

New Europe College Yearbook

2024-2025

Volume 1



GALINA BABAK
ALEXANDRA BARDAN
GEORGIOS CHATZELIS
ETTORE COSTA
IDRIT IDRIZI
ADINA MARINCEA
VICTORIA MYRONYUK
ALEXANDER PANAYOTOV
NADAV SOLOMONOVICH
GIUSEPPE TATEO

Editor: Andreea Eșanu

EDITORIAL BOARD

Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Andrei PLEȘU, President of the New Europe Foundation, Professor of Philosophy of Religion, Bucharest; former Minister of Culture and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania

Dr. Valentina SANDU-DEDIU, Rector, New Europe College, Bucharest, Professor of Musicology, National University of Music, Bucharest

Dr. Anca OROVEANU, Permanent Fellow, New Europe College, Bucharest; Professor of Art History, National University of Arts, Bucharest

Dr. Katharina BIEGGER, Strategic Advisor, Center for Governance and Culture in Europe, University of St. Gallen

Dr. Constantin ARDELEANU, Senior Researcher, Institute for South-East European Studies, Bucharest; Researcher, New Europe College, Bucharest

Dr. Andreea EȘANU, (non-tenure) Assistant Professor, University of Bucharest, Faculty of Philosophy

Copyright – New Europe College, 2025
ISSN 1584-0298

New Europe College
Str. Plantelor 21
023971 Bucharest
Romania
www.nec.ro; e-mail: nec@nec.ro
Tel. (+4) 021.307.99.10



ALEXANDRA BARDAN

Spiru Haret Fellow

Lecturer, Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies,
University of Bucharest

Biographical note

PhD in Communication Studies, Université Paris 3, Sorbonne Nouvelle (2008)
Dissertation : *Les Industries Culturelles en Roumanie 1970–1989 – acteurs locaux, acteurs internationaux ; L'émergence et l'enjeu d'un espace public alternatif de communication*

She presented papers at international conferences and workshops in France, Germany, Greece, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom. She also authored several book chapters and articles in the field of social history and daily life in communist Romania, nostalgia and popular culture, design, visual communication, and photojournalism.

BUREAUCRATIC GAPS IN ROMANIA DURING THE 1980S: DIASPORAS, TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY NETWORKS, AND THE SECOND ECONOMY

Alexandra Bardan

Abstract

This article explores the dynamics of transnational solidarity networks that fostered long-term relief strategies that compensated for shortages of consumer goods in socialist Romania during the 1980s. The first part of the paper provides an overview of several significant factors that influenced the way diasporic communities supported their non-migrant relatives and considers the concept of “social remittances” to focus on the work of mediators linking diasporic “donors” and “beneficiaries” in the homeland. The case study examines the formal commercial operations of trading companies, whether local or foreign, in the process of both creating and reinforcing existing transnational family ties and uncovers the socialist state’s involvement in what can be seen as a “parcel industry” that alleviated shortages and facilitated access to scarce goods. The content analysis of the parcels revealed a wide variety of goods produced in Romania, pointing to double standards embedded in socialist consumer culture and opening up new questions about processes of privilege and social (in)equality that emerged long before 1989.

Keywords: transnational networks, late socialism, cross-border flows, shortage economy, second economy, foreign trade companies

1. Introduction

In April 1988, a business delegation from “Quelle,” one of the largest West German mail-order companies, arrived in socialist Romania. The media coverage of the visit was minimal, consisting solely of a dispatch from the local news agency,¹ which gave a brief account of discussions on cooperation in export and tourism. A more detailed account was given in a secret file of the Romanian *Securitate* (ACNSAS 8853/21:

209), which noted that the German businessmen came to negotiate the delivery of parcels containing consumer goods to Romanian citizens, since the company “dealt with the sending of parcels to various countries at the request of West German citizens, who paid both the price and the required commission.” This was still “yesterday’s news”, considering that some 18 years earlier, in May 1970, the German company was cited among the many foreign companies that contributed to the humanitarian campaigns for Romania in the aftermath of a catastrophic flood that changed the lives of people and damaged settlements in many regions of the country.² In addition to commercial actors offering aid, traditional humanitarian and relief organizations such as the Red Cross, religious and social service organizations such as Caritas, as well as governments, diaspora communities, and individual volunteers were also involved. Once the flood crisis was over, the sending of parcels and money did not stop; on the contrary, it increased significantly, to the point that it became a constant subject of *Securitate* surveillance.

The forms of assistance gained momentum in the 1980s, changing from short-term disaster relief, as in the case of the 1970 floods, to long-term strategies to compensate for the regular shortages of consumer goods in socialist Romania. Solidarity networks established new links, while the number and variety of actors increased significantly, beyond the traditionally structured groups of donors and their local counterparts (religious organizations and charities belonging to ethnic or religious minorities). The wider sphere of interaction included new individual and institutional actors, ranging from ordinary citizens and diasporic communities committed to regular donations and gift-giving, to mediators such as foreign trade companies and courier services, but also agents of the communist regime, the government, and the secret police. A glimpse into these de-territorialized networks reveals an intricate and entangled system of cooperation and exchange and provides a new insight into the mediation of solidarity aid and its mediatization, which acted as a salutary infusion within Romanian society at a time of extreme scarcity and deprivation, and the source of endemic poverty. The paper asks how the emergence of a “pluri-functional and polycentric system of interconnected actors” (Constantin 1996) engaged the latter in ambivalent, even contradictory strategies based on the bureaucratic gaps of outdated or incomplete regulations and legislation, committing them to improbable but lucrative alliances, with subsequent various effects on the dynamics of the second economy.

The above topics provide several levels of reading relevant to current research on communist regimes in a global context, transnational and transregional history, and migration and diaspora during the Cold War. A first level of reading concerns the challenge of surviving multiple threats, where migration showcases individual stories, but also, and more often, collective ones. Whether in times of upheaval or considering *la longue durée*, where the cumulative effect of social and political pressures force people to migrate (Kunz 1973), family and community connections accommodate stories of trust and solidarity. A second level of analysis considers a larger framework that unveils a complex system of assistance and exchange fueled by “social remittances” (Levitt 1998), understood here as circular and continuous flows of communication that include ideas, norms, values, and practices that spread from the migrants’ country of residence to the country of origin and vice versa. The transnational ties that connected diasporic communities to family, religious, and ethnic groups in the homeland played an important role in shaping social change during late socialism in subtle but profound ways. A third level of reading refers to the paradoxical aspects generated by the continuous flow of “social remittances”: during the last two decades of communist regimes, the new actors involved in the mediation of aid developed complex commercial and political relationships, leading in the process to the configuration of a particular type of socialist consumer identity. Marked by a severe economic crisis, a political dictatorial regime, a growing autarky and cultural isolation, as well as the omnipresence of the personality cult of Ceaușescu, the strenuous decade of the 1980s of socialist Romania also unfolded in the context of an emerging contemporary globalization. A historical investigation of transnational solidarity networks sheds new light on local economic, social, and cultural change, thus joining scholarship that challenges narratives embedded in Cold War binary frameworks (Yurchak 2006; Bren and Neuburger 2012; Reid 2016).

This paper will begin by exploring the interplay between the national framework and the emerging globalized economic, technological, and cultural flows shaped by the specific geopolitical context of the 1970s and 1980s. It then discusses the topic of the present research within a series of conceptual disciplinary shifts that embed a new way of looking at the past, while also pointing the study towards an interdisciplinary approach that links cultural and material research. The case study will focus the discussion by asking how transnational solidarity networks functioned, how diasporic communities supported their non-migrant relatives, and

more specifically, how mediators of aid contributed to less visible patterns of economic and social change during late socialism.

2. Layers of historical background

The following lines will provide an overview of some significant factors that influenced the economic, social and cultural developments during the 1970s and especially the decade of the 1980s, based on a systemic approach that takes into account: 1) the disruptions caused by the foreign debt crisis at the beginning of the 1980s; 2) the rationalizations, austerity measures and economic crisis that unfolded during the 1980s in Romania, with effects on the second economy; 3) a series of double standards that emerged from a contradictory normative context; and 4) the advances in (computer) information technology, telecommunications and transportation that anticipated the interconnected globalized world of the 1990s.

The first layer is more generally related to what Cornel Ban (2014: 60–70) identified as Romania's efforts to overcome its peripheral status in an increasingly bridged global economic system, while at the same time pursuing an independent economic and foreign policy within the communist bloc. Industrialization strategies, reduced energy needs, and prudent foreign borrowing made the country less vulnerable to the first global oil crisis of 1973–1974. In 1978, Romania's foreign debt amounted to about \$5 billion. The economic weakness was aggravated by the planning of oversized projects in heavy industry,³ the low performance of politically directed management, and increasing energy requirements. This had to be met in a less predictable and unfavorable international context, under the cumulative effects of the second global oil crisis of 1978–1980 and the recession that spread to highly industrialized countries in the early 1980s. This time, due to the rising interest rates of external creditors, Romania's foreign debt reached almost \$12 billion by 1982. Following the National Conference of the Communist Party in December 1982, as Georgescu (2018: 12) notes, the Romanian leadership decided to pay the entire foreign debt in advance,⁴ bringing to a harsh end a series of complex rescheduling negotiations conducted since 1981 with international financial actors and banks.⁵ In addition to radical cuts in imports, the export of virtually all types of commodities led to a massive reduction in

the domestic supply of consumer goods, with serious consequences for the population's standard of living.

A significant trend emerged from the foreign debt crisis, which manifested itself in a shift from a regular policy of obtaining much-needed hard currency to a strategy of obtaining hard currency at (almost) any cost, such as the operations of some Romanian foreign trade companies, which "were carried outside the international trade regulations, sometimes violating the embargo regime or international sanctions"⁶ (Georgescu 2018: 13). The archival records of such foreign trade companies show that they had to fulfill certain planning requirements, but at the same time they lacked the economic means to do so. Throughout the 1980s, Romanian foreign trade companies had to meet exaggerated revenue plans in foreign currency and had to be inventive. The case study discussed later in this article illustrates one of the many tensions between economic actors and the state as foreign currency was collected by any means necessary.

Related to the above processes is the second layer that explores how the austerity measures affected everyday life. Along with historical accounts (Georgescu 1991; Deletant 2019), a consistent body of literature comes from the letters and correspondence exchanged during this period, which provide a measure of how the quality of life gradually deteriorated. Some of the sources are public critical letters, such as those sent to Radio Free Europe (Andreescu and Berindei 2010, Andreescu and Berindei 2015), or the petitions sent to Nicolae Ceaușescu by various citizens complaining about domestic issues (Anton 2016). By far the most dramatic writings are the private letters exchanged by families and friends and intercepted by the *Securitate* (Țăranu 2016). The letters collected from 1980 onwards contain harrowing stories of hardship and rationing of food, electricity and heating, raising the question of how people were able to carry on throughout the decade. The year 1982 witnessed several harsh measures that affected everyday life, such as a 20% increase in prices and tariffs for electricity, heating, gas, and other fuels, as well as an unprecedented 17.8% increase in the inflation rate (Georgescu 2018: 11). But the worst was yet to come: chronic food shortages and power cuts prompted comparisons with wartime consumer habits, while references to the expansion of the second economy became widespread (RFE/RL Research Institute 1984).

Scholarship before and after 1989 approached the second economy of late socialism mainly in terms of social relations and processes specific to conditions of scarcity and shortage, characterized by survival strategies, corruption practices, smuggling, and (in)formal networks (Grossman and

Tremblay 1985; Sampson 1987; Brezinski and Petersen 1990; Ledeneva 1998; Irek 2018).⁷ Recent studies have addressed the issue by questioning the scarcity of consumer goods under a semiotic approach to consumption (Chelcea 2002; Fehérvary 2009; Wasiak 2015; Gille, Mincyte, and Scarboro 2020). The analysis of objects, materials and practices revealed the symbolic value acquired by Western goods, instrumental in the construction of what Alexei Yurchak (2006) called “the Imaginary West,” fueled by everyday consumption practices. Less attention has been paid to the fact that scarcity and lack are not limited to Western goods, but rather to how a particular type of socialist consumer emerged in relation to a binary framing of commodities. For example, local products, many of which were of inferior quality, lacked modern product presentation, and frequently broke (Muzeul Țăranului Român 2003), symptoms of an “oppressive and negligent state” (Fehérvary 2009, 429), were perceived in opposition to overvalued Western goods, mediated by glittering gadgets, attractive packaging, and images of the affluent consumer society presented in movies and TV shows (Mattelart 1997). The case study will show that, perhaps more often than not, the products available in the hard currency shops or shipped through humanitarian or diaspora connections were in fact locally produced goods that were unavailable or in short supply. These are understudied features of the second economy that may emerge from an exploration of transnational solidarity networks.

A third layer of the historical context is related to a contradictory normative context that left room for the emergence of a series of double standards in Romanian society. Strong restrictions confined the population to the geographical and cultural borders of socialism, preventing undesirable contacts with the Western world: these included strict controls on international mobility and migration,⁸ strict monitoring of all contacts with foreigners⁹ and the ban on holding foreign currency.¹⁰ However, the specific regulations of the early 1970s responded to the social changes and new professional mobilities brought about by the reduction of geopolitical tensions, the controlled internal liberalization of the previous decade, and the expansion of international cooperation developing in a world no longer divided by the bipolar configuration of the early Cold War years. Moreover, the political leadership began to devote more attention to the Romanian diaspora in an attempt to attract and develop favorable opinions towards the communist program as a sound political regime (Dobre and Talos 2006). Three directives from the early 1970s revolved around hard currency and allowed certain people to purchase durable goods (produced

in the country or imported),¹¹ hold personal accounts in foreign currency when earning income in/from other countries,¹² and to build, buy and repair houses and vacation homes with payment in foreign currency.¹³ As such, these types of regulations favored the population that could legally access hard currency either by working or by having relatives abroad.¹⁴

Last but not least, the fourth layer of historical background is related to technological and telecommunication developments. A study carried out by the Central Institute for Economic Research in Romania in 1984, based on data and projections, painted a rather precarious picture of the endowment of households with durable goods; compared to other socialist countries, the level of endowment in Romania was significantly lower.¹⁵ Internationally, a 1978 US technical paper (Baer: 2–3) devoted to business and economic projections for the following decade noted that technologies were based on incremental changes in existing communications services rather than on the creation of new ones. The projections pointed to improvements in the availability, cost, and performance of services and products already offered. Long-distance telephone calls, data transmission, color television, satellite TV broadcasts and channels, and technological gadgets such as home audio and video systems defined the decade of the 1980s both in terms of more individualized consumer practices and in the articulation of a globalized popular culture (Flichy 2004). The 1980s also saw the growing popularity of fax machines using land-based telephone lines, responding to a more dynamic than ever global business environment, while the rise of international (long-distance) business travel and the democratization of leisure and tourist travel provided additional links between diasporic communities and kinship groups in Romania.

3. The field, the sources, and the method

Along with the sudden demise of Central and Eastern European communist regimes in 1989, several processes of contemporary globalization remained uncharted, leaving many questions about diaspora and migration from the region unanswered.

To allow for an interdisciplinary perspective, several conceptual shifts that embed a new way of looking at the past provide a rich literature relevant to this research. A first gateway comes from the “global turn” in historical studies, which combines comparative, transnational, and postcolonial views on the region of Eastern Europe, paying attention to

continuities and ruptures and challenging the theological view of 1989 as ground zero for the end of “societies of shortage” and the emergence of consumerist cultures (Reid 2016). A critical view should also delineate the metanarratives of the Cold War that unfolded in the 1990s, which reinforced a binary framing of analytical and interpretive processes applied to the recent past.

Second, the “cultural turn” provides a bottom-up approach in which meaning is explored through language, semiotics, and systems of representation. This view opens up an interrogation of how political and economic ideas were understood in everyday life and how they were transformed in routines, be they professional or domestic. For this study, the social construction of consumer durables as luxury items, but also the cultural role of hard currency and hard currency shops that reflect an image of multiple “Western Oases” in the country, inform the double standards of consumption and how these double standards of “hard currency discrimination” further shaped consumer identities.¹⁶ This article considers a fluid definition of domestic consumption as appropriate to trace subtle changes, despite the rationalizations, austerity measures, and economic crisis of the 1980s in Romania, by exploring networks embedded in the second economy that operated within the span of multiple foci of alternative globalizations.

Third, the “material turn” entails inquiries that move from a passive view of the consumer to an active figure endowed with agency, resisting and negotiating a consumer identity, sometimes in opposition to dominant norms. The construction of the consumer as a category within the larger framework of socialist policies of collective consumption and equal distribution of goods is thus linked to an observation by Frank Trentmann (2005: 12), who considers that “consumers emerged not only as the result of a bottom-up process of frustrated individuals but also as a top-down process through state-sponsored consumption programmes.” As mentioned earlier, the analysis should examine both types of missing or scarce goods, imported and locally produced, when focusing on how transnational transfers of specific products contributed to the emergence of the socialist consumer.

At the intersection of the above approaches, the concept of “social remittances” provides a comprehensive analytical framework. According to Levitt, social remittances are a particularly powerful form of cultural diffusion driven by migration at the grassroots level and can be traced through the exchange of letters, parcels, telephone calls, and other forms of

communication, such as stories shared during short-term visits. Moreover, since mediators influence the impact of remittances (Levitt 1998: 939), a first goal of the case study will be to map the mediators. Their accounts represent the manifold implications of their work, not only on the delivery of aid, but also on the groups and individuals with whom they served as liaisons. Disentangling remittances also puts into perspective the pervasive nature of “blat” practices (Ledeneva 1998), which are a key feature of the Soviet second economies. The next objective of the case study is to examine the mediation of aid as a process that shapes the form, content, and distribution of care packages, since the polycentric networks of transnational solidarity provide numerous accounts that can enlighten features of the second economy that remain largely unexplored, beyond survival strategies, smuggling, and corruption practices. There is also a consensus in the literature that activities within the second economy are tolerated “safety valves” (Sampson 1987; Verdery 1996; Pasti 2006). Less attention has been paid to the content of foreign support in terms of modeling the local economic and social landscape. This is where the third objective of the case study comes in, which is to explore how the mediation of aid was represented and framed by various actors within the polycentric network of remittances. By “unpacking” the parcels, the analysis of the material culture of remittances offers a valuable insight into the role of diasporas beyond sending goods to fulfill the most basic needs of families left at home.

The research method used is the case study (Yin 2014), supported by the triangulation of information from the content analysis of a wide range of archival sources. The main body of documents are reports of the former *Securitate* on specific issues related to foreign trade and transnational aid flows. Files from the Romanian Communist Party shed light on changes in legislation related to bureaucratic gaps. Archives from the Radio Free Europe Research Institute offer a different perspective on the second economy, hard currency, and humanitarian aid strategies. Digital repositories of press articles¹⁷ and local legislation¹⁸ provide specific framings of events, while the testimonies¹⁹ from respondents involved in transnational networks provide valuable insights into context and meaning.

4. Diaspora, migration, and the solidarity aid during the Cold War

A first aspect to consider is the dynamics of the geopolitical context. Growing out of initiatives that emerged mainly during the Second World War, the development of solidarity aid followed not only the Cold War cycles of geopolitical détente and renewed tensions, but also the geographies of material aid along East-West and North-South coordinates.

By 1953, American citizens could no longer use the CARE²⁰ services to send gift packages to relatives and friends in the Soviet bloc, where officials presumably included any direct means of “imperialist influence.” When the dispatches resumed, a series of articles published in 1954 by a US newspaper, the *Daily News*, described the Eastern Bloc’s methods in harsh terms, calling the process no less than “the Communists’ Propaganda and dollar-making gift package racket.”²¹ But the journalists highlighted another problematic side of the story, asking donors whether they would deprive friends or relatives of occasional holiday treats. The same concern was raised in a 1959 report by a committee investigating un-American propaganda activities in the United States. Entitled “The Communist parcel operation,” the committee found that it was in fact a blackmail operation designed to acquire hard currency based on the good deeds of American citizens and “out of love for their relatives who, living under communism, are unable to acquire sufficient food and clothing which residents of the free world have in abundance.”²² This time, the focus was on the high tariffs on food and clothing parcels sent behind the Iron Curtain, which allowed the Soviet Union alone to collect more than \$100 million a year. During the 1960s, Eastern European communist regimes began to use unofficial means²³ to renew ties and foster loyal positions among the scattered emigres. Romania was no exception, with a 1967 decision by the party leadership aimed at developing a comprehensive long-term strategy.²⁴ In 1972, Romanian customs regulations were amended to allow citizens to receive parcels from abroad containing “various clothing and household goods, including refrigerators, radios, televisions, tape recorders, sewing, knitting and washing machines, as well as cars,” provided that payment of customs duties and international transportation was made in foreign currency (Dobre and Talos 2006: 320).²⁵

The history of international migration provides several important trends for the emergence of patterns that shaped solidarity aid and social remittances in the 1980s. Successive waves of migration have

been dominated mainly by ethnic migration²⁶ (Scutaru 2019; Anghel et al. 2016). In terms of destination, the pioneers in the early 20th century headed to the US and Canada, establishing solid communities in major cities. In the post-war and state socialist period, ethnic migration increased, supplemented in the early period by refugees and asylum seekers, and from the mid-1960s by irregular labor migration (Fassmann and Miinz 1994; Dobre and Talos 2006). Beginning in the mid-1970s, external factors such as the Helsinki Final Act, which emphasized freedom of mobility as a fundamental human right, and requirements to secure the US most-favored-nation status boosted the migration of ethnic German and Jewish minorities on the basis of undisclosed bilateral agreements. These covert operations added to previous diaspora strategies, making the instrumental dimension of hard currency flows from abroad even more salient at a time when foreign debt was escalating. Despite the restrictions on freedom of movement, legal migration of ethnic Romanians increased steadily in the late 1970s and 1980s,²⁷ based on various mechanisms, such as family reunification and asylum applications, albeit with difficult and time-consuming procedures (Anghel et al. 2016; Scutaru 2019). In addition, illegal migration flows to destinations in Western Europe and North America also increased, through tourist and family visits, professional and cultural exchanges, study trips, and sports events, which were transformed into asylum applications (Scutaru 2019: 259–260). Last but not least, illegal border crossings added to the growing number of migrants manifold stories of successful escapes or tragic endings.²⁸

In retrospect, humanitarian aid has so far been understood as a crucial gateway for Romanian society in the face of unprecedentedly rising costs affecting living standards due to the regime's decision to repay in advance the foreign debt. Scholars Bodeanu (2018) and Capotescu (2018; 2021) pointed to the flood crisis of the 1970s as the starting point of a broad collective effort for humanitarian aid, involving a variety of actors. Cases inspired by religious communities, private and state aid agencies, or "private humanitarians" shed light on a commitment guided by moral duty and challenge the stereotypical image of the second economy as dominated by profit-driven covert traffic and smuggling. Complementing the above contributions, this article expands the approach of humanitarian aid and moves the focus to transnational solidarity networks, to the continuous (re)balancing of power within the polycentric system of exchange, and to its ability to respond to multiple individual and collective needs (Constantin, 1996: 9). Trading companies, whether local

or foreign, acted as significant mediators in the process of both creating and reinforcing existing transnational family ties.

5. Mapping the mediators

A US press article²⁹ published in 1972 reported on the growing economic exchange that was making it easier to send gifts to families in Eastern Europe. Local companies³⁰ developed a thriving business that boomed during the Christmas season, working with US companies that became agents for the Eastern European firms. American customers could choose from “gift brochures with thousands of items of all kinds,” ranging from food, clothing, housewares, and cars to propane stoves, firewood, and even sheet metal or other building materials. While US agents could earn a 5–10% commission on each sale, one estimate of the annual profit for Eastern European companies was more than \$30 million, a strong incentive for Eastern Bloc governments to make sure US customers were satisfied. The latter sent money orders or even blank gift certificates, which were used by locals to buy goods that were generally in short supply, mainly because they were exported. On this specific point, the press article enlightens two mechanisms that in the long run shaped the double standards embedded in the second economy: 1) scarce and/or better quality products were made available to specific categories of recipients, configuring a “first class” market for consumers who had access to foreign currency, and 2) the financial instruments used benefited from the unofficial exchange rate of high currency on the black market, and since gift certificates and money orders allowed people to purchase almost 75% more goods, they urged their US relatives to use the services of Eastern European companies. Overall, senders, recipients, and mediators were all satisfied with this *modus operandi*.

On the Romanian side, several commercial actors acted as intermediaries between senders and recipients. The companies ICE Comturist, ICE Terra and ICE Mercur³¹ began operations in the early 1970s and were later joined by ICE Romtrans³² and Sulina Freeport, established in 1978.

In 1972, regulations were relaxed to encourage foreign currency transfers from the country’s diaspora, and ICE Terra³³ and ICE Mercur³⁴ were given additional responsibilities. Based on archival sources, one of the key players in the transnational solidarity networks linking the

diaspora with families in the country appears to be by far Comturist. The company was founded in Bucharest in 1970 as a sales agency within the General Directorate of Hotels and Restaurants to organize the activity of selling various articles and durable goods in freely convertible currency to foreigners.³⁵ During the first years, Comturist Agency had shops in hotels, airports, border points, etc. and sold goods through 123 units: 14 in Bucharest, 75 on the Black Sea coast and 34 in other cities located on the main tourist routes. The central office in Bucharest also managed various gifts that could be sent to any address in the country and abroad. In 1974 it appeared as a unit subordinated to the Ministry of Tourism, and in 1977 it changed its status and became a foreign trade company, gaining the ability to negotiate and conclude agreements directly with foreign partners.³⁶ At the end of 1988, probably due to an internal crisis, Comturist became a commercial agency again.³⁷

For the foreign mediators, the cross-reading of several archival sources³⁸ reveals a fairly accurate geographical distribution of Romanian emigrants across all continents. However, there are qualitative and quantitative differences in the flow of social remittances, correlated with the size of diasporic communities. An unexpected feature is the number of mediators in the United States involved in the process of sending food, money and goods, with more than 25 companies, mainly tourist agencies.³⁹ In second place were West Germany⁴⁰ and Canada⁴¹ with five companies, followed by Australia with three firms.⁴² Two companies were identified for Israel⁴³ and Switzerland,⁴⁴ while only one company could be identified for Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom.⁴⁵ Another peculiarity of the above-mentioned companies is that the vast majority of them began to cooperate with Romanian trading companies in the early 1970s, thus fostering a long series of commercial exchanges. According to a series of *Securitate* reports (ACNSAS 8853/21), certain mediators, among which the Swiss company Palatinus⁴⁶ appears as one of the oldest partners and with a considerable volume of transfers, operated mainly in favor of ethnic recipients and representatives of religious organizations. Last but not least, there were direct and rather small but constant flows of money between families and friends in various places. In 1985, for example, an intelligence operation initiated by the *Securitate* to trace transfers of hard currency and parcels to citizens living in Prahova County pointed to senders from Italy, Spain, Canada, Portugal, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Ecuador, Chile, and Venezuela.⁴⁷

6. Transnational networks of social remittances

Over time, several channels were used to deliver packages to recipients in Romania. One of the most common ways was through the regular postal services, although most reports (Andreescu and Berindei 2010) and personal testimonies lamented the long waiting times and the constant tampering with packages, as if an informal fee was added to the formal customs tax, consisting of the theft of some goods from the actual contents of the box.

The personal testimonies collected for this article corroborate specific mediation processes with the aid strategies and humanitarian approaches described by Capotescu (2021). Individuals organized the collection of donations from parishioners within a religious community linked to a similar community in Romania, whose priest was usually in charge of distributing goods (food and clothing) to the needy. The collection and distribution of goods improved over time, strengthened by the personal ties that developed between the sending and receiving communities, increasing the impact of remittances (Levitt 1998: 938). On the other hand, the weak link in this type of network was the actual transportation of the aid from one place to another, since each time it required renting a truck and hiring a professional driver who did not belong to the community.

Comturist statistics (ACNSAS 8853/21: 118) on parcels sent from abroad to Romanian citizens show an increase from 702,255 units in 1986 to 834,421 in 1987, as well as an increase in the proportion of units sent through companies and order houses instead of individuals, from 35% in 1986 to 44.5% in 1987. On the other hand, a 1982 report by the Securitate revealed that several means were used to transfer various amounts of foreign currency: 1) money in the form of orders, based on contracts between Comturist and partner companies. Within the limits of the amount provided, the beneficiary of the order could choose the desired goods from an offer that included cars, motorcycles, freezers, refrigerators, electronic equipment and food packages; 2) money in cash was sent through deposits to the Romanian Bank for Foreign Trade in the Comturist account; by direct deposits at the Comturist cashier in Bucharest; by cashed checks within 10–12 days of receipt, credit cards and telegraphic payment orders through the Romanian Bank for Foreign Trade to the Comturist account. Another means by which Romanians could receive hard currency was through gift vouchers, which had been used since 1973, when Comturist collaborated with the Israeli company Romis;

Romis sent vouchers of various values, while “Romanian beneficiaries received in exchange indigenous and imported goods within the limits of the dollars registered on the vouchers” (ACNSAS 8853/44: 14). In all of the above cases, Romanian citizens could benefit from hard currency without actually touching it or physically holding any amount of it, based on the exceptions introduced in the early 1970s to the regulations prohibiting its possession.

It seems that Comturist, Romtrans and Sulina Freeport were the main actors who, since 1980, carried out commercial operations based on the authorization signed by Cornel Burtică, the then Minister of Foreign Trade and International Economic Cooperation. The operations consisted in sending parcels of food and clothes to Romanian citizens in order to obtain foreign currency according to plan requirements. Foreign companies such as Quelle, Palatinus and MT international sent foreign goods to warehouses located at Sulina Freeport and Romtrans Oradea, where the products (domestic and/or imported) were organized in standardized packages and sent to the recipients by regular internal postal services. In this type of network, the Romanian companies benefited mainly from customs commissions, warehousing and transport, while the links between the foreign senders and the recipients in the country operated outside the formal commercial relations.

The most complex network identified in the archival sources seems to have been developed by Comturist. Two examples of contracts drawn up in early 1988 provide a complete picture of the actors formally involved and the *modus operandi* that functioned up to that point (see Figure 1). A direct link connected the Client (a foreign company) and the Supplier (Comturist), which acted as mediators between the Donors (people from diaspora communities, aid agencies and organizations) and the Beneficiaries (people in Romania). Clients gathered orders from the Donors and transmitted them to the Supplier, who distributed the goods to the Beneficiaries through Comturist shops or through internal postal delivery (with an additional amount in hard currency). The Supplier (Comturist) paid the Client a 10% commission on the order. The Client had a bank deposit (called “Revolving”) for Comturist, which was periodically replenished to ensure a consistent fulfillment of orders.

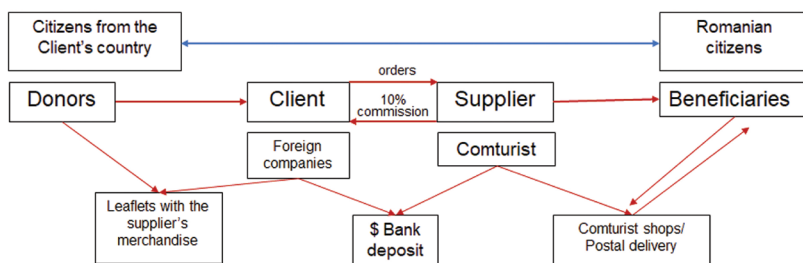


Fig. 1. The Comturist model of transnational network of remittances
 (the author's archive, model based on draft contracts retrieved from ACNSAS 8853/21)

Payments were made by the Client through wire transfers, payment orders, certified checks and International Money Orders issued by Barclay's Bank, and the Client was also responsible for printing advertising leaflets with the Supplier's goods to be consulted by the Donors. In this model, senders from abroad and recipients in the country were linked both by the formal links of the contract and by the constant flow of social remittances informed by letters, telephone calls, or other means of communication. These channels were used to communicate what was needed and/or wanted by the recipient, but also to report on the impact of the goods received, deciphered mainly through letters of thanks for packages sent on special occasions (holidays, birthdays, or other personal events).

However, commercial exchanges did not always proceed as planned, since on at least three occasions the flow of foreign aid was interrupted by interference from the *Securitate*.⁴⁸

7. The mediation of aid: unpacking the parcels

The mediation of aid provides several instances that can illuminate specific features of consumer identity in late socialism. Considering the hardships of the era, a telling example comes from a letter exchanged in 1954 that reflects the postwar poverty (RFE/RL Research Institute 1954). The sender's request depicts a fragile female figure through items such as "un fichu, des agraffes, une plase en nylon, des epingles, une houpette, un peu de poudre, une petite bouteille d'oja,"⁴⁹ which shows that, even in times of

scarcity and need, consumption is not limited to basic goods, and that additional social and gender dimensions should be included.

A second example comes from advertisements placed by foreign mediators in diaspora publications. A 1980 advertisement promoted Comturist gift parcels “with no customs fees and special prices,”⁵⁰ and various tourist services for US residents, while a 1986 insert from Italy promoted “the opportunity to send [parcels] immediately” and “choose from a wide range of products from the Comturist company catalog or from stores/warehouses in the country.”⁵¹ In addition to the wide range of products on offer, from food, household appliances, clothing, cosmetics and cigarettes to building materials, furniture and cars, the presence of both Romanian and Italian brands, as well as premium denim, such as Rifle and Spitfire, is a special feature.

The third type of packages is found in internal company documents. In this case, a handwritten note from 1988 (ACNSAS 8853/21) recorded a series of standardized Comturist food parcels, titled “Carpați” (\$49), “Extra” (\$45), “Sibiu” (\$52), and twelve “Family parcels” with prices ranging from \$22.5 to \$85. The contents varied, including assortments of the following: Sibiu salami, canned pork, canned beef, white flour, sugar, cocoa, coffee, chocolate, liver pâté, ham, rice, melted cheese, powdered milk. A “VIP” box of \$83 contained a carton of imported cigarettes. On the other hand, since parcels could no longer be sent through Sulina Freeport in 1988, the US companies Abaco and MT International diverted parcels through Tarom Airlines. MT International took advantage of the speed of transportation to advertise this benefit to donors from the US and Canada, using the slogan “New! Fast, by plane. American goods. Immediate delivery” (ACNSAS 8853/21: 229). The company had standardized parcels, “MT-1” to “MT-5,” with prices ranging from \$139 to \$89, as well as a “MT-Top” for \$159 and a “MT-Big” for \$239, which also contained food. A distinctive feature of these parcels is the constant presence of coffee beans (3 to 5 kg),⁵² Kent 100S cigarettes⁵³ (2 to 10 cartons) and, in two instances, a pack of ten 3-hour VHS video tapes, a seemingly odd item given that VCRs were not sold in state stores, nor were state video rental services provided.⁵⁴

The final example comes from archived commercial catalogs. A joint 1988 brochure produced by MT International (USA) and Romanian Holidays Tours and Travels (UK) gives a measure of the material culture channeled through social remittances towards the end of the communist regime. The 16-page catalog, apparently distributed to remitters by direct mail, advertised 19 types of duty-free standardized parcels.⁵⁵ It also

offered gift certificates with a minimum value of \$50, which could be used to purchase goods at any hard currency store. Donors could also order Romanian durable goods, from cars (Dacia, Olcit, ARO), building materials, household appliances (Automatic, Arctic, Select), home electronics (TV Cromatic, Telecolor, Diamant, Electronica radio-cassette players) to heating and car fuel, as well as one- to four-room apartments.⁵⁶ This particular category in fact illustrates the range of scarce household products that could be officially acquired only through long waiting lists, or more quickly through blat and favors exchanges and/or on the black market. A special group of services provides a useful insight into the symbolic value of the transnational solidarity network: vacations, geriatric and spa treatments at the Black Sea and in holiday resorts in the country were offered to relatives. These vacations, paid for in hard currency, meant that family members at home had access to better accommodation and food conditions, priority services, and higher standards compared to domestic tourist facilities for Romanians.

Overall, the mediation of aid can be seen as a double-edged sword, alleviating shortages while reinforcing the double standards of consumption embedded in the second economy.

8. Conclusions

This article advanced a bottom-up, exploratory analysis that opened a new perspective on how transnational solidarity networks operated in the region long before the fall of the Soviet bloc. It approached the expanded sphere of formal commercial operations that unfolded between sending and receiving communities, and it clarified some of the ways in which a package exchange economy developed, shaping not only the circulation of social remittances, but also specific channels and contents.

The cumulative effects of social remittances can be correlated with short-, medium-, and long-term impacts. In the short term, transnational and humanitarian aid supported survival stories by assisting communities, families, and individuals in need. Some of the intermediaries (mainly religious) provided basic goods to people who had no connection to the Western world other than the faith community to which they belonged. In the medium term, social remittances emerge as a quite significant channel through which Western goods and symbols entered the country. The mapping of mediators provided a more accurate picture of transnational

networks, while the increasing flow and regularity of parcels and money transfers delineated a mass phenomenon of greater magnitude, juxtaposed with the anecdotal figure of the family member living abroad who occasionally sent gifts. The models of transnational solidarity networks also put into perspective the informal blat and smuggling networks of the second economies. In addition to the economy of favors, there was the money, gifts, and aid packages sent by diasporic communities, but first and foremost there was the involvement of the socialist state in what can be seen as a “parcel industry.” Romanian foreign trade and transport companies were instrumental in formally promoting social remittances as long as they served as a means to fulfill hard currency plans. There is also a certain paradox in the mediation process: high-quality local goods destined for export were diverted through Comturist to be sold as components of standardized packages for foreign money. Since the result was hard currency and the clients were foreign partners, the company understood it as an “export operation,” even though the actual products never left Romanian soil, which explains how Comturist capitalized on a bureaucratic gap.

A closer look at the contents of the parcels reveals other paradoxes concerning consumption and consumer identity. The presence of a wide variety of Romanian-made goods in the mediators’ catalogs challenges the prevailing binary framing of local vs. foreign goods in two ways: 1) the overvalued pre-1989 reading of Western goods was transferred to local products, based on the presumed origin of the parcels sent from abroad. 2) Second, the post-1989 undervalued perception of virtually all Romanian consumer goods stemmed in the early post-communist years from an abundance of imported brands and the population’s flourishing appetite for consumption of foreign goods (Pasti 2006: 216). Moreover, family abroad became synonymous with a consumer’s privileged access to higher quality and scarce products. Ironically, this was denied to the usual recipients of privileges, the high ranks of the Party, since having relatives abroad would hinder their political careers.

Although social remittances alleviated shortages and facilitated access to scarce goods, they contributed to “hard currency discrimination” and in the long run reinforced the double standards embedded in socialist consumer culture, thus informing processes of privilege and social (in)equality that emerged long before 1989. This trend opens up new questions: How did social remittances, supported by information, material culture, and symbolic values, operate in contradiction to socialist

egalitarian rhetoric? How did they contribute to social stratification? How did they configure a specific kind of “second-class” consumer identity? Finally, this article also considers new questions about the normalizing effect of social remittances on consumption practices within a scarcity economy. A further objective would be to explore the function of mediators in filtering needs, configuring solutions to scarcity, and designing an actual normal consumer experience for people in the country, canceling the aberrations of the regime and the economic system, circumventing the long waiting lists for durable goods, opening access to local quality products (but intended for export), and to decent and normal services (tourist packages configured for foreigners). This would add a missing link to the transnational chain of aid that has promoted not only systems of provision based on solidarity and cooperation throughout the country, as remittance recipients continue to share goods with local relatives and friends, but also unaccounted effects in the second economy and on the back market.

Endnotes

- ¹ "Cronica zilei," *Scînteia* 14206, 22 April 1988.
- ² "Sprijin acordat României pentru înlăturarea urmărilor inundațiilor," *Scînteia* 8439, 29 May 1970.
- ³ Mainly oil refining capacities.
- ⁴ The plan was to "reduce the foreign debt by half until the end of 1985, followed by its complete liquidation in the next 2–3 years" (Georgescu 2018).
- ⁵ The International Monetary Fund, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank), private commercial banks.
- ⁶ For a case study on Hungarian foreign trade companies, see Zsuzsanna Borvendég, *The Ages of the Impexes*, Magyarságkutató Intézet, Budapest, 2021.
- ⁷ A consistent pre-1989 Western literature on secondary economies pointed to the systemic flaws of communist regimes and painted a rather bleak picture of the phenomenon, which was seen as "deviance," "institutionalized pathology," and the source of endemic corruption. This framing was further tempered by the accounts of scholars from the former Soviet space who entered Western academia in the 1990s and approached the topic through sociological and anthropological lenses.
- ⁸ The State Council, "Decree no. 973 of October 23/1968 regarding the passport regime," *Buletinul Oficial* 135, 28 October 1968.
- ⁹ The Great National Assembly, "Law no. 23 of December 17/1971 concerning the defense of the state secret in the Socialist Republic of Romania," *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 157, 17 December 1971. Law no. 23/1971 was amended in the mid-1980s by "Decree no. 408 of December 26, 1985, concerning some measures related to the defense of state secrets and the manner of establishing relations with foreigners," which was not published. Decree no. 408/1985 generalized the monitoring of all contacts with foreigners, as all employees were required to sign a commitment that they were aware of the existence of the Decree on State Secrecy, with the specific requirement to note the content of interactions with foreigners, by whatever means they occurred: meetings, (in)formal discussions, telephone conversations, etc. See ACNSAS, *Documentary Fund*, Folder D0013376, vol 12.
- ¹⁰ An early regulation concerning hard currency was instituted by the "Law No. 284 of August 14, 1947 for the transfer to the National Bank of Romania of gold, effective currencies and other foreign means of payment." In 1960, the Great National Assembly adopted the "Decree no. 210 on the regime of foreign means of payment, precious metals and precious stones," published in the *Buletinul Oficial*, no. 8, 17 June 1960. It was decided that the possession in any capacity of foreign currency and precious metals, as well as operations of any kind with them and with precious stones, constitute a

state monetary monopoly and are prohibited, except as expressly provided by law.

¹¹ The Council of Ministers, “Decision no. 202 of February 23/1973 for bringing or receiving from abroad durable goods to be used by the Romanian citizens, as well as the purchase of some products that are sold in the country with payment in foreign currency,” published in *Buletinul Oficial*, no. 21, 1 March 1973.

¹² The State Council, “Decree no. 233 of December 23/1974 concerning certain rights and obligations of Romanian citizens who earn income in foreign currency,” published in *Buletinul Oficial* no. 165, 26 December 1974. Minor changes were brought by the “Decree no. 159 of May 14/1984”, published in *Buletinul Oficial*, no. 165, 16 May 1984.

¹³ The State Council, “Decree no. 175/1974 on the construction, sale, and repair of houses, with payments in foreign currency, for persons who do not have Romanian citizenship, but who reside or want to establish their residence in the Socialist Republic of Romania,” published in *Buletinul Oficial*, no. 108, 1 August 1974.

¹⁴ Double standards also emerged in Romanian tourism, stemming from the initial strategy of the authorities, which aimed to differentiate between “commercial tourism” for foreigners, especially those arriving from Western countries, and “social tourism,” a service provided for the benefit of the country’s working population. This strategy reflected a dualistic structure of tourism, where “domestic tourists often use non-international standard facilities” (Bardan 2020). The double standard made “commercial tourism” a paradoxical representation of “Western oases” in Romanian resorts, accessible to local tourists by proximity, but unaffordable and prohibited by specific tourism policies.

¹⁵ The Central Institute for Economic Research, “Radio Household Market in R.S. Romania; complex prospecting study on the horizon of 1985–1990 and 2000”, at The National Historical Archives of Romania, *The Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party Fund*, file no. 57/1977.

¹⁶ There were several features that significantly differentiated the tourist packages for foreigners: better hotels and food, vacations during the high season in special destinations and hotel units, exclusivity for shopping in hard currency outlets, and leisure spaces such as private beaches, hard currency discotheques and clubs. Notes collected by the *Securitate* in 1977 recorded a strong dissatisfaction expressed by Romanians: the differences between the two types of tourist products were seen as “hard currency discrimination.” (Bardan 2020).

¹⁷ Digiteca Arcanum (<https://adt.arcanum.com>) for collections of Romanian journals and magazines, newspapers.com for foreign (mainly US) journals, as well as Google Books (<https://books.google.com>) for institutional reports published before 1989 by foreign bodies.

- 18 *Portal legislativ*, at <https://legislatie.just.ro>.
- 19 Several strategies were used to access personal testimonies, from taped interviews to electronic correspondence and the use of social media. Eleven testimonies were collected by the time this article was written.
- 20 The Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE) was established in 1945, gathering US and Canadian associations to help rebuild war-torn countries from western Europe.
- 21 Vladimir Mandl and James McGlincy, "Sky-High Duties for Poland Gifts Build Red Racket," *Daily News*, New York, Friday, 9 April 1954, p. 40. According to another column, a total of 470.115 CARE packages were delivered in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Romania from May 1946 to July 1950, "Iron Curtain Nations Turn Down American CARE Gifts," *The Fremont News-Messenger*, Fremont, Ohio, 13 November 1953, p. 9.
- 22 The Committee on Un-American Activities, "The Communist Parcel Operation", Report, United States Government Printing Offices, Washington, 25 September 1959, p. 3.
- 23 The creation of cultural and scientific committees and organizations, the publication of newspapers and magazines for emigrants, tourist actions, the facilitation of commercial contacts with businessmen, as well as the opening of restaurants with national cuisine.
- 24 Commercial, scientific, cultural and educational cooperation, as well as the strengthening of ties with Orthodox parishes and religious communities of the emigrants (Dobre and Talos 2006, pp. 272–286).
- 25 On the other hand, several norms concerning the content of gift parcels remained particularly strict, with items such as "worn-out clothes, shoes, underwear," which were still prohibited by the Customs Code introduced in 1978. See The Great National Assembly, "Law no. 30 of December 22, 1978, the Customs Code of the Socialist Republic of Romania," published in *Buletinul Oficial*, no. 115, 28 December 1978.
- 26 Mainly with German, Jewish population, and to a lesser extent, Hungarian ethnic minority for the last decade of the communist regime.
- 27 With an estimate cumulating over 250,000 people in the 1980s (Scutaru 2019, p. 254)
- 28 One of the most mediatized successful stories is the escape of gymnast Nadia Comăneci in November 1989 (Olaru 2021). Tragic stories have been documented by several projects dedicated to the mass phenomenon of illegal border crossings. See Marina Constantinoiu: <https://frontieristii.ro> and Brândușa Armanca (2021).
- 29 "Corporations make it easy to send gifts to countries in Eastern Europe," *The Daily Item*, Sunbury, 22 December 1972, p. 17.
- 30 Comturist for Romania, Tuzex for Czechoslovakia, Pekao Trading Corp. for Poland, Genex for East Germany, Ikka for Hungary, and Vneshpositorg for the Soviet Union.

- 31 ICE stands for “Întreprinderea de Comerț Exterior,” meaning Enterprise for Foreign Trade.
- 32 State enterprise for international transports and expeditions.
- 33 ICE Terra was created in 1971 by the “Decision No. 28” of the Council of Ministers and responded to the Ministry of Foreign Trade. It was in charge of export-import operations, the provision of various services with payment in foreign currency and the sale of customs tickets. From 1972 it managed the construction of houses bought with foreign currency.
- 34 ICE Mercur was established in December 1967 by the “Decision No. 3236” of the Council of Ministers and responded to the Ministry of Internal Trade. It was mainly in charge of the import of foreign goods to be sold in shops with hard currency payment. From 1972, it managed the restaurants with Romanian cuisine opened abroad and the supply of the emigrant communities with Romanian goods.
- 35 “Comturist,” *Munca* 6896, 16 January 1970.
- 36 The State Council “Decree no. 508 of December 30/1977”, published in *Buletinul Oficial*, no. 108, 1 August 1974.
- 37 By the “Decree no. 381 of 17 December 1988”. The foreign trade activity was taken over by the Company for International Tourism and Tourist Advertising ONT Carpați Bucharest.
- 38 The Comturist files were corroborated with the 1970–1989 Reports of the Attorney General to the Congress of the United States on the Administration of the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938, and with Romanian diaspora journals and magazines.
- 39 Abaco Travel, American Aviation, Arta Travel Service, Chima Travel Bureau, Cosmos Parcels Express, Duna Travel Bureau, Euroimpex, Glo-Travel Serv, Gregory Import-Export, Health and Pleasures, Holmes Lumber/ David Troyer, Hungaria Travel Bureau, Illona Travel, International Remittances, Ioniță Tours, Janosi Travel, Litoral Travel, LT Entreprises, MT International, Ro-American, Ro-American Trading, Rona Travel Bureau, Space Travel Agency, Stephen Geroe, Terra Travel, Transylvania Travel, Victory Travel Agency.
- 40 Alimex, Belimpex, Papp, Halmen, Quelle.
- 41 Apollo Travel, Columbus Travel, Hungaria Ikka, Budapest Travel, International Travel.
- 42 VIP International, Bucharest-Melbourne, Romanian Travel Agency.
- 43 Romis and All Meridian.
- 44 Palatinus and Cladef.
- 45 For Austria, Radu Gheorghe, for France, SARL Costel, for Italy, Romexital, for Sweden, Continent Resor Mariner and for UK Romanian Holidays.
- 46 Palatinus, based in Switzerland, was founded in 1957 as a trading company that facilitated the sending of gift and care packages to Eastern European countries.

- 47 The money was sent through the Romanian Foreign Trade Bank as provisions
for travel and for the purchase of goods with payment in foreign currency.
- 48 This topic will be covered elsewhere due to space limitations in this article.
- 49 “a scarf, staples, nylon hair net, pins, a powder puff, a little powder, a small
bottle of nail polish.” (author’s translation).
- 50 Ad by Litoral Travel Bureau on the 3rd cover of the calendar *The Ancient
Candle*, 1980, published by “St. Simion” Parish of Detroit, Michigan. Item
belonging to the private collection of Florian Ciobanu, facebook.com/
ReclameVechiRomanestiOldRomanianAds
- 51 Insert by Romexital on page 25 of the magazine *Columna*, edited by the
“Dacia” Association in Rome.
- 52 Coffee was an alternative currency; it was exchanged for other products or
services.
- 53 The “long Kent” was labeled as Romania’s “unofficial currency,” a valuable
substitute for US dollars (Lee 1987).
- 54 For the VCR phenomenon, see Bardan (2021).
- 55 Annual and quarterly subscriptions were offered as options to increase the
flow.
- 56 VCRs were presented on a separate page.

Bibliography

Primary sources

- The National Historical Archives of Romania (ANIC), *The Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party Fund, 1965–1989*.
- The National Historical Archives of Romania, *The County Socialist Cultural Committee of Bacău, 1974–1989*.
- The Archives of the National Council for the Study of Securitate Archives (ACNSAS), *Documentary Fund, 1965–1989*.
- Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, Publications Department: *Background and Country Reports*, Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

Secondary sources

- Andreescu, G., M. Berindei. *Ultimul deceniu comunist. Scrisori către Radio Europe Liberă*. Vol. 1. Iași: Polirom, 2010. Vol. 2. Iași: Polirom, 2015.
- Anghel, R. G., A. Botezat, A. Coșciug, I. Manafi, M. Roman. *International Migration, Return Migration, and Their Effects: A Comprehensive Review on the Romanian Case*, IZA Discussion Papers 10445, Institute of Labor Economics (IZA), Bonn, 2016.
- Anton, M. *„Ceaușescu și poporul”. Scrisori către “iubitul conducător” (1965–1989)*. Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2016.
- Armanca, B. *Frontieriștii. Istoria recentă în mass-media*. București: Curtea Veche, 2021.
- Baer, W. S. *Telecommunications Technology in the 1980s. Forecast*. Santa Monica: The Rand Paper Serie, 1978.
- Ban, C. *Dependență și dezvoltare. Economia politică a capitalismului românesc*. București: Ed. Tact, 2014.
- Bardan, A. *„Oaze de occident”: turism și agrement în România anilor 1980.”* in D. Báthory, Ș. Bosomitu, C. Budeancă, *România de la comunism la postcomunism. Criză, transformare, democratizare*. Iași: Polirom, 2020.
- Bardan, A. *“Fenomenul video în România anilor ‘80: între secretul lui Polichinelle și Operațiunea ‘Mica publicitate’.”* *Iscoada*, 7 October 2021, <https://iscoada.com/text/fenomenul-video-in-romania-anilor-80-intre-secretul-lui-polichinelle-si-operatiunea-mica-publicitate/>.
- Bodeanu, D. *O rază de speranță în întuneric... Ajutoarele primite din străinătate de cultele religioase din România în anii ‘70–‘80*. Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2018.
- Bren, P., M. Neuburger, *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Brezinski, H., P. Petersen. *“The Second Economy in Romania.”* in M. Łoś (ed.), *The Second Economy in Marxist States*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990.

- Capotescu, C. "Continuing Politics by Other Means: Giving in Cold War Europe." *International Journal for History, Culture And Modernity* 6.1 (2018): pp. 105–133.
- Capotescu, C. "Migrants into Humanitarians: Ethnic Solidarity and Private Aid-Giving during Romania's Historic Flood of 1970." *East European Politics and Societies* 35.2 (2021): pp. 293–312.
- Chelcea, L. "The Culture of Shortage during State-Socialism: Consumption Practices in a Romanian Village in the 1980s." *Cultural Studies* 16.1 (2002): pp. 16–43.
- Constantin, F. "L'informel internationalisé ou la subversion de la territorialité." *Cultures & Conflits* 21–22 (1996): pp. 1–25.
- Deletant, D. *Romania under Communism. Paradox and Degeneration*. New York: Routledge, 2019.
- Dobre, D., D. Talos. *Români în exil, emigrație și diaspora: documente din fosta Arhivă a C.C. al P.C.R.* București: Pro Historia, 2006.
- Fassmann, H., R. Miinz. "European East-West Migration, 1945–1992." *International Migration Review* 28.3 (1994): pp. 520–538.
- Fehérvary, K. "Goods and States: The Political Logic of State-Socialist Material Culture." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51.2 (2009): pp. 426–459.
- Flichy, P. *Une histoire de la communication moderne : espace public et vie privée*. Paris: La Découverte & Syros, 2004.
- Georgescu, G. *Romania's Foreign Debt Crisis in the 1980s: Determinants and Consequences*. Bucharest: Romanian Academy, National Institute for Economic Research, 2018.
- Georgescu, Vlad. *The Romanians. A History*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991.
- Gille, Z., D. Mincyte, C. Scarboro, *The Socialist Good Life: Desire, Development, and Standards of Living in Eastern Europe*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020.
- Grossman, G., V. G. Treml. *The Second Economy in the USSR and Eastern Europe: A Bibliography*. Durham: Berkeley-Duke Occasional Papers on the Second Economy in the USSR, Duke University Press, 1985.
- Irek, M. *Travelling with the Argonauts: Informal Networks Seen without a Vertical Lens*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2018.
- Kunz, E. F. "The Refugee in Flight: Kinetic Models and Forms of Displacement." *International Migration Review* 7.2 (1973): pp. 125–146.
- Ledeneva, A. V. *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Lee, G. "In Romania, Kent as Currency." *The Washington Post*, 29 August 1987.
- Levitt, P. "Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion." *International Migration Review* 32.4 (1998): pp. 926–948.

- Mattelart, T. *Le cheval de Troie audiovisuel, Le rideau de fer à l'épreuve des radios et télévisions transfrontières*. Grenoble: PUG, 1997.
- Muzeul Țăranului Român. *Anii '80 și bucureștenii*. Ed. by I. Nicolau. București: Paideia, 2003.
- Olaru, S. *Nadia și Securitatea*. București: Epica, 2021.
- Pastî, V. *Noul capitalism românesc*. Iași: Polirom, 2006.
- Reid, S. E. "Cold War Binaries and the Culture of Consumption in the Late Soviet Home." *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* 8.1 (2016): pp. 17–43.
- RFE/RL Research Institute, *Situation Report: Romania*. Budapest: Open Society Archives at Central European University, 1984.
- RFE/RL Research Institute, *What to Send in a Gift Parcel to Romania and How*. Budapest: Open Society Archives at Central European University, 1954.
- Sampson, S. L. "The Second Economy of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 493 (1987): pp. 120–136.
- Scutaru, B. "Romania." In A. Mazurkiewicz, *East Central European Migrations During the Cold War*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019.
- Țăranu, L. „Pe luna decembrie nu mi-am făcut planul...” *Românii în „Epoca de Aur”, corespondență din anii '80*. Țărgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2016.
- Trentmann, F. "Knowing Consumers – Histories, Identities, Practices: an Introduction." In F. Trentmann, *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005.
- Verdery, K. *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* New York: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Wasiak, P. "Debating Consumer Durables, Luxury and Social Inequality in Poland during the System Transition." *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropaforschung* 64 (2015): pp. 543–565.
- Yin, R. K. *Case Study Research Design and Methods*. 5. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2014.
- Yurchak, A. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.