest came to Greece, the others moved to Austria (…), and now all my brothers are in Austria and my parents followed. There is no one left in Romania' (Constantin, 38 years old, emigrated in 2001). Thus, once initiated, migration becomes an embedded family strategy that most family members adopt. As we shall see in the next section, the emergence of Romanian transnational families (Ducu, 2018) creates links and may generate future movements when the economic and political context in a host country changes.

Another interesting aspect of the role social and family networks play in Romanian migration is that these networks may also generate or enhance family members' aspirations to migrate. As Lacrie explains, unemployment or limited financial resources was not the basic factor for taking the decision to migrate. Rather, as her siblings were already abroad sending remittances back to the family in Romania, this practice facilitated new consumption patterns and created new aspirations to earn extra money. In this case, the decision to migrate is also seen both as an expression of agency and a route to adulthood (Horváth, 2008) as well as an emancipation from the protective role of the parents.

I had money; my brothers were sending it to me. At some point, I grew up and I said: 'I should also contribute'. I wanted to study, I wanted to work. My brother sent me money to buy clothes (...). I wanted to pay my rent, to do it on my own. This is what I wanted. You see, my mother had to give me money to pay the rent, to study. And my siblings used to send me money from where they were working abroad so I could buy clothes. And I said 'I'll go to work, I'll make some money, I'll buy my own clothes'. How can I put it...? I felt the need to work for myself. To do something! Not to have my brothers holding me in their arms! Until when? I was 20 years old... for how long [would I rely on my brothers]. I felt old and ashamed. (Lacrie, 38 years old)

In some Romanian communities, this family migration strategy spread to other members of the community, contributing to the establishment of a 'Romanian culture of migration'. This intensified from the 2000s onwards, when Romanian emigration began to rise. Migration remittances had a positive impact on the reduction of poverty and income inequality and accounted for 1.9% of GDP in 2016, from a peak of 4.5% in 2008 (Dospinescu & Russo, 2018, p.8). In some cases, these migrant remittances were an important factor in establishing a 'culture of migration' in rural communities (Cohen, 2004) or among Romanian youth (Horváth, 2008). Rooted in the income from remittances, stayers were able to develop new patterns of consumption and develop new aspirations for living standards that could influence the decision to embark on migration. As Constantin remembers:

Everybody was leaving. All my friends and my brothers had left. Everybody had left in that period (2000-2001). That is, those who were around my age or close to my age, with whom we had been together all our childhood had all left. Some had gone to Austria, some to Spa-

in, most had gone to Spain at that time (...). Well, I was basically left alone, I had no other acquaintances there [in my small town]. (…) So I finished high school and came to Greece right away (Constantin, 38 years old).

Changing opportunities, changing aspirations: reassessing migration decisions during mobility

Romanian migration is seldom a linear or cyclical movement between Romania and the country of destination with the potential for return in the future. Rather, an extensive literature has documented how Romanian mobility is characterized by movements within Romania and between different countries (Sandu, 2005ab; Elrick & Ciobanu, 2009; Potot, 2010; Ciobanu, 2015). Examining the Romanian migration journey through the lens of mobility also highlights how migration aspirations and migration decisions are not taken once in a lifetime, but are actually reconstructed contiguously in accordance with changes in the perceived opportunities or constraints in the country of origin or the host(s).

As Caterina explains, she initially migrated to Cyprus, where she stayed for 6 years before returning to Romania. Her initial aspiration was to migrate for a few years to earn money so as to be able to buy a house back in Romania. However, returning to Romania in the early 2000s, she states she could not find a job that paid as well as abroad. As a result, she revised her migration plans and thought about migrating to Greece for a few years. As she explains:

I managed to buy an apartment in Iași back then, and the money all went there. I was in despair. What was I going to do? I was still young. I was 30 years old, I had to go somewhere. And I had met my employer in Cyprus (…), he was originally from Greece and he had told me that, when my contract there ended, if I had nothing to do and nowhere to go, I could come here to Greece (…). When I left Cyprus [to go to Romania], I said I wanted to settle down. I wanted to organize my life, to stay in Romania and, not be uprooted once again, to move away again. But the phone rang (…) and he asked me if I wanted to come to Greece (...) I managed to get a tourist visa. I said [as an excuse to get my visa] that I was going to Greece on vacation, a vacation that has lasted for 18 years. And so, I am here (Caterina, 50 years old, emigrated in 1994).

Migration plans can also be altered when regularization opportunities arise. As mentioned earlier, regularization programs were implemented in Greece in 2001 and 2005. Due to mobility and employment restrictions in place prior to 2002 for Romanian migrants, some changed their initial plans to move to Western European countries and migrated to Greece instead. The information about the regularization programs was available through social and family networks. In other words, opportunities in the host countries can act as a pull factor in migration decision-making, not only when it comes to taking the migration decision itself, but also when it comes to choosing between possible destinations. As Constantin describes, his parents and brothers were in Austria and he only had one brother in Greece. However, at the time he wanted to move, only Greece had launched a regularization program. So instead of going to Austria, he moved to Greece.

The economic crisis that affected Greece's economy also impacted on Romanian migrants' aspirations and migration plans. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that in numerous cases, the recession had a devastating impact on the lives of Romanian migrants: unemployment sky-rocketed in Greece between 2013 and 2016, insecure employment increased, and despite many Romanians developing 'resilience strategies' to alleviate the implications of the economic recession (Fratsea & Papadopoulos, 2020), others decided either to move to another country or to return to their

country of origin. The downturn therefore saw many people reassess their initial aspirations and migration plans and examine their options. As Crina puts it: 'When I came in Greece, I was thinking it would only be for a few years to earn some money and then to go back. But truth be told, I couldn't go back then, [I have organized my life here]. And now jobs are scarce. And I am wondering whether to leave or not'" (Crina, 49 years old, emigrated in 2001).

Conclusions

By exploring migration and mobility processes, I have highlighted different ways in which migrants take the decision to migrate, taking into account both the factors that shape their aspirations to embark on their migratory journey, and the ways in which these migratory practices have the 'capacity to aspire' (Appadurai, 2004), to orient and to motivate the (im)mobility decisions of other migrant actors, too. In the thirty years since the collapse of the communist regime, a range of factors have influenced the aspirations and migration decision-making of Romanian migrants. The dynamics of Romanian migration facilitated the emergence of a culture of migration in the early 1990s, which was well established by the 2000s. The culture of migration was enforced by remittances, through which new patterns of consumption and new aspirations with regard to living standards developed.

By adopting a life-course perspective in examining mobility (cf. Kley, 2011; Findlay, McCollum, Coulter & Gayle, 2015; Boccagni, 2017; Scheibelhofer, 2017), this paper places the emphasis on the changing aspirations of Romanian migrants as these impact on migration decision-making, the ways these aspirations are reconstructed over an individual's migratory journey, and how they are shaped by individual factors, the available networks, and changing structural conditions in the countries of origin and residence. Based on the narratives of Romanian migrants, for some, the decision to migrate was 'pushed' by the limited resources in the country of residence and 'pulled/attracted' by the prospects in other areas. Additionally, embarking on a migration journey is also seen as an expression of agency and a route to adulthood, but also as an emancipation from the protective role of the family. The analysis of the qualitative material reveals an interplay between migrant agency and changing structures in the countries involved.

Migration decision-making is continuously reformed on the basis of changing aspirations and any new constraints or opportunities that may arise. Actual or perceived territorial inequalities regarding incomes, livelihoods, employment prospects, social mobility and well-being are not compared solely between the countries of origin and destination, but rather within different transnational social fields (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004), between potential future destinations including a return to Romania. In this sense, the images created by social or family networks regarding the well-being prospects between different territories are important: these 'imaginaries of mobility" (Salazar, 2011; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013) will shape the future movements both of the individual and/or other Romanian migrants. Nevertheless, this future-oriented 'capacity to aspire' is, as Appadurai (2004, p.68) reminds us, 'not evenly distributed in any society', which foregrounds the issue of -territorial – inequality and stratification in the study of migrant aspirations.

Acknowledgements

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