
Acasă, în România. Ongoing housing improvement in homeland

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ABSTRACT

The text explores the interaction between home making – the social construction process of the domestic sphere – and house building – the actual building of a house, which is full of significance – based on a dense ethnographic experience with the families and their living places, in Romania and Italy.

Moving from Appadurai's perspective of the local dimension as the repertoire of the conditions of possibility, it has been possible to show that home making and house building practices reveal the conditions of 'possibility' experienced by those people and represent at the same time an action aiming for the fulfilment of 'imaginable' and 'desirable' futures.

KEYWORDS

Rudari, Romania, migration, home-making, house-building, local dimension (Appadurai).

BIO

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Introduction: future and home

The article focuses on the practices and the meanings related to the house-building and home-making processes in Romania by a Romanian *Rudari Lingurari* network of families, mutually connected through ties of kindred, coming from some villages in the South of Romania and who migrated mostly to Italy, but also to Spain, Great Britain and France¹.

During my multi-site research², started in 2008³, I tried to hold together the two dimensions of space and time, connecting the transnational⁴ perspective and mobility⁵ paradigm to the past, present and future of the life of these families. In this connection, the emphasis is on how the local dimension – both in Italy and in Romania – intervenes in the process of construction of new ways of thinking that affect the lives of the migrants, what they consider important and how to implement the possibilities opened by migration, considering constraints, imagination and aspiration, how and where they feel at home.

My long-term research reveals the centrality of the international network determined by patterns correlated to the extended family and affinity kinship. In the immigration countries, the relationships network – extended in space – provides actors with a basic understanding and knowledge of new contexts and scenarios of migration. It also allows the enhancement of a process of anticipation and the projection into a relatively near future of life expectations. Marriage practices and the family relationships appear as important resources to cope with changing circumstances and a new local dimension.

A future-oriented approach, induced me to identify the key elements that the family's network provides; and the desires and practices induced by kinship cultural patterns, notably referred to the *homing* process (thinking, feeling and making a home, see Boccagni 2017).

Moving from these emic and cultural factors to the political and macro-structural factors - and their interaction – I analyse what intervenes in the process of conceiving 'thinkable' and 'desirable' futures, and the concrete possibilities of realising them⁶. The issue of the local dimension suggested by Appadurai (2013) as the repertoire of the conditions of the possibilities, starting from how individuals and groups do experience about themselves and shape their own future⁷.

¹ See: Marcetti *et alii* 2011; Marcetti and Tosi Cambini 2013; Tosi Cambini 2010, 2016a, 2016b, forthcoming 2021.

² In the twelve or so years of research I 'followed' the migrant families in this family network, in the villages in Romania, in Great Britain and with relatives in Bulgaria, as well as in Italy.

³ The research began in 2008 thanks to the Giovanni Michelucci Foundation, for which I was a researcher and head of the Observatory on precarious living in Tuscany and of the Observatory on Roma and Sinti settlements until 2014. In 2015 I was a research fellow in the MigRom project – *The immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe: causes, effects, and future engagement strategies*, <http://migrom.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/>. From 2016 to the present day (December 2020) the relationships with many of the families have continued and they have allowed me to follow from within or closely their stories in Italy and Romania. In this article, as already in the publications cited in the previous note, I bring together the knowledge that emerged during the various research periods, in a perspective that reconstructs the changes that have affected the history of these families before and during migration. For reasons of research ethics, people's names have been changed, making them difficult to recognise. In this sense, fictitious names are also used for the countries of origin. As regards the pictures in the article: the first four were taken in the course of research for the Michelucci Foundation; the others are part of the ethnographic work carried out in various periods in Romania. The latter, apart from those that also portray me, were produced as fieldwork 'documents'. The photographs in which I appear are the result of an ethnographic 'situation' in which people wanted to take photos using my camera or theirs, becoming part of a communications circuit separate from the research itself.

⁴ "If the adjective 'transnational' does have any specific meaning in referring to migrants, I suggest that it should lie in problematising the 'attachment' to places of origin among deterritorialised persons who are not only denied full membership of the 'society' in which they mainly live and work but even a full personhood" (Gledhill 1998: 4, cit. in Grillo 2000: 6).

⁵ See among others: Sheller and Urry 2006; Favell 2015; Riccio 2019.

⁶ «Anthropologists need to engage in a "systematic effort to understand how cultural systems, as combinations of norms, dispositions, practices, and histories, frame the good life as a landscape of discernible ends and of practical paths to the achievement of these ends. This requires a move away from the anthropological emphasis on cultures as logics of reproduction to a fuller picture in which cultural systems also shape specific images of the good life as a map of the journey from here to there and from now to then, as a part of the ethics of everyday life" (Appadurai, 2013, p. 292). This effort will evidence the difference between what Appadurai calls 'the ethics of possibility' and 'the ethics of probability'. The former is based on "those ways of thinking, feeling and acting that increase the horizon of hope, that expand the field of the imagination, that produce greater equity in what [he has] the capacity to aspire, and that widen the field of informed, creative, and critical citizenship". Conversely, the ethics of probability deal with "those ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that flow out of what Ian Hacking called 'the avalanche of numbers'... they are generally tied to the growth of a casino capitalism which profits from catastrophe and tends to bet on disaster" (Appadurai, 2013, p. 295); (Poli 2014: 28).

⁷ "The capacity to aspire is unequally distributed" and "its skewed distribution is a fundamental feature, and not just a secondary attribute, of extreme poverty" (Appadurai 2013: 289).

By connecting the families' network, the cultural familiar pattern and the local dimensions in Italy and in Romania, I tried to understand how the families I'm talking about can shape their home and future, in their double life context. This *future-homing*⁸-oriented analysis can give a deep comprehension of the migration experiences, and also to identify the shifts in meaning linked to the process of homing between the first generation that migrated and their sons and daughters who grew up in the country of immigration.

This last aspect is important since here we will in fact refer to a generation of people who have already begun to migrate as women and men (albeit young), who have therefore not grown up in the new migratory context, whose perspective of 'future' and 'home' looks very different (see Tosi Cambini *forthcoming* 2021).

Within this *future-homing*⁹-oriented approach, which impacts a significant number of issues within life contexts, the article will focus on the process of building one's home in Romania, not before dwelling on some elements of the housing situation in Italy, precisely because of the connection between the two contexts in bringing out or not the feeling of 'being at home' and the desires that arise from it: a real vision of the house materially and – we would say – 'strongly understood' (its external and internal form, the place and methods of construction, the necessary resources, etc.).

Hints on migration and the condition of precarious living in Italy

The *Rudari* families' network I'm referring to is centred on the families' area of origin in the South of Romania and, in particular, in some villages in Costanța County (*Județul*), Dobruja Region, and Călărași County (*Județul*), Muntenia Region. They are traditionally associated with mobile lifestyles, historically tied up to woodworking which was interrupted with the advent of Communism and policies of forced settlement⁸. This, however, changed in the '90s when the *Rudari* again began to move internationally due to their economic precariousness. Work was irregular in agriculture and construction sectors, with salaries below € 10 a day. The only alternative was to work as drivers for the tinker Roma in the village and abroad. Without regular work, the *Rudari* in their homeland were also excluded from access to the national health system. Leaving became the only concrete and feasible option. Youths started to leave in search of seasonal jobs. Mothers and girls could also engage in short term travel to substitute relatives in domestic work. Married men engaged in longer work periods. A single member or a nucleus of the family could more or less permanently leave for various countries of greater Europe: Italy, Spain, England, Germany, France, Greece and also Turkey. This process created transnational family webs, giving rise to a 'reticular migration' in which relatives abroad act both as a vehicle for work opportunities and a safety net for the new arrivals.

It is acknowledged that people engaging in migration within Europe do not take just one voyage, but many more or less frequent ones, which allow them to live in the reality of their homeland as well, making it possible for them to juggle social, economic and spatial relationships in two places at the same time. This form of migration gives individuals and family groups the opportunity to continually renegotiate their existence in the countries of their departure as well as in their country of arrival according to their individual possibilities. Contingent situations influence decisions.

As mentioned, I have studied the *Rudari* 'community' which arrived in Florence. For many of them, the mode of settlement took the form of squatting. Their first squatting occurred in 2006 and it is called by them 'la Luzzi'⁹ from the name of the public hospital that was hosted on the premises until 1998. This experience was an important 'life-passage' for many people, as it gave them the possibility to achieve a certain degree of residential stability in the migration, compared with the previously homeless or little slum situation experienced by the first men who arrived. Thanks to 'la Luzzi', new possibilities have opened up: family members arriving, schooling for the children, job-seeking, health caring. Life in the receiving country is an uphill experience, but with some advantages. Communications with the community in the country of origin were (and continues to be) intense with a constant exchange of information, things and people between the two places: Romania was (and is even now) still considered 'home'.

⁸ See next paragraph.

⁹ Please refer to the texts cited in note 1.

'La Luzzi' also served to provide protection and support. Its inhabitants had to face changes in social and cultural contexts, similarities or deep differences compared with the place of provenance. The ties of solidarity within families and the relative ease of reception into a new place have given many families the possibility to attempt different strategies 'in their movement' between Romania and Italy, to gradually confront the new realities of immigration by trying out various opportunities of life between these two contexts, and sometimes to attempt a new life plan in Italy without jeopardising everything in the country of origin. Self-management has provided them with opportunities for action, but their capability has been reduced by the description of them given by media and institutions: they have been falsely represented as being committed to illegal activities, squalor, muddle and uncivilised behaviour. The safety net within the 'la Luzzi' has kept alive some of the fundamental characteristics of family networks: economic unity, living together and solidarity.



FIGURES 1-2: 'La Luzzi': some abandoned areas and buildings in the complex that have become family homes

With the support of the *Movimento di Lotta per la Casa* (a Social Movement in Florence) the alternative proposal to squatting in 'la Luzzi' was not only occupying an abandoned property to inhabit as much as an opportunity both for the city and for the immigrants: for the squatters to acquire access to decent housing and for Florence to develop the potentialities of the Luzzi as a socially useful structure. The

request to start a negotiation with the local institution was started also against the envisaged privatisation of the area (park and buildings), transforming the place into a five-star hotel or a luxury housing complex.

In this way, the aspiration of these immigrant people combines with the broader issue of the government of the city and with what Henry Lefebvre called “the right to the city”. In the anticipation prospective, we could say that the future of the families and the future of the city encounter each other at a crucial point: the housing issues.



FIGURES 3-4: ‘La Luzzi’: some abandoned areas and buildings in the complex that have become family homes

With the end of the occupation of ‘La Luzzi’, over the years families have found other and, with time, changing solutions, with returns to Romania, transfers to other occupations, rentals of houses with several families. Some – but few – have followed institutional paths linked to shelters, others to emergency housing and – the luckiest, at the moment we only know two – have become assignees of a public housing apartment.

For ‘our’ families, the precariousness of the housing conditions in Florence¹⁰ reinforces the intensity of the context of origin in giving meaning to their life choices and the renegotiation of a physical and social space *acasă în România*.

In Romania

The population of the villages of ‘our’ families, as often happens in Romania, is spatially divided and there is a distinction between Romanians, Roma (*țigani romei*) and Rudari (*țigani rudari*).

Valeriu¹¹, a relative of the family that is the ‘protagonist’ of the following paragraphs, tells me that during the Second World War they went to the municipalities of Cernavodă and others nearby where there were waterways, especially the Danube and its ramifications, near the woods and asked the *pădurar* (the ‘guardian’ of the wood) for permission to fell the trees. They worked with wood, manufacturing spoons (*lingure* ‘spoon’, hence the name of *rudari lingurari*) and other kitchen utensils, and then during the summer they would go to various towns to sell them or barter them with other objects, mainly foods such as flour and cheese, which they would eat during the winter. They also worked with the *boeri* (the owners of buildings and land) both in the houses and in the fields. “The Rudari”, explains Valeriu, “used to go around Dobroudja, in particular to Călărași¹² and Tulcea, always near the Danube, with their cart. They stop in the places according to the duration of the contract for use of the forest that the *pădurar* grants them. They move with their cart and oxen”.



FIGURE 5: Geographical area of provenance

From the end of 1950s – with the progressive state control measures, forced sedentarisation and the collectivisation process – they gradually began to work at the Sibiu Mare Agricultural Cooperative, where they also slept overnight. They were paid from Monday to Friday, while – continues Valeriu – the work on Saturday and Sunday was paid for with flour and other food products.

When Valeriu’s grandfather’s brother calls Luminița (Valeriu’s mother) to Sibiu Mare, she is pregnant with him (it is 1966): “My parents are in Brăila and therefore they have to cross the river with the cart on the boat and Luminița was afraid of falling into the water and losing her baby, which is me”. Ion, Valeriu’s grandfather, bought 2000 square metres of land and they settled permanently in Sibiu Mare.

¹⁰ In this sense, it should be emphasised that they have not been identified in public discourse, by the media and by institutions as ‘gypsies’ and, therefore, have had the opportunity to actively escape the mechanisms of the ‘policies for the Roma’. On this point, please refer to the texts cited in note 1 and, further on, in paragraph 3.

¹¹ Sibiu Mare, Romania, October 2010.

¹² Călărași is in Muntenia Region.

Despite the difficulties experienced, the period of work in the CAPs¹³ is remembered as a ‘safe’ time, in the sense that some elements of social protection were guaranteed, which in the post-socialist period failed completely¹⁴.



FIGURE 6: The map of Sibiu Mare village at the time when Valeriu’s grandfather settled there and built the house, designed by ‘uncle’ Valeriu for me in October 2010.

On the map, Valeriu inserts the *Camin* [cultural] to provide me with spatial references of the present, in order to orient myself. Where the inscription *islaz* appears, on the outskirts of the town – Valeriu explains to me – the first Rudari lived there and subsequently the poorest ones remained, with mainly small houses, dry-built with *adobe* (mud brick), and even in 2010 it continued to be so. Although a few were better cared for, most of the houses showed severe structural and maintenance deficiencies. Valeriu adds that when the Rudari came to Sibiu Mare, including his grandparents, before settling permanently, though he was not yet born, they stopped in the *islaz* (fig. 7). The Rudari then began to buy the land and build better houses than the first ones, but always with *adobe* and less important than those of the Romanians, in the other area of the country corresponding to the inscription *case vechi* (e.g. fig. 8).

While the area beyond the river and the main road – where, in the drawing, I noted ‘the ‘90s’ – is that of the third ‘expansion’ of the Rudari, where there are the houses of the sons of Luminița, i.e. of Valeriu himself, Ionica and Alexandru built starting from those years, some from scratch, others enlarged with new rooms, thanks to the first remittances coming from the work abroad.

These elements of socio-spatial configuration are important to understand today the different aspects that contribute to configuring the construction of the house – in the double sense of house-building and home-making – as one of the central factors in migratory processes.

¹³ *Cooperativa Agricolă de Producție*, ‘Agricultural Production Cooperatives’.

¹⁴ Also Teodorescu reports: “[...] the Rudari of Valea lui Stan, who in the state-socialist era were active in the collective farms [...]. This lifestyle was remembered by some older Rudari interviewees as prosperous and secure. Not secure from farm relocations, but secure in that everyone was forced into employment and therefore not ‘dying of hunger like nowadays in democracy’ [...]” (2020: 103).



FIGURE 7: Islaz, 2010.



FIGURE 8: A big 'old' Rudari house

To understand better, it is necessary to mention some issues around the ‘categorisation’ of Rudari groups. Their origin is still debated among the few scholars who have dealt with them over time. The fascination that the question has in our eyes lies in the category of identity (as critically deconstructed) but, in reality, it appears to be a problem that worries scholars more than the Rudari themselves. Above all, in my opinion, by reducing the question to whether or not they are Roma, a fuzzy logic is lost in approaching the processes of ethnicisation and those of emic and ethical identity ‘collocation’ in a given social and historical context. It is precisely the question of borders that intrigues me most because ‘our’ Rudari with their history linked to itinerant crafts and their current biographies demonstrate not only the arbitrariness of the borders themselves, but also that of being a group that does not know what to do with them. In short, we could say, they crossed them and continue to cross them because they don’t need them (at least not these etic and spatial borders).

In the popular Gypsy/non-Gypsy dichotomy, non-Gypsies place them among the Gypsies, but they define themselves as non-Gypsies. ‘Our’ Rudari say they are not gypsies or they just say “they call us gypsies”, shrugging their shoulders and turning their heads a little, thus underlining that this word has a meaning that does not belong to them and does not concern them, if not in their relationship with the “Romanian Romanians”¹⁵.

In the popular Roma/non-Roma dichotomy, the Roma place them among the non-Roma and this time they agree, not considering themselves Roma.

In this sense, Valeriu explains to me¹⁶ that the *romi* call them *caștali* (i.e. ‘wood workers’ in a derogatory sense), and that the “Romanians Romanians” call them *țigani*: “Even the ‘Romanians Romanians’ work as drivers for the *romi*, so” – says Valeriu – “there are beautiful Romanians who speak *țiganește* [romanes] and then they call us ‘*țigani*’, even if we don’t speak the *țiganește* language”.

This situation has greatly intrigued the intellectual culture, and there is no doubt that scholars speak of it when they speak of gypsies, but then with many ‘distinctions’: *țigani* but always a little ‘special’, ‘others’, ‘different’ (Bengelstorf 2009; Block 1936; Chelcea 1944a; Calotă 1974, 1995; Guță 2009; Stahl 1991). And it is certain that, incorporated among the Gypsies in popular cosmologies and having entered the Gypsy imagination, they find it hard to get out of it. Moreover, with the use for some years of the word ‘Roma’ in substitution for ‘Gypsies’ (almost always inflated by discriminatory meanings in the various European languages), they are struggling to get out of their identification as ‘Roma’ in disciplinary studies¹⁷: although, among the scholars, there is also the theory that they are Romanians (Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1922, Cherata 2015) or a separate group of unknown origin (Chelcea 1943, 1944b), most researchers essentially believe that they are Roma (see Sorescu-Marinković 2018).

What is certain is that it is a set of networks of people with blurred borders that historically occupy a region also with blurred borders. Three things are certain: 1) they speak Romanian as their first language, a Romanian that linguists define as archaic and which they trace back to dialects spoken in south western Transylvania in the 15th-16th century (Calotă 1974, 1995); 2) they are traditionally wood workers, and their techniques have been studied in detail in the past by Martin Block (Block 1991 [1923]) and nowadays as a singular contribution to Romanian intangible cultural heritage (Sorescu-Marinković 2018); 3) they traditionally lived in local groups made up of a few dozen families and located near peasant villages and, at the same time, near woods and forests, in *bordeie*, that is huts or underground houses¹⁸.

Their narrative of their own group identity underlines an extreme distance from the Roma: in a contrastive way, they claim to speak Romanian, to be or have been wood workers and that during communism they worked in the CAPs, and that they have their own customs and traditions, different from the Roma. Similarly, various of the nineteenth and twentieth century sources emphasise the fact that they are considered honest and good people, not antisocial like the Roma; in short, they are considered ‘strange gypsies’ with whom one usually gets along, even if there may be disputes about the

¹⁵ If they use the term ‘gypsy’, it is especially young people who do so and it is to make fun of someone among themselves by calling him so, in order to emphasise an aspect that has to do with the external stereotype of a way of doing or a physical appearance attributed to gypsies.

¹⁶ Sibiu Mare, Romania, October 2010.

¹⁷ For questions concerning the adoption of the ‘official’ Roma terminology, please refer to Tosi Cambini and Beluschi Fabeni 2017, with related bibliographic references.

¹⁸ Although *bordei* is the name given to the underground house, the term is commonly used in many regions of Romania also to indicate very poor houses, such as the hut (*colibă*). For the underground dwelling in the eastern Danube region see Stahl 1972.

rights of way in the village and the exploitation of the woods¹⁹. With the Rudari, who could and can cover many types of work related to wood (from lumberjacks to charcoal burners to craftsmen with a thousand tools for the house or for agricultural work), we have the example of integration in a geographical area characterised by the presence of vast forests, which historically favoured the development of a real ‘wood culture’, in which everything, the houses of the poor, the palaces of the rich and the churches, could be wooden constructions, and in which there is a rich cosmology related to the tree (Bouras 2018).

The Rudari, therefore, in the last five centuries have spread around the Balkans in search of wood to work and woods from which to obtain it. And sometimes practicing other ‘gypsy’ jobs, especially that of animal exhibitors. Often occupying the same economic niche as the Roma, they have often had similar destinies, including deportations.

Considering the endogamy of which all the authors speak, but of which we still have few quantitative data²⁰, they constitute the typical case, also usual in other Eurasian contexts, in which the boundary between ‘occupational group’ and ‘ethnic group’ disappears (Piasere 1995; Maruschiakova and Popov 2013, Constantin 2016). The fact is that the Rudari we are talking about here underline precisely this type of cohesion, deriving their name from the Romanian *rudă*, ‘relative’, and therefore thinking of themselves as a group of relatives, or as local groups of relatives, not as an ethnic or cultural group or the like. Therefore, despite the dissolubility of the ethnic categories endogamy appears to be key in the social organisation of the Rudari.

With the Roma, on the other hand, they continue to share some interests and destinies even today. Since the policy of ethnic recognition in the Balkans has been over-valued and considered a fundamental tool of redemption, there has been an alliance of Rudari with the Roma, who gather in the same political parties (Şerban 2007; Tosi Cambini *forthcoming* 2021), or who jointly present their own claims. For the Rudari, therefore, sometimes the possibility arises of fluctuating between different categorisations: certainly considered *țigani* in Romania, in their own land they can choose whether to weave a conjunctural alliance with the Roma or not; while in foreign emigration countries, depending on the migratory ‘channels’ which they manage to enter, they can instead declare themselves ‘only’ Romanians. Although the latter are, in any case, the subject of discriminatory discourses and practices, there is no doubt that the possibility of not being associated with the Roma opens up greater opportunities for them to settle and work²¹.

This position ‘between the borders’ is also reflected in the spatial position occupied in the villages, between the ‘Romanian Romanians’ and the ‘Rromi’, but with the latter undoubtedly united by an unequal treatment (neither at the level of civil society nor at the institutional level) by the Romanians (even racist treatment) and by a housing situation which – with the cessation of itinerant crafts and the beginning of sedentarisation – placed their homes in an unequal comparison with the homes of the Romanian peasants.

Now, with remittances – which in the history of migration, it is known, have always played an important role not only for people but also for the development of their countries of origin – the houses of many Rudari have gradually taken on forms of construction that have increasingly begun to have characteristics defined by (all) the inhabitants as ‘modern’, considered in that context not only as better than the previous Rudari houses, but also than Romanians’ peasant houses. As in cases of other groups with which, as we said above, they share a treatment of marginalisation by the majority population, even for the Rudari their homes are considered a sign of ‘civilisation’ (see Tesăr 2016, Toma, Tesăr and Fosztó 2017). Ionica says: “we are modernised, we have cars, and we have beautiful houses”.

¹⁹ This is not the only case in Europe where wood workers are considered ‘gypsies’, although there is no social friction with them: that of the *agotes* of the Basque Country in modern times, economically useful and integrated even if considered unclean, known as *cascarots* in the French part, is another example (Antolini 1989). Thanks to Leonardo Piasere for sharing with me this information.

²⁰ See Tosi Cambini *forthcoming* 2021.

²¹ Similarly, Slavkova reports the same thing about the Rudari of Bulgarian nationality, who in Spain and Greece claim to be Bulgarian and have nothing to do with the “Romanian Gypsies, whom the Rudari perceive as beggars and nomads, and with whom they do not want to deal” (2017: 62). Another case, rare at the moment in the literature, is that reported by Teodorescu in Uppsala (Sweden) where the Rudari from the province of Vâlcea in Romania practice alms-giving.

This ‘modernisation’ takes shape, materialises and becomes visible in their country of origin both for other Rudari and for ‘Romanian Romanians’. Compared with the latter, this has made it possible to open a continuous process of socio-spatial ‘renegotiation’, with multiple nuances and discrepancies, which – in particular with respect to the theme we are discussing – can be read in the configuration of the new portion of the village parcelled out by the Municipality, where new houses have been built by both Rudari and ‘Romanian Romanians’ (Fig. 8 and 9).



FIGURE 9: Panorama of the new part of Sibiu Mare

With respect to the internal equilibrium of ‘our’ Rudari, mutual views and positioning emerge among the ‘localised groups’ based on acquired lifestyles and assets.

Speaking one evening in the garden of his house in Romania, with Mihai, uncle Valeriu and his neighbour Stefan, the latter asserts that “the Rudari of Sibiu Mare are the ones who are better off”, “you see” – he continues, turning to me – “we have more beautiful houses, cars... this is because we started to emigrate earlier, we went all over Europe, to Italy, Germany, France, England”. Then he looks at Mihai, remembering that he is from Vadrea and tells him: “I’m sorry, eh, but that’s it, don’t you think?”. Mihai initially hesitant, replies “Yes, but here you have the *țigani* [*pletoși, călderări*], eh, that also counted, you can’t say that it didn’t”. Stefan can only confirm. So I ask him: “But in your opinion, Stefan, is it also because Communism took place here, the Rudari from here, from Sibiu Mare, worked more in the CAPs than the others in Vadrea, Sibust...?” “Well, that can be so”, he replies, but it does not seem to be a topic that convinces him, as he shows little interest in it.

Stefan returns to migration and the improvement of the material conditions that it has made possible: “Have you seen how they are doing in Badra?” Along the same lines are the telephone messages that Constantine, while visiting his wife’s parents in Badra, sends to his cousin Dana, when he is in Vadrea.

The competition that emerges between people from different places is rarely made explicit between them, i.e. intergroup (Stefan forgets for a moment that Mihai is from Vadrea), while it is more likely that it is intra-group, as in the case of the aforementioned cousins. On both occasions, the game of competition also passes through the search for a common understanding, in the tones of irony, as in messages such as: “Help... there are mice here! I can’t wait to go home [to Sibiu Mare], believe me”.

To interpret it adequately, this competition must be correlated with the kinship structure of these groups, among whom there is a marriage alliance, which the reconstruction of the genealogy made by me can document as existing already for at least a century. They are spatially localised groups, whose territorial location is the result of the intertwining of internal and external factors: of the residence model of the new couple based on viri-patrilocality; of the circulation, within parental networks, of information on work-economic opportunities (element of continuity in the social organisation of the Rudari who we know, from the times when they went to *baltă*²² up to the new emigration contexts) and from the

²² Marshy area in the woods, where they lived part of the year when they were still working as *lingurari*.

historical-political dynamics (the very complicated ones of *Cadrilater*²³ – in which they lived –, those subsequent to the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the communist regime, and those related to the sedentarisation policies).

So these groups correspond to genealogical ‘clusters’ placed spatially, among whom there is, it was said, a marriage alliance, possible thanks also to the absence of differences in power levels and therefore of a formal political hierarchy between these groups, as well as between families.

“In this anti-hierarchical society, internally fragmented but at the same time interrelated and densely intricate” (ni Shuinéar 2005: 343), in our case, every adult person, both man and woman, can say ‘something good’ about their family or network of families, which brings with it, in turn, an affirmation of (temporary) superiority.



FIGURE 10: Road in the new part of Sibiu Mare, 2015

²³ An important part of these families’ micro-history can in fact be found in the macro-history of the dispute between Romania and Bulgaria in Southern Dobruja and in particular in the events following the Treaty of Craiova signed on 7 September 1940.



FIGURE 11: Road with Rudari houses in Vadrea, 2015

Now, in ‘that something good’, there are references to multiple areas of life, for example, the behaviour of one’s children, but above all – returning to migration – the skill demonstrated in achieving the objectives of economic improvement that have allowed the purchase of vehicles, the investment of remittances in activities such as the opening of a shop or the purchase of a van to begin the local transport of goods or the international transport of goods and people, and – above all – the building of a new home: “And what did we leave for, then!”, exclaims Dana.

What in the literature is defined as migratory ‘success’ is therefore replayed in the context of origin both internally and externally, making the social and spatial arrangements fluctuate towards new balances, where the house seems to be the cornerstone.

How to build a house 1: a family matter (production and reproduction of relationships)

We will now tell how was built, from August 2015 to the last summer, the home of Mihai and Dana, who ‘eloped’²⁴ together in 2009 while they were in Florence.

The union between these third-degree cousins, one from Vadrea, the other from Sibiu Mare, with three children, Dorina eight years old, Marco, born in 2014 and Rachele almost one year old, was eventually accepted by the respective families. This union followed the practice (in its many variants) of this wide Rudari network: the frequently occurring elopement and the following ‘pardon’ (in one of the possibilities), the alliance between groups of families within well-defined territorial spaces, or – in other words – the tendency to maintain the unity of genealogical space through endogamous marriages between relatively distanced kin.

²⁴ Elopement, as a ‘form’ of marriage, is widespread among the Rudari.

There is, however, an element that slowly emerges in the story of the couple, after the birth of the children, of the new family. It is the tendency to not respect virilocality, which is completely set aside with the decision to build their home in the village of the bride.

Let's see the temporal succession, in 2015, of the phases that led to the beginning of the construction works and how the man's family compensated for this will, from a symbolic-cultural point of view, in order to avoid a fracture between the families involved and allow the new nucleus to build a house: the last act which materially sanctions the completeness of adulthood and the of the family.

The land was finally bought from a person acquainted with the town, who was also a Rudaro. It is located in the new part of Sibiu Mare, the fourth Rudari 'expansion' in the territory of the town, this time – as we said – space for new homes also for Romanians. It is located near the house under construction belonging to Dana's brother, her cousins' house – at the time, almost finished – and that of a couple of uncles.

Already in the spaces and times of migration to Italy, since the couple went to live together and, therefore, with the consequent collective recognition of their union, Mihai is – we could say – incorporated into his wife's family, an aspect that was the source of strong disagreements that have lasted for years between the latter and her mother-in-law, and that only in the last two years seem to have subsided a little. In fact, with the passage of time and especially the birth of the grandchildren, the mother-in-law gradually gave in, also after having talked repeatedly with Dana's mother.

An important role for the family approval for the construction of the house, in 2015, was also played by Liviu, Mihai's elder brother, who also emigrated to Florence with his family and who also ended up accepting Dana's choice of country:

Sabrina What did Liviu say to Mihai?

Dana He said he's sorry they're not close, but if we have made up our minds, that's fine with him.

This passage represents the final approval by Mihai's family, certainly not with enthusiasm, which in fact made it possible to complete the purchase of the land and for the decision to start work on the house. The works will be done in the way they always are, that is, as we will see shortly, through the activation of the close parental network of both spouses.

The plot measures 500 square metres and 2,000 Euros have been paid for it. The deed will be registered with the Municipality in a subsequent period in order not to spend on bureaucracy the resources needed for its implementation.

While Dana, in July 2015, tells me all this, we are still in Vadrea, in the home of Mihai's parents. Indeed, to compensate for the imbalance due to the breach of the principle of virilocality, the following steps have been undertaken in Vadrea: the making of "documents" of the union of Mihai and Dana (what externally would be perceived as the wedding in the municipality), the following *grătar* at home with kin and the closest 'brothers and sisters in Christ' (the *masă*, the table, is placed), and the (Pentecostal) baptism of little Marco on the evening of the following day.

"Sabri" – tells me Dana – "we left in a rush, with not even the time to prepare our luggage: Mihai's mother with his [older] brother arrived in Sibiu Mare and we had to leave immediately... I have nothing to wear to go to the municipality. Mihai's mother wants me to buy a dress, but I have no money, and at home I have plenty of clothes!"

Once order is re-established through the different above-mentioned passages, one can start to speak about how the home should look: which shape (not the purely external one, it is indeed a 'vision of the home'), how many floors, how many bedrooms.

In this sense, Mihai – like the other men who I have had the opportunity to hear on the subject – indulge the woman's wishes especially with respect to the location of the kitchen and other features (for example the built-in wardrobes in the bedroom), often absent or transformed compared to the traditional Rudari houses. Although this aspect is connected to the close relationship between the domestic space and the activities/skills related to gender, it has in itself novelties coming from the work activities of women in Italian homes, which men have less to do with. The homes of Italians, in fact, represent one of the main models of inspiration in imagining the interiors and from which objects and furniture often come. With an original mix between this model, a little bit of *kitsch* and the *rudari domesticité*, the walls are coloured, the windows enriched with chiffon curtains of various colours, the kitchen is equipped with all

the household appliances, but then often the bed is added to it, a living room is set up with sofas, knick-knacks and decorative objects, where initially we tend not to let the children go and use only for guests, but then it is invaded by the TV, bags and anything else that comes from Italy, all while waiting to be placed elsewhere (in the house itself or, more often, in that of relatives).



FIGURE 12: Interior of a new house, bedroom, wardrobe with clothes that have come from Italy.



FIGURE 13: Interior of a new house, to be completed, with objects and household appliances that have come from Italy-

In Vadrea, using the wifi network of a shop, Mihai and I connect with my computer (their tablet, bought in Italy, in the hurry of the departure, was forgotten in Sibiu Mare) and we browse a Romanian site where they sell projects to build houses. Obviously, it is not Mihai's intention to buy one, but only to take inspiration from the pictures of the houses and the measurements of the areas indicated, also to get an idea of how much building material is needed and how much it may cost.

We see one house in particular, with one floor, which has the entrance as Dana would like it – so Mihai tells me – and also the kitchen and living room spaces. Even the bedrooms, three in number, correspond to their wishes, while the bathrooms – which in the image are two – will be reduced to one, which to them is obvious. Happy with the choice, we save the web page and, a little later, in the evening, Mihai shows it to his parents, who like it.



FIGURE 14: Interior of a new house: living room with various objects and furniture from Italy, some of which destined for relatives' houses.



FIGURE 15: Interior of an old house modernised thanks to the first remittances.



FIGURE 16: Traditional stove in the new house. The emigrant woman's mother is seated beside it on a low stool, a traditionally used type of seat.

Now we can leave and return to Sibiu Mare: Dana's mother-in-law, who had insisted on coming too, will not be able to do so because her eldest daughter, in Florence, has found her a job for two months, so in a few days' time she will have to join her²⁵.

It is possible to retrace the stages of those busy days in July 2015 spent in Vadrea:

Wednesday 22: recognition of paternity, by Mihai, of the two children (who will now bear their father's surname and no longer that of their mother), in a notary's office for the public administration, in the city near Vadrea, Petești.

Saturday 25, morning: marriage 'documents' in the Municipality to which the town of Vadrea belongs. From here on, Dana will also bear Mihai's surname, which completely replaces her own.

Saturday 25, evening: the *grătar* is held.

Sunday 26, evening: baptism of Mihai's son, Marco and of his little cousin, son of his elder brother, Liviu. To celebrate the baptism, the arrival of Mihai's mother's brother from England was expected. The ceremony is held during the *adunare* (the Pentecostal meeting), next to the home of Mihai's parents, since it was they, about fifteen years earlier, who gave the land for the construction of the 'church'.

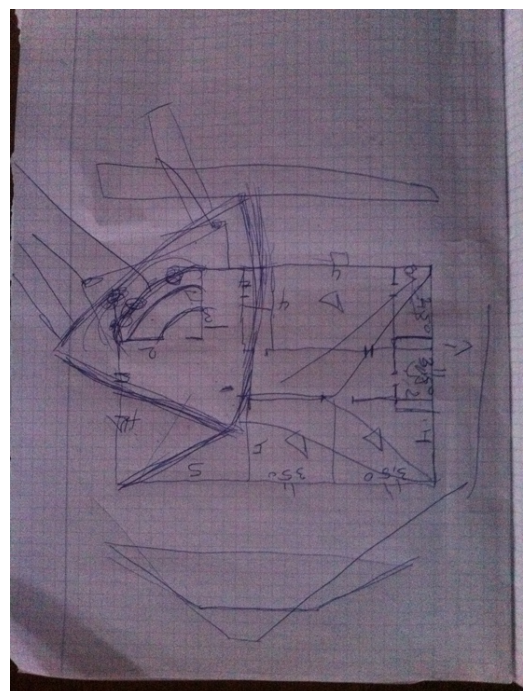
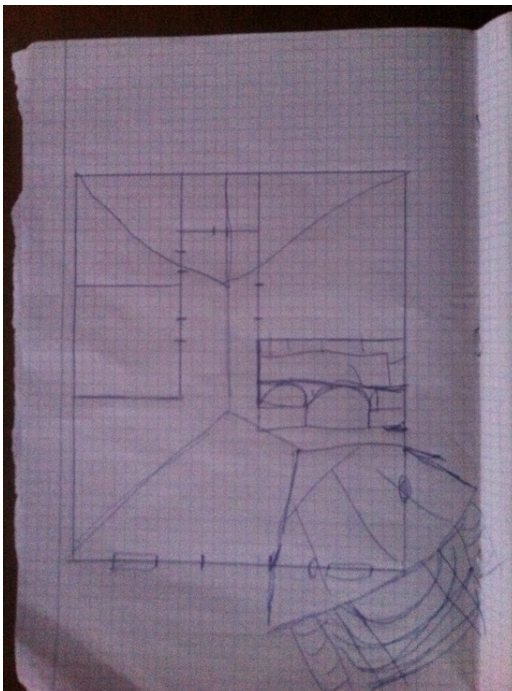
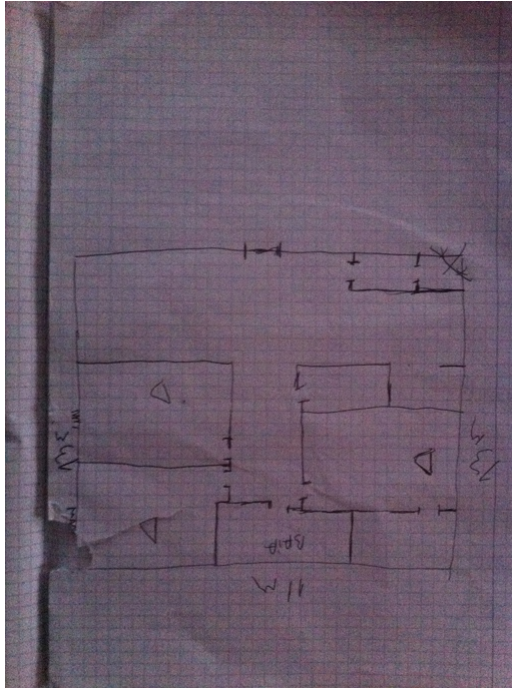
On Monday 27 we are therefore ready to return to Sibiu Mare and after a few days, on August 3, construction of the house begins.

²⁵ Leaving by bus, which in such a short space of time, costs much less than the plane, does not require a reservation and, giving the possibility of making any changes in departure dates, allows for much more luggage to be carried.

How to build a house 2: a family building site

In the week between the return and the start of the actual work, Mihai draws the floor plan of the house in a notebook, and discusses it with a *Rudari* peer of his age from Sibiu Mare who works as a bricklayer and is involved in the early stages of the work.

In the evening, this guy joins us at Dana's family home. The men talk about measurements, the material needed, how to spend as little as possible; we women serve them but we also listen, we look after the children and then, when the conversation lightens, we too are involved. Unlike the others, I remain silent and listen, so every now and then they make fun of me, especially Mihai and uncle Valeriu, who has seen me go to their house for years: "Don't you have anything to say? Are you dumb?". But everyone is happy with my progress in the language and it is an aspect that is greatly appreciated.



FIGURES 17- 20: Plans of the house designed by Mihai (the last one with some modifications made by bricklayer)

The picture just outlined is an example of how the whole process of building the house is incorporated into the genealogical space from the beginning, and also inherent in the filiation, as it is linked to the fact of the formation of the new family nucleus, a segment that detaches from the parents' home, but remains close to it (although in this exceptional, but not unique case, the close housing proximity is recreated in the wife's parental network).

The close scanning of the times makes it clear that, when the conditions are met for the fulfilment of something that is expected to happen in any case (whether it is in the near future – for example, a departure – or in a less definable time), you do it immediately. Especially when this fulfilment is linked to economic resources: as they exist, they must be used immediately.

Finally, the technical aspects of the construction of the house are also dealt with in the same context of family relationships: the only person who is not in the parental network, the bricklayer from Sibiu Mare, however is a Rudar and has been known for many years, and is invited home, in the evening, when the family reunites.

The bureaucratic aspects – the registration of the joint project and the planning permission – can wait (they are expensive and take away resources that must be used for the purchase of building materials), but will still be done before departure for Italy.

LISTA DE MATERIALE		
20 ml	TRACTORU	
18 ml	PIATRA	
13 ml	MOULU DEFZHA	
14 ml	CHERBETA	
18 ml	FIERU	70 x 12 x 10
72 ml	CIMENT	40 SACI
13 ml	BELASTRO	
1 ml	ACRU	30 x 12 x 10
50 lei	BETONERA	
50 lei	TIGARI	
72 lei	CIMENTU	40 SACI
60 lei	BENZINA	

FIGURE 21: List of materials needed and related costs to start the work

Mihai, Valeriu, the son of the latter, Iuli, and Dana's younger brother clean the land together with the mason, and on August 2 everything is ready. The food for the week is purchased, and in the morning of the following day the men arrive from Vadrea: Mihai's father and the brothers (from the oldest to the youngest teenager). As soon as they arrive, they start to work. The women, after serving coffee and breakfast (bread, cheese, bacon, etc.), rearrange the house and start cooking.

There is a bit of excitement, the grandmother and Dana don't get along very well; I give a hand above all by looking after the children: this time, in fact, it is not a question of cooking for the grandmother or for the cousin Nicolae – as happened in March and April – but for *the men who were working*. And the men have strong roles: they are the father-in-law, the husband, the husband's

brothers... And even the men of the house, like Valeriu and Costantin, demand greater respect in that situation.

I must, therefore, adapt the relations to the new context: Mihai is no longer Mihai, but a man to whom things must be asked at the right moment, or not asked at all; Ioan, the teenage brother of Dana, whom I knew already as a child, is not the boy I reproach when he is in Italy or with whom I make jokes about his 'girlfriends', but a young man to whom food must be served when he is back from work.

Even among women there are hierarchies, and I come last, since I cannot prepare food as men like (one must be sure that the food is made in the proper way, and as they expect), nor do I have a husband to serve²⁶.

This means that in this specific situation I do things that are very similar to those that teenagers would do, if they were at home: I prepare the table, cut bread, I quickly buy it in the shop if it finishes (and this is bad), I serve water and beer, clean the table, help to wash the dishes. Sometimes, if needed, I bring the dishes: a task which I do increasingly frequently when *mamaia* (the grandmother) notes that I can actually do it (even when they are boiling and exceedingly full of *ciorbă*, soup). To measure on myself the respect and the changes of attitude that this situation involved has been fundamental to understanding the internal mechanisms.

While men eat, the women stay in the kitchen or at the side of the table, listen the conversations of the men (and later on, with great precision and subtle rhetoric, circulate, making 'assessments' and preparing 'strategies' if need be, or simply preparing for something that will happen), and staying ready to immediately bring them what they ask for (more food, something else to drink ...).

My presence is "reshaped" even by men, particularly by those who know me less (even if I have been with them as a guest twice, staying for several days each time) and the use of humour. For instance, Mihai's father, when Dana is asking me to bring some soup also for little Marco (and I do it wrongly twice, since I bring it with too much fat) says, laughing: "Our women are *badanti*²⁷ in your country and you do it with us".

When the lunch comes close to the end, the women become less nervous: everything has gone well, the men (and the father-in-law in the first place) are satisfied, and they drink coffee in the shadow in the *grădină*, some of them together with a cigarette.

We can eat too. Dana and the grandmother are always worried that I do not eat enough. *Mamaia* sometimes invites Dana's father-in-law to rest for a while, but he regularly and politely refuses, and goes back to work with the others.

The solidarity between relatives, which in living nearby also involves production and reproduction, here remodelled according to the needs of the case, is the basis on which the construction of the house can take place. All the men in the parental network, who are present in Romania and who are not already working elsewhere, participate. The tenacity of parental ties and their persistence even on a symbolic level make the construction of the house a social and cultural fact in which the kinship (ascending and descending, by consanguinity and affinity) is 'deposited'.

Also for Mihai and Dana's house, once the foundations, the external walls and the roof have been made, the work stops as happens in all the many cases we know. And it is not certain that it will be resumed in August of the following year: the time of construction of the house follows the state of the resources that families are able to put away, and these – in turn – are linked to the vicissitudes in the immigration country²⁸.

Mihai and Dana's home remains essentially in the same state for three consecutive years. Finally we start to put in the windows and the front door, then the internal doors. At this point, the house – four years have now passed – is ready to accommodate the first pieces of furniture and the first objects. Next year it is hoped that it can be plastered externally and painted internally, "So, Sabri, – Dana tells me with her eyes shining – when I go home, I won't go to my mother's anymore, I'll go to my house".

²⁶ Also with the presence of Dana and her husband's female cousin, who in the second week also contributed to the construction, the grandmother, who saw me slightly worried when having to serve lunch, tells me "let it go, they (the two women who are her grandchildren, Dana and Maricla) will serve their men".

²⁷ This precise word was used when speaking in Romanian.

²⁸ Teodorescu also notes that "the investments made by the Rudari are gradual and often interrupted by insufficient funds" (2020: 103).

Open conclusions

The text explores the interaction between home making – the social construction process of the domestic sphere – and house building – the actual building of a house, which is full of significance –, an exploration underscored by the dense ethnographic experience of the families and their living places, in Romania and Italy. Considering these multifaceted processes, the research and reflection proposed here are based on the micro dimension of the family unit, the meso dimension of the kinship and migratory networks and the macro dimension of (ethnic) social categories and the territory.

The territory, as we have seen, becomes not only a map where we can observe the exclusion/inclusion dynamics of the families considered, but also and above all a field in which people build and renegotiate their complex role in society as a whole. The diachronic dimension of this socio-spatial negotiation is provided by combining emic visions of oral memory with the changes over time identified by ethnographic research, including them both in the village's social geography.

The case study, as previously discussed, concerns a group of families belonging to a Romanian (and not only Romanian) minority that is considered in Romania as 'gypsy' by mainstream society, but not by the Roma and that in Italy 'disappears' ethnically speaking ('our' Rudari become simply migrant 'Romanians'). Thus it is possible to reveal the practical and circumstantial dimension of ethnic categorisations and how they acquire roles that are sometimes explicit, sometimes latent and other times insignificant in the actors' social practices. The endogamy dimension appears to be the only bond (deeply 'intimate' emic) that maintains this group's real boundaries, however fuzzy they may be.

Returning to Appadurai's perspective of the local dimension as the repertoire of the conditions of possibility discussed in the introduction, it has been possible to show that home making and house building practices reveal the conditions of 'possibility' experienced by those people and represent at the same time an action aiming for the fulfilment of 'imaginable' and 'desirable' futures.

The ethnographic narration of scenarios and factual moments of family life has enabled me to outline the significations circulating among the actors present: the 'family' is thus de-essentialised, reconstructing the processes of production and reproduction that generate it and at the same time 'generate' the house.

There remains the exploration of what we have defined as 'shifts in meaning' linked to the process of homing between the first generation that migrated and their sons and daughters who grew up (or were even born) in Italy. How does their idea of 'feeling they are at home' change? And in which house and where?



FIGURE 22: House in adobe with the roof redone in metal sheets before the migration



FIGURE 23: Foundations in the new part of the village defined 'case vechi'



FIGURE 24: Foundations in the new part of the village



FIGURE 25: Foundations in the new part



FIGURE 26: 'Old' farmhouse, purchased from a Rudari family many years earlier (Vadrea)



FIGURE 27: Expansion of the 'old' farmhouse due to the growing number of family members before the migration.



FIGURE 28: Expansion of the 'old farmhouse using the first remittances



FIGURES 29-30: House under construction



FIGURE 31: House to be completed, already inhabited (summer)



FIGURE 32: New house, with only the kitchen inhabited by an elderly family member who has remained in Romania (winter)



FIGURE 33: Two storey house belonging to a family which immigrated into Italy many years ago and had tried unsuccessfully to go back and live in Romania. The addition of bars and grates to the ground floor windows and doors can be seen, as a deterrent to thieves



FIGURES 34-35: House under construction with the first and most important building phase underway



FIGURE 36: House under construction with the first and most important building phase underway



FIGURE 37: Rudăreasele and me



FIGURE 38: Rudăreasele and me

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