

I. Across boundaries. Individuals on the move

Paul is now 65 years old. He has been retired since 2010 and he receives his pension after *11 years, 9 months and 29 days*¹ of legal work in Spain. He now lives in Seaca, takes care of his mother and is almost done with the construction of the family house, a multi-story building. He married young, when he was just 16, and he now has 5 children - 3 daughters and 2 sons, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Apart from his mother, who is a typical stayer, without any work-related migration experience, he is the only one from his family to come back: *I have all my children there. They all have [legal] papers. There are about 19-18 workers in my family, my boys, my daughters, my sons-in-law, more than 18 persons.*

For Paul, crossing borders has been a recurrent practice after 1989. His first work destination was the former republic of Yugoslavia from 1990 until 1992, followed by Germany until 1993 and, finally, Spain from 1996-1997 and 1999-2010. All these departures involved the fraudulent movement in the international space, and left him, his family and other fellow travelers exposed to countless dangers. All the trips to the destinations have been instances of divine intervention, as the illegal departures were ultimately big games of chance. They involved the contributions of various categories of intermediary actors, such as local loan sharks – in order to access the necessary financial resources for the departure; guides – able to get migrants safely across the borders; translators – persons who had special skills of mediating potential conflicts and knew the

¹ Words written in Italics either appear verbatim in interviews, or denote ideas that sum up the interviews.

law of the land, invaluable in the unfortunate cases of being caught and brought to the border authorities.

Migration is depicted in his words as a human tragedy: *I left a quarter of my life there, tragedy, a human tragedy, the tragedy of Romanians who are over there...* He is constantly returning to this idea, and elaborates on it. It is not only the tragedy experienced by people trying to take control of their own fate and find a better life, but also the tragic destiny of Romania, a *Garden of Eden* that loses its people for faraway places, ultimately incomparable to *home*.

Paul is *țigan*, but he prides himself with his mixed blood: with Romanian biological parents, he was raised as *țigan* by a Serbian woman raised herself by *țigani*, and her *țigan* husband. Nevertheless, he confesses that he is in the majority, he feels as being part of the majority, namely Romanian, and emphasizes his open mindedness and adaptation to community practices and ways of being as opposed to the adherence to traditions characteristic to *țigani*.

He talks about his origins as traits that open the world to him, insisting on the idea that we are all equal in our brotherhood, despite having different colors or speaking different languages. His faith in equality is, as he says, based on his experiences of talking, living and working alongside people from all over the world. He got to know Africans, and found out that they were *in fact* good people, he encountered Indians as co-workers and uncovered striking linguistic similarities, as he puts it, between old versions of *țigănească*, the language of his ancestors, and Indian. Through interactions with all these instances of otherness, Paul came to conclusions about the Romanian spirit and Romanian people, whom he describes as being the most intelligent, not necessarily cultivated in formal environments but naturally gifted. This privileged standpoint allows him to show generosity in his belief in sameness and in every man's right to lead a good life and to be protected by his state.

With a complex ethnic heritage as both (or neither?) Romanian and Roma as the starting point in his journey of self-accomplishment and self-discovery, Paul tells a story of gain – economic capital, respect abroad, new skills and experiences – interwoven with major loss, the loss of the homeland, the loss of the place one calls home. As a means of making up for this loss, his plans for the future, or better said his previous plans that have now come to materialize involved a return to origin, which had taken place at the time of the interviews. It is also a story about individuals and states, brought together by the shared *tragedy of migration*. His discourse is permeated by concepts such as *us* and *them* (Romanians and the others, Spanish people and other immigrants alike), with their meanings constantly redefined in the course of interactions. But, at the same time, it is a life story, rich in episodes that bring forward matters of identity, formulated as questions and, retrospectively, answers about who one is in the world, who one is across borders and who one is in relation to members of various out-groups.

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In this book, I make use of concepts such as collective identity, identity construction, migration as discursive resource and ethnicity in tackling the question of how identity is constructed by the interviewees in their interactions with the researchers. More specifically, a certain part of this constructionist setting is emphasized: the role played by migration as concept brought by interviewees into the discussion flow in order to define social categories or, in social identity theory's vocabulary, in-groups and out-groups. Given this analytical orientation, using as introduction the words and story of a migrant among those whose voices I present and discuss seemed only natural. This introduction is meant to be an easy way in a complex world governed, among others, by migration.

The book is not focused on migration as phenomenon, and it does not place it in causal relations to states of facts. Instead, it is a proposition to explore discourses and narratives of migration and the shifts in various social definitions performed within them. It basically brings forward migration and identity as two related concepts and explores how the latter is constantly redefined in reference to the former. The theoretical perspectives that link identity and migration presented here are assimilation and transnationalism, and, albeit from different directions, they both relate to issues such as integration and dealing with borders, be they political, social or psychological.

Empirical data are employed in the text: qualitative, open ended interviews conducted with individuals with migration experience, as well as nonmigrants, from two rural communities in Romania. The interviews are seen as co-constructed artefacts, shaped by the interaction between the researcher and the respondent(s). at the same time, they are treated as being the environment in which respondents present versions of themselves, by constructing images, identities and coherence.

The first section of the book, with its two chapters (Theoretical perspectives on identity and migration; Migration in communities: Seaca and Păunești), is meant to set the frame for the subsequent discussions. The following chapters (Stories of Alterity in Migration; Telling Stories of Migration: Individual Narratives of Departing and Returning; The Other at Home. Narratives of Difference and Migration; Religious orientation, migration and identity construction; Ethnicity across borders) analyze qualitative data, whose generation is detailed as Annex in order to provide lines of answering to the research question formulated above. Each chapter ends with a series of conclusions. Symmetrically, the book is concluded by an Epilogue, in which the main throughout findings are underlined.

Different chapters of this book have been previously published, either as chapters in collective works or as journal