



# Continuing Politics by Other Means: Giving in Cold War Europe

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HCM 6 (x): 105–133

DOI: 10.18352/hcm.541

## Abstract

This article unearths the little-known history of charitable giving in Cold War Europe. The first case explores supply conduits forged in the German Romanian community of West Germany and Romania. Starting in the late 1960s, Western community members became involved in supporting those left behind in Romania through care packages and tourist visits. As the political leadership under Nicolae Ceaușescu adopted drastic austerity measures in the early 1980s, the second case shows how East German volunteer groups organized aid to Romania from within the socialist bloc. The discussion concludes that the provisioning relationships uncovered in both examples integrated the world of materials into daily aspirations of ‘governing precarious lives’ to a new repertoire for public action that did not remain external to politics but rather reformulated what was at stake in politics through immediate, direct acts of assistance.

**Keywords:** assistance, ethics, informal economy, socialist Romania

## Introduction<sup>†</sup>

Dear Minister for Foreign Affairs!

I write to you because we have relatives in Romania and we would like to send them packages. Unfortunately, this is very difficult. Each time we do so, our relatives in Romania are required to pay high customs

fees. However, we would like these packages to be considered as gifts. Furthermore, we are only allowed to send twenty-five kilograms to one address per year. It is also not permitted to send canned goods. Especially meat preserves would make a difference. We have seen it for ourselves: people in Romania have a hard time procuring goods. Of course, in our vacation spot, the consumer stores were well-provisioned – for marketing reasons. But what happens after the end of the tourist season? During our vacation, we witnessed how people waited in line even for shampoo and soap, and afterwards they wound up getting nothing because those items were sold out. Recently, food stamps were introduced. We would like to ask you to negotiate with the Romanian side an alleviation of the current package regulations. I would be most appreciative if you could solve this problem for us and our relatives, and for all Romanians.<sup>2</sup>

During the Cold War, waves of people and material goods were swept across Europe. Europeans traveled by the hundreds of thousands from the capitalist West to the socialist East carrying consumer goods, clothes, foodstuffs and other items essential – or desirable – to daily life on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Meanwhile, millions of parcels and packages filled with similar assortments of quotidian products often scarce in socialist countries reached the East via postal services. As this letter to the West German Ministry of Foreign Affairs attests, assisting family and friends in socialist Romania was an arduous, costly and at times outright frustrating endeavor that required donors to skillfully navigate postal arrangements and customs policies. Such challenges notwithstanding, Europeans in both East and West passionately enacted what David Schneider has termed ‘diffuse, enduring solidarity’ with family, friends and distant others.<sup>3</sup> To facilitate the movement of materials and people, an enormous amount of institutional structure was in constant play in Europe from the late 1960s onward.<sup>4</sup> In petitions and complaints, citizens routinely called upon state institutions to promote their mission of helping in Romania. Indeed, avenues for the delivery of gifts and donations grew over time, driving the rise of an economy of informal assistance between Eastern and Western Europe. In the late 1960s, the first transmission lines to Romania emerged in Western Europe, notably in West Germany (FRG), Austria and Switzerland. Citizens from the more affluent socialist states such as East Germany (GDR) and Hungary joined these transnational efforts in a second wave in the 1980s.

While this sweeping human and material tide may seem a natural extension of smuggling, tourism, or a somewhat more specialized form of shopping or trade tourism, I suggest that none of these familiar categories adequately represent the forms of exchange I shall discuss in this article.<sup>5</sup> Rather, this era saw the emergence of an economy of everyday assistance across long distances. I use the term ‘giving’ to shed light on how material exchange and moral aspirations were imbricated in this transnational solidarity practice.

Delving into this little-known history raises the question of the degree to which such material acts of solidarity with individuals behind the Iron Curtain were overtly ‘political’. What motivated ordinary people to engage in such forms of assistance? How did socialist states police acts of assistance from abroad? In addressing these questions, the first aim of this article is to broaden common understandings of what constituted the realm of politics in the period. For this purpose, I show how the enactment of solidarity across borders was indeed bound up with the prevailing geopolitical realities of the 1970s and 1980s. At the same time, I argue that giving allowed ordinary Europeans to act upon political grievances in seemingly apolitical ways, or to put it differently, to continue politics by other means.<sup>6</sup>

This period offers insights into the ways social practices unaffiliated with either international rights campaigns or the institutionalized framework of NGOs created new possibilities for ordinary people to live an ethical life by ‘making a difference’ or ‘doing something’, as the common language of political activism proclaimed. Since the 1960s the established catalogue of social justice activism in the West (and to a considerably lesser degree in Eastern Europe) included acts of public disobedience, awareness raising campaigns, consumer boycotts, intellectual debates and protests, to name only the most obvious examples.<sup>7</sup> But while these repertoires often employed discursive and symbolic strategies, I point to material exchange as an equally significant site for the negotiation of the political through new forms of assistance, care and help between ordinary people. Sharing consumer goods and provisioning others in need with consumer goods, foodstuffs and medicine constituted the core domain of giving.

Mediated through the consumer cultures of the 1970s and 1980s, giving was immediate and practical. Its morally-loaded claims to solidarity espoused a radical departure from the reciprocal and transactional

exchanges commonly studied in socialism. Accordingly, the ‘provisioning relationships’ (Ulf Hannerz) discussed in this paper integrated the world of materials into daily aspirations of ‘governing precarious lives ... faced with situations of inequality, contexts of violence and experiences of suffering’.<sup>8</sup> Giving joined ethical aspirations for human solidarity to a new repertoire for public action that did not remain external to politics but rather reformulated what was at stake in politics, to paraphrase Didier Fassin.<sup>9</sup> The second aim of this paper, then, is to explore the potential for the material world to function as an extension of the political realm by generating new sets of ethics in human encounters.

I present here two brief case studies that highlight how sharing goods across the Iron Curtain allowed for the enactment of human solidarity and the formation of a daily ethics of giving. The first example explores supply conduits forged in the German Romanian community of West Germany and Romania. Starting in the late 1960s, Western community members became increasingly involved in supporting those left behind through care packages and tourist visits. A few years later, such private provisioning turned into a new method to organize assistance from abroad for community members in Romania who became victims of natural disasters.

The second example witnesses these aid networks moving into the socialist bloc. As the political leadership under Nicolae Ceaușescu adopted drastic austerity measures in the early 1980s, citizens from across Eastern Europe set out to organize aid to Romanian acquaintances, friends and anonymous recipients. I focus here specifically on informal East German aid efforts to Romania in the mid-to-late 1980s. Both examples scrutinize the close nexus between materiality and practice by borrowing methodologically from a recent literature on consumption, praxiography and Actor-Network Theory.<sup>10</sup>

## **‘Giving’ in the Political Realm**

Numerous scholars of socialist Eastern Europe have theorized the political scope of everyday practices. For the sake of this discussion, my particular interest lies in three approaches that represent major theoretical lines of thinking. One body of scholarship points to the system-stabilizing and system-destabilizing effects of daily practice in a

dichotomous state-society struggle for political legitimacy;<sup>11</sup> a second set frames practice as duplicitous behaviour oscillating between opposition to and tacit support of the social order;<sup>12</sup> and a third one conceptualizes daily practice as a type of ‘escape’ from the social engineering under state socialism and as a site of human agency.<sup>13</sup> While embedded in the social structures explored in such works, giving remained elusive to the surveillance apparatus of socialist states. Giving did not manifestly subvert the social order, but socialist states did not encourage citizens to engage in such activities, either. Instead, sharing foodstuffs and scarce consumer goods across state borders remained surprisingly un-politicized. Instead of being at the centre of officials’ attention – as were most social activities that involved the movement of people and goods across state lines, such as tourism, small border trade and smuggling – the expansive economy of giving did not emerge as a *specific* target of state control.

This assertion requires some explanation, for secret police agencies such as the East German *Staatssicherheit* or the Romanian *Securitate*, customs officers and border guards at state lines aimed to monitor human mobility as tightly as possible, pre-emptively eliminating any conceivable threats to the social order. Katherine Verdery writes: ‘[The Romanian secret police] were convinced that secrets existed among the citizenry, secrets that would unmask a hidden enemy, a saboteur, a spy, a counterrevolutionary, a danger to the state or Party. Such secrets were potentially everywhere, both ‘out there’ in the world and ‘in here’ in the Party apparatus. Uncovering them was the *Securitate*’s *raison d’être* toward maintaining social order’.<sup>14</sup>

How can we understand the deliberate bureaucratic disregard for the movement of donors and volunteers who regularly visited Romania on supply trips? For one, the very idea that socialist societies were in ‘need’ and required outside assistance, particularly in such seemingly banal and small-scale provisioning activities, escaped official thinking.<sup>15</sup> Second, since the 1970s, socialist states began to tacitly accept the growing import of foreign consumer goods and currency through small border shopping or trader tourism as a means of rebalancing trade deficits with the West.<sup>16</sup>

In this messy normative space state officials regularly mistook individuals engaged in provisioning activities for trader (or genuine leisure) tourists. To be sure, this confusion was not disadvantageous to border

officers, who frequently extracted bribes from all incoming visitors. At the same time, by swimming with the tide of millions of tourists, donors and volunteers slipped through the cracks of the system with remarkably little friction. Paradoxically, as it was both unthinkable and economically opportune to socialist states, the practice of giving did not emerge as a threat to the social order. Instead, it remained an un-politicized social activity until the end of state socialism. However, this erasure of politics masked any inherent ethical claims to human solidarity that might have motivated people to engage in cross-border assistance in the first place. I discuss the implications of this finding in the next section.

## **Socialist Exchanges in Material Culture and Consumption Studies**

Introducing ethics to the conversation on informal exchange in socialism highlights how the provisioning and sharing of consumer goods and other materials did more than merely communicate political ideas, maintain consumption practices, or shape cultural perceptions and identity formations of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, as existing works of material and consumer culture would suggest.<sup>17</sup> Crucially, such exchanges also generated ethical categories in daily human encounters and furnished structures of moral personhood.<sup>18</sup> This view derives insight from the scholarship of anthropologists such as Webb Keane who has suggested that ethical experience is an ‘irreducible component of the politics and pragmatics of ordinary life’.<sup>19</sup>

Existing material culture approaches and studies on consumption under socialism have remained largely mute on the role of ethics. Older studies have argued that chronic shortages in socialism forced people into the exchange of goods, favours and services otherwise scarce or unavailable.<sup>20</sup> Measured against a putative Western or capitalist standard, this view construes socialism as a fundamentally deficient economic system. Likewise, informal exchanges are characterized as essential survival strategies of everyday life. Complicating such economic determinism, other works have explored the production and reproduction of social life through exchange by emphasizing the role of social and symbolic capital. Studies of this provenance include Alena Ledeneva’s work on the economy of favours (*blat*) in Soviet Russia

and Daphne Berdahl's discussion of the forms of social differentiation that informal exchange perpetuated in the GDR.<sup>21</sup> Both authors have demonstrated the centrality of reciprocity as an organizing principle in informal exchanges. According to the idiom 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours', people developed complex strategies of procuring consumer goods and obtaining access to special services in the socialist period. Echoing Marcel Mauss' anthropology of the gift, Ledeneva and Berdahl argue that informal exchanges were part of a tacit social contract that mandated repayment of favours in timely manner.<sup>22</sup> In other words, no gift or favour was ever truly free. Quite the contrary, the unspoken expectation, or rather obligation, of reciprocation ensnared clients and patrons into complex structures of interdependency.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, a more recent literature has highlighted the highly adaptive entrepreneurial strategies that underlay various informal trade activities in socialism. In particular, Jerzy Kochanowski's comprehensive study of the secondary economy in socialist Poland delves into various trade practices ranging from shopping tourism to smuggling.<sup>24</sup> According to Kochanowski, these cross-border activities neither represented the mirror image of the formal economy nor emerged as a result of shortages alone. Instead, there existed symbiotic relationships between state and non-state domains that enabled the rise of independent 'market' practices throughout the socialist period. Kochanowski's work rethinks the often assumed (and indeed moralizing) attributes attached to secondary economies as 'black', 'corrupt', 'deviant' or 'shady' and stresses their functional role in economic life in the region. This focus on 'market' practices, however, comes with a price tag: it largely reaffirms established assumptions about exchanges in socialism as invariably transactional and, most importantly, profit-driven.

## **Toward a Theory of Post-Transactionalism**

I suggest that such theories ignore an altogether different possibility for conceptualizing socialist exchanges. Although giving overlapped with the wide-ranging system of provisioning relationships theorized in the existing literature, I argue that it diverged from exchanges based on favours or 'market' activities. Significantly, the underlying aspirations, social relations and forms of personal gratification in the economy of giving were of a different kind. Whereas earning profits represented the

motivating rationale of shopping and trader tourists as well as organized smuggler groups, donors who supplied beneficiaries with goods did not act to satisfy a profit motive. Rather, cultural exploration, self-development, acquittal of moral guilt and the maintenance of kin ties and friendships across long distance were the sorts of personal ‘benefits’ to be gained. Likewise, donors were not tied to the same obligations of generating and maintaining social capital through favours and the exchange of goods as local populations. Their spatial and social externality to the community life of recipients boasted a degree of material independence that allowed them to operate outside of the normative social framework in which they intervened. In this subversion of transactional logics, I suggest, lies an ethical structure that has remained largely neglected in the existing literature.

In the hope of initiating a new conversation on post-transactional forms of exchange in socialism (and beyond), this discussion explores people’s ethical aspirations to solidarity across borders on their own terms.<sup>25</sup> At the core of giving lay a compassionate engagement with the need(s) of recipients that invoked affects of generosity and sympathy with social injustice and human suffering under socialism. Liisa Malkki has termed this ethics of relating as the ‘need to help’.<sup>26</sup> Such affective structures – often intermingled with particularistic motivations such ethnic, internationalist, kin, national and sectarian allegiances – ran counter to monetary enumeration and linear reciprocity. Although the altruistic aspirations under study were complex, and at times not unproblematic, shedding light on the role of ethics in informal exchanges adds the crucial dimension of voluntarism to the study of secondary economies, and more broadly, to economic life in socialism.

I shall now illustrate this argument by turning to the provisioning relationships forged between Transylvanian Saxons and Banat Swabians in Romania and West Germany.

## **From West to East: Assistance in the German Communities of Romania**

In the post-war period, approximately 345,000 ethnic Germans, whom I shall henceforth refer to as Romanian Germans,<sup>27</sup> populated the territories of Banat and Transylvania, geographically located West and

Northwest of the Carpathian Mountains, in Romania.<sup>28</sup> While Romanian Germans, a majority of which were Transylvanian Saxons and Banat Swabians, enjoyed relative socio-economic autonomy in the pre- and interwar periods, their relationship with the post-war socialist state was fraught from the beginning.<sup>29</sup> Early post-war policies of collectivization, deportation, ethnic discrimination and expropriation frustrated the prospects for a prosperous life for the Romanian German community in socialist Romania.<sup>30</sup>

Despite efforts made by the government of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1947–1965) to reintegrate Saxons and Swabians into society, the latter collectively turned their gaze toward the West in the hope of finding the economic opportunities they had lost after World War II.<sup>31</sup> For those willing to emigrate, the FRG in particular emerged as the ‘external homeland’.<sup>32</sup> Both a romanticized image of West German *Kulturnation*, but also pragmatic factors, encouraged this orientation.<sup>33</sup> Notably, provisions in the West German Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) from 1949 and subsequent legislative amendments granted ethnic Germans from Eastern and Central Europe citizenship in the FRG.<sup>34</sup> Drawing on this legal framework, national refugee associations (*Landsmannschaften*) in the FRG engaged in extensive lobbying campaigns in Bonn to promote the possibility for Romanian Germans to immigrate into the West.<sup>35</sup> From 1975 onward, the Helsinki Accords provided these efforts with additional backing, through international provisions declaring family reunification a humanitarian matter.<sup>36</sup>

Despite favourable diplomatic relations with Romania in the 1960s and an expansive human rights regime in international affairs in the 1970s, however, official West German efforts to facilitate immigration remained limited.<sup>37</sup> Part of these constraints were a result of Bucharest’s insistence that Romanian Germans were citizens of Romania, and thus intervention on their behalf would constitute an illegitimate interference with Romanian sovereignty.<sup>38</sup>

Against this backdrop, the most viable mechanism to achieving family reunification in the FRG became a secret bilateral arrangement between Bonn and Bucharest. Under the codename of *Operation Kanal*, both governments agreed in 1968 to establish yearly quotas for German emigrants into the FRG. In exchange for millions of Deutsche Marks paid by the FRG annually, the agreement boosted the number of exit visas for Romanian Germans to an average of 12,000 per year.<sup>39</sup>

Although *Operation Kanak* stoked collective hopes for relocation, it only offered immediate possibilities for immigration to a fraction of applicants. For each successful visa appeal, multiple requests were denied or put on hold indefinitely. Additionally, the tens of thousands of Romanian German applicants faced the haphazard and frustrating hurdles of a slowly grinding state bureaucracy and middlemen who required extensive bribing. Complicating the matter further, Romanian law granted travel documents to first-degree family members exclusively, often dividing families along generational lines.

From 1968 to 1989, around 210,000 Romanian Germans successfully relocated to the FRG, but the contingent and piecemeal nature of this migration accord also highlighted the limits of Cold War diplomacy. The latter increasingly came to furnish a future-oriented realm of promises for a better life in the West that was irreconcilable with the realities for those Romanian Germans left behind in the old country. Moreover, the demonstration effect of the better life for those who obtained immigration papers to the West made the German community in Romania increasingly left behind, diminishing its social coherence. While Romanian German immigrants gained access to the consumer and labour markets in West Germany, those left behind faced declining prospects for economic self-realization and a slipping standard of living back at home.<sup>40</sup>

Against this backdrop, sharing consumer goods allowed newly emigrated Romanian Germans in the FRG to help mitigate some of the material and mental pressures on home communities. Consumer goods, clothes, foodstuffs, medicine and other items sent in packages or delivered in person created an economy of assistance, care and solidarity. Provisioning family, friends and other community members in Romania, such assistance took on a variety of forms. These ranged from little attentions such as luxury items and gifts desired but not essential to daily life common in the 1970s to more scarce and necessary essentials for daily life that became hard to procure starting in the early 1980s.

Matthias Seiwerth's decades supplying Romanian Germans with Western goods highlight some of the principles of this moral economy. Seiwerth was born in the Transylvanian village of Valea Viilor (*Wurmloch*), and in 1969, he and his wife relocated to the FRG. Since most family members in Valea Viilor did not attain immigration permits, Seiwerth launched yearly supply visits to Transylvania that continued

well after 1989. Recounting what motivated his annual trips he stated: ‘We were eager to make life easier for those who remained in Romania. We wanted to show that we did not forget them. We did not want them to think that we left Wurmloch for a better life in Germany, while they had to do without so many things we enjoyed in the West’.<sup>41</sup>

Seiwerth’s trips evinced a sense of moral obligation to care for those left behind, incorporating sentiments of guilt and responsibility, but also pride for his accomplishments in the West, into a personal mission of caretaking and community work using the material goods accessible to a Westerner. To account for various needs in Valea Viilor, supply trips required careful grocery shopping to ensure that Seiwerth would satisfy both family requests and incorporate the appropriate items to bring on courtesy visits to neighbours, friends and other community members. After procuring these supplies in local supermarkets, Seiwerth departed in his vehicle for Romania. Consumer goods such as chocolate, cigarettes, coffee and cosmetics, among others, were frequent articles on his shopping lists in the 1970s. Likewise, books, fashion articles, music tapes, electric devices and complete sets of furniture and kitchen appliances enjoyed high demand in Valea Viilor. In the 1980s, more essential goods such as baby food, cooking oil, flour, sugar and scarce medicines dominated Seiwerth’s supplies.<sup>42</sup>

Margareta Steinmeier, born in the Transylvanian city of Reghin (*Sächsisch Regen*), engaged in similar supply trips since the early 1960s. A generation earlier than Seiwerth, Steinmeier left Romania as a ten-year old girl when her family relocated to Nazi Germany in 1941. After the war, her first visit to Reghin was in 1958. She recalled: ‘I embarked on my first trip back to Siebenbürgen [Transylvania] with full bags. I didn’t know what was needed there, so I brought what I thought would be helpful, but people didn’t suffer from hunger’.<sup>43</sup> Cultural exploration, maintenance of kin relations and her appreciation of Romanian hospitality lay at the core of Steinmeier’s visits to Reghin on her Volkswagen Transporter that she organized periodically thereafter:

[I travelled there] because of my relatives and the atmosphere, friendliness and warmth of people. There is a different mentality than in Germany. Regardless whether [visitors are] German or Romanian, everyone is willing to let you stay at their house in Romania. Even if there is little space for accommodation, people will make it work. In Germany, one wouldn’t want

to inconvenience people by offering them one's couch for the night. And of course, the natural beauties! Since I left Romania at the age of ten, I didn't know much about Siebenbürgen. Now, I had my own car and could drive to Kronstadt [Braşov] and other cities, including Bucharest. The scenery was beautiful, and above all, still pristine – unlike the concrete landscapes of [West] Germany.<sup>44</sup>

Steinmeier's account offers glimpses into the complex motivations of donors. Crucially, the affective structures of gratification highlighted in her recollection fell outside the types of reciprocal relationships and transactional exchanges commonly studied by scholars in the barter, favour and trader economies under socialism. Steinmeier's ultimate externality to community life in her native village made her an agent of intervention who did not reproduce social relations in Reghin from within, but rather shaped them from the outside. This outsider status allowed her to maintain some distance from the webs of local interdependence in Reghin and to intermingle supply trips with opportunities for self-development and alternative sociality. In other words, her obligation to help was grounded in a *moral* imperative to provision family and friends precisely without expectations of equivalent repayment.

These post-transactional forms of exchange also rippled outward through the subsequent redistribution of Western goods among recipients. Those who received assistance or ventured into their own supply trips in neighbouring countries developed intricate rituals of hoarding, saving for special occasions, home decoration and recycling.<sup>45</sup> But the notion of community solidarity also mandated that goods received from abroad be shared beyond immediate family ties. For Silke Rodel from Agnita (*Agnetheln*), the arrival of packages from West Germany and the modes of sharing between family, neighbours and the broader community were organically interwoven. According to Rodel, the first people in line to sift through the various items from the West and to pick what they needed for personal consumption were immediate members of the family. She remembered:

Afterward, our relatives were asked to join and to explore if they would find something of use. Next the neighbours proceeded in line. The remaining items were sent to the local parish, which redistributed them among the village community. Not only Transylvanian Saxon families lived in our neighbourhood but also Romanians, Hungarians and Roma. These

neighbours benefited from Western gift packages, for they obtained access to much of what we received from abroad; we shared everything that we did not need for ourselves.<sup>46</sup>

Such notions of community solidarity not only made it acceptable to pass on gifts (*weiferschenken*), but they also reinforced an ethical imperative to share with others.<sup>47</sup> Rodel explained:

It was not at all the case that we wore several lines of new clothes. Rather, we owned a skirt, one or maybe two blouses, a pullover and a pair of pants. These items were not separated by an ‘and’ but by an ‘or’. It was common practice to give away clothes that did not fit us anymore. This not only included Western clothes, but generally all types of clothes.<sup>48</sup>

In the world of socialist consumption, recycling Western gifts did not conjure notions of social stigma and shame (the ‘hand me downs’ worn by a humiliated Cinderella), but rather signalled the individual’s adherence to a code of daily solidarity with those who had less.

Despite such pervasive habits of communal solidarity, it was not uncommon that beneficiaries in the Romanian German community also re-appropriated Western goods as bargaining chips in exchange for other products or services. In this process of re-entering the transactional exchange economy, then, the value regime of Western supplies changed accordingly. Goods previously received from Western relatives or friends without expectations of repayment could in this way regain the commodity value prevalent in strategic client-patron transactions. This re-commodification was made possible as consumer goods traversed a distinct social biography (Igor Kopytoff).<sup>49</sup> What can be deduced from such instances is not that post-transactional exchanges were in reality fictitious – or worse, cynical moral tales. Rather, ethics was not a fixed category in social life. The ethical had to be permanently created and re-established within the particular contexts, situations and relationships in which each single act of giving and receiving arose.

Returning to the macro-social perspective, Seiwerth and Steinmeier were among many expatriates in the West who fostered local exchange until the end of state socialism with their supply runs.<sup>50</sup> A different example of the depth of this network involves charitable giving in states of emergency. During a catastrophic flood in 1970 that devastated hundreds of villages and towns in Romania, private disaster relief operated

as a crucial supply conduit for emergency aid to Romanian German communities affected by the floods. In West Germany, the Romanian German community successfully lobbied the Federal Foreign Office to negotiate with the Romanian government on an exemption of customs duties for care packages dispatched to flood victims.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, citizens in West Germany such as Margareta Steinmeier, who worked as a high school teacher in Karlsruhe, reacted promptly to the situation in her native Transylvania. Steinmeier remembered:

Since I often travelled to Romania during my summer vacations, I told my students stories about life in communism. [In 1970] the *Siebenbürgische Zeitung* published articles and pictures of the floods in Mediasch [Mediaş]. With these articles I created [some] wallpaper. That year it was possible for us to send packages to Romania. The *Diakonische Werk* in Karlsruhe provided addresses of eight to ten families in Mediasch with many children. My students enthusiastically collected clothes that we sorted according to the children's different ages. Each student group was responsible for one family. The next day we brought the packages to the post office. It took only a few weeks and we received beautiful and heartening thank you letters from the families.<sup>52</sup>

As in the case of the 1970 flood, private relief work allowed for the transfer of private disaster relief outside established avenues of emergency aid – governments, humanitarian NGOs, and relief agencies. While in the world of professional humanitarianism, extensive bureaucracies coordinated funding, manpower, resource allocation, transport and distribution for disaster relief, Steinmeier shrugged off the notion that her aid trips and subsequent supply journeys required any organization at all: ‘There was nothing to be organized’, she pointed out. Her account referenced a form of simplicity characteristic to private provisioning activities throughout the period. Regardless whether tackling moments of urgency or systemic need, in Steinmeier’s view, everyone could ‘make a difference’ through daily acts of solidarity.

While import statistics of care packages for the 1970 disaster were not preserved, in 1975 a second flood hit large parts of Romania. Official reports for 1975 offer a more complete picture on the scope and scale of packages deliveries to the crisis zones. Diplomatic exchanges between Bonn and Bucharest suggest that over 200,000 packages with baby food,

clothes and canned foodstuff reached recipients in Transylvania from the FRG alone, overwhelming the Romanian postal service.<sup>53</sup> During natural disasters such as the 1970 and 1975 floods, the Romanian state relied temporarily on foreign government aid and international organizations to help remedy the strain to national food and water supplies, medical provisions, as well as shelter and other rehabilitation efforts. However, while international humanitarian organizations had relief mandates that ended in the aftermath of the disasters in 1971 and 1976, privately organized assistance did not end arbitrarily after such cataclysmic events. Over the following decade, the volume of packages sent to Romania both from the West and from within the Eastern bloc instead increased substantially. As the economic prospects in Romania began to decline dramatically in the early 1980s, a large volume of clothing, consumer goods, contraceptives, drugs and other basic everyday items reached recipients via postal packages. In 1986 and 1987, a total of more than 1.5 million packages from private benefactors within and without the socialist bloc were dispatched to Romania.<sup>54</sup>

### **Aid from within the Socialist Bloc**

The rise of an economy of giving from within the Soviet Bloc in the 1980s is remarkable on different levels. For one, it highlights that long-distance giving was not an ethical practice of Westerners exclusively.<sup>55</sup> Rather, under these conditions, citizens from socialist countries such as East Germany joined in as well. Of particular concern to socialist donors were Romanian women and families that were pushed into unprecedented material deprivation by the Romanian state's severe austerity program and its pro-natalist four-children-family policy in the 1980s.<sup>56</sup> Although state officials repeatedly rejected the aid offers of Western governments and relief agencies, declaring 'No one in Romania needs charity. Every Romanian citizen has access to adequate health care',<sup>57</sup> the country's economic crisis rose to unparalleled levels within the Soviet bloc in the 1980s.<sup>58</sup>

In a period of rising post-Keynesian global reordering, Romania, like much of Eastern Europe and other parts of the world, faced rapidly growing foreign debt obligations to Western lenders and rising prices for natural resources. As a solution to escalating deficits, the Romanian

leadership sought a drastic reduction of foreign imports in the late 1970s. Additionally, to service state debts, food rationing was reintroduced for the first time since the early post-war years in 1981. Concomitantly, prices of 220 different Romanian products increased by 25% in 1982, while the population's purchasing power fell by 8.8% in the same year. As a result, Romanians spent the highest average proportion of family budgets on food in the COMECON. Soon the state began to ration corn, coffee, flour, rice, sugar, oil and other basic foodstuffs.<sup>59</sup> Alongside these public cuts in basic supply and consumption, the Romanian state launched a 'scientific diet' in 1982, calling upon the population to reduce its daily calorie intake and to consume healthier food. The new nutrition maxim read: 'We eat to live and not live to eat'.<sup>60</sup> Supplementing these 'soft' calls for personal belt-tightening, ration cards enforced the mandated nutrition goals through more prescriptive measures. In 1988, the state allocated twenty-nine grams of sugar, twenty-seven millilitres of cooking oil, seven grams of flour, twenty-three grams of poultry and pork and less than two grams of sausage for individual daily consumption.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, prices for electric power, heating fuel, gasoline and natural gas rose dramatically throughout the 1980s. Private households experienced unannounced daily power outages and the rationing of warm water. In the absence of bare essentials of daily life, Romanians therefore refer to the 1980s as a time of 'darkness'.<sup>62</sup>

As the state's austerity program cleared out the shelves of consumer stores, many unavailable goods resurfaced in informal economic niches. Romanians who had the requisite social connections were able to avoid serious material deprivation, but this was not the case for everyone.<sup>63</sup> While international humanitarian organizations were prohibited from operating in Romania, non-institutionalized networks, much less visible to the socialist state's restrictive and prescriptive surveillance, skirted such entry bans at an increasing rate in the 1980s.<sup>64</sup> East Germans played a significant role in this emergent socialist economy of giving through the avenue of socialist tourism. Bound for leisure activities in the Carpathian Mountains or for vacation resorts at the Black Sea, East Germans witnessed the ubiquitous rationing of necessities of daily life. A short chat with locals on the street, a quick run to a consumer store, an unplanned visit in a Romanian hospital – situations abounded for first-hand encounters with empty store shelves, long food lines and inadequate medical care. To some visitors, the situation in Romania

was ‘depressing, even by the standards of the GDR’.<sup>65</sup> Tourists from other neighbouring countries such as Hungary made similar observations, witnessing the rapid material decline with a sense of bewilderment: ‘Each year that passed, we noticed a drop in the standard of living in Romania. The decline unfolded in real time before our eyes. The situation was alarming’.<sup>66</sup>

For tourists and visitors, local encounters evoked compassion and empathy with the plight of Romanian interlocutors. As cathartic moments, face-to-face encounters provoked detailed emotional labour and moral reflection among East Germans who, by comparison, lived a more prosperous life than Romanians.<sup>67</sup> While human motivations remained invariably complex, fluid and at times contradictory, a common thread among donors revolved around the notion of ‘doing something’ to improve Romanian living conditions. In this vein, giving reflected a commitment to seeking immediate and practical solutions to human suffering. Its allure lay precisely in its inherent simplicity: every East German citizen, in theory, could get involved by sending a donation, preparing a care package, or delivering supplies to recipients in person while on a (tourist) trip in Romania. Regardless of gender, intellectual orientation, professional training, or social background, the invocation of ‘doing something’ called forth a practical approach to mitigating material need. Rather than dwelling on utopian visions of social progress or high-minded political programs to reform socialism, the seemingly innocuous acts of sharing foodstuff and consumer goods promised a more direct alleviation of the daily material crisis in Romania. This stance toward localized and temporary forms of intervention echoed notions of neutrality from politics formulated by humanitarian organizations: NGOs such as *Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)*, as Peter Redfield has argued, take on the ‘contemporary functions of governing, if on a minimal, immediate scale’.<sup>68</sup> MSF’s inherent ‘ethic of refusal’ – exhibiting a profound disinterest in seeking ‘anything like classical sovereignty or conventional claims to power’ – characterizes the organization’s mode of operation.<sup>69</sup>

The stated goals put forth by East German donors resonated with such seemingly apolitical aspirations to reduce human suffering. Specifically, refusal to be involved with ‘traditional politics’ emphasized meaningful solidarity with Romanians as a present-oriented project (rather than one geared toward a ‘better future’). East Germans

routinely articulated a sense of standing outside of politics and acting in a fashion ‘closer to life’. While reminiscent of dissidents’ strategic claims to act ‘apolitically’, this stance invoked compassion with people’s suffering and basic human goodness as an end in themselves. Achim Barth, an organizer of aid campaigns in Zwickau, stated: ‘I was never a political person. [Dissidence] was an abstract sociological concept. I had a Protestant upbringing. What motivated me first and foremost were the personal contacts to Romania’.<sup>70</sup>

Barth’s invocation of an apolitical sphere of human sociality inspiring his volunteer work fit rather uneasily with the calls of regime critics for social change. Rather, these motivations point to an aspect of everyday practices under socialism that Padraic Kenney has called a new ‘revolutionary style’ embodied by a generation of young activists in the 1980s known as the *konkretny* (meaning: focused on reality). According to Kenney, the *konkretny* were concerned with everyday problems and how to find ‘realistic, effective means of overcoming, or at least, exposing them’.<sup>71</sup> As people of ‘action and deeds’, the *konkretny* refused to merely ‘talk theory’ and critique state socialism.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Barth and his friends understood clandestine provisioning activities as immediate acts of humanity that appeared more suitable to ‘make a difference’ in the lives of those who were in need than to expose the ills of the political system.

The social crisis caused by the austerity program in Ceaușescu’s Romania generated a sense of urgency among East Germans to get involved. This experience of human need ensnared socialist donors and recipients into peculiar ethical relationships that unsettled binaries of ‘inferior and superior’, ‘rich and poor’, ‘powerful and powerless’. Instead, such alternative ways of relating appealed to notions of shared dependency and neediness underlying the human condition under socialism. ‘We didn’t have much ourselves in East Germany’, said Uwe Schwabe, a donor from Leipzig. He continued: ‘We all grew up in the social order of communism and therefore were able to relate to the suffering of others. We felt a type of silent solidarity with those people. Regardless if Czechs, Hungarians, or Poles, we all belonged to one community. This solidarity worked like a charm’.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, Schwabe’s insistence that all people in socialist states were in need alluded to a sense of radical equality that blurred the distinction between donors and recipients.

By mid-decade, numerous informal initiatives sprang up in rural areas across East Germany and in cities such as Berlin, Dresden,

Leipzig, Potsdam and Zwickau. In 1987, a student group in Zwickau launched periodic aid trips to the city of Braşov in central Romania. Using frequent inexpensive train connections and small-scale means of transport in goods, such as backpacks or bags, allowed for the transfer of sizable amounts of aid across borders. Minimizing the potential for conflict with border authorities, members of the group used similar traffic routes and embodied strategies as trader tourists, common in the 1970s and 1980s in the region.<sup>74</sup> While basic consumer goods and clothes often passed border controls without much quarrel, other items prohibited for import required the requisite bribes or more laborious, and indeed physical, negotiation skills. This included illicit goods such as medicine, but also contraceptives. Birth control pills, for instance, were not illegal in Romania, but they were unavailable due to the state's ban on abortion. In customs controls, supplies for fertility control therefore had to be declared for personal use. Couples in the Zwickau group were especially suitable carriers for condoms or the pill. As one participant remembered, upon entry of border guards into train compartments, strategically performed displays of public affection could sway even the most disgruntled of state official to allow free passage of family packages of contraceptives. Likewise, pairing group members with state officials could prove helpful to ease potential conflict at the border: 'We women had our own tricks. A certain kind of look or smile imparted to a male border guard often helped to melt the ice and elicit sympathy'.<sup>75</sup>

Negotiating border passage with state officials thus drew on a complex and gendered repertoire of discursive as well as performative strategies. Part of the 'game' of traversing Eastern Europe's border regimes was the thrill of not getting caught by the authorities – making each trip a 'great adventure', as Achim Barth put it.<sup>76</sup> Susanne Hartzsch-Trauer, member of the Zwickau group, enjoyed a sense of illicit danger as part of a broader project of self-liberation and self-development achieved through her volunteer work: 'For many years, people in the GDR had accepted the deplorable state of affairs that they only lamented in private circles, among family and friends with whom they knew they could talk. However, people always remained passive. Grievances remained contained to one's private life. These activities allowed us to finally step out of that privacy and to become essential again'.<sup>77</sup>

As the main train routes from Zwickau to destinations in Romania passed through such major hubs as Budapest, aid transports allowed for

brief layovers in one of Eastern Europe's most exhilarating metropolises. Cultural exploration and pleasure went hand in hand with aid deliveries. Susanne Hartzsch-Trauer remembered:

Budapest was the only city in Eastern Europe that was like a place in Western Europe. There you could get records of groups that were censored in the GDR. For young East Germans who weren't used to such a cosmopolitan city, Budapest represented love, lust and luxury. One simply had to spend one day in Budapest and do something fun like going to an arts exhibition or a concert that wouldn't have existed in the GDR.<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusion

As this final comment highlights, affects of pleasure and the thrill of danger played an integral role in motivating people on both sides of the Cold War divide to give to family and strangers in Romania. This call resonates with a burgeoning literature that frames daily ethics as 'inseparable from the very nature of people's lives with one another – that it is not reducible to some context-free explanation in terms of innate drives, economic interests, rational first principles, or evolutionarily adaptive functions'.<sup>79</sup>

This article, then, has addressed two problems. First, it examined the placement of giving in the spectrum of political practice in socialist states. As many practitioners claimed, was giving an apolitical practice? I suggested that neither socialist states nor donors framed provisioning activities as subversive acts against the social order. Unable to conceptually categorize the proliferation of solidarity practices, the Romanian state depoliticized the matter. State officials later began to suspect a trend of illicit economic activity behind the influx of goods and people into Romania in the 1980s. But this initial misrecognition displaced the possibility for the socialist state to truly grasp the scope and scale of cross-border solidarity with the Romanian population.

The process of depoliticization allowed donors and volunteers to conceive of their actions as apolitical. Purporting to be apolitical, however, did not signal their adherence to the concept of 'anti-politics' embraced by leading dissidents in the period. The latter delineated an intellectual critique of the limitations on individual freedom, responsibility

and self-determination brought about by the social engineering under state socialism.<sup>80</sup> The former, in turn, characterized a departure from the realm of traditional politics altogether. As the reunification of families and the adequate supply of the Romanian population with daily essentials seemed unsolvable through diplomatic means or engagement in opposition movements, unorthodox strategies of ‘making a difference’ and ‘doing good’ gained appeal. To be sure, donors and volunteers were cognizant of the potential of running into trouble with state officials. This necessitated their strategic rejection of framing cross-border assistance in political terms. But what is crucial about this refusal is that the very act of sharing goods neither depended upon nor required a political program or recourse to the politics of social activism in the first place. Analogous to institutionalized humanitarianism, giving evaded utopian visions of elevating collective human flourishing. Helping individuals and local communities constituted a form of micro-intervention. It was never comprehensive in scope and scale, but it was neither reduced to a mere promise of a better life in the future either. If socialist dissidence and political opposition remained intellectual projects for reforms of society at large, giving represented somewhat of its mirror image. Giving was situated in the domain of daily life, confined to addressing immediate and practical solutions to injustice. It is precisely this simplicity and focus on the material ‘here and now’ that opened remarkable room for donors to manoeuvre in the sphere of Cold War politics. International relief agencies, government aid programs and humanitarian NGOs systematically lacked this elusiveness.

Second, by stressing that giving was both quintessentially material and a site for the creation of ethical encounters, this discussion sketched out the contours of a ‘white’ economy of assistance, care and sharing across long distance in Cold War Europe. It showed that giving encompassed distinct ethical exchanges that ran counter to those reciprocal and profit driven socialist practices that have often been classified as ‘black’ or ‘corrupt’. I suggested that a post-transactional theory of socialist exchanges attentive to such embedded ethical structures adds a voluntaristic perspective to the study of second economies. The example of East German charitable giving demonstrated that charitable work and voluntarism was not anathema to socialism, although it remained outside of official ideology. Be that as it may, it should be reiterated that the ethics of giving did not constitute a pure realm of human altruism.

Rather, it existed in counterpoint to ‘black markets’, extending along a wide spectrum of shades of grey as it continually intersected, overlapped and moved in and out of other domains of social life. This echoes Michael Lambek’s suggestion that deploying ethics as a category of analysis should not rest upon a ‘purified notion of ethics’ but should accept lingering uncertainty, polyvalence, or ambivalence inherent to selfhood, social encounters and human action in social life.<sup>81</sup> Similar to what scholars of consumer and material culture have suggested via the concept of the social biography of things, this conclusion stresses the contextual and multiply-situated nature of giving. Giving could at once function as a vehicle for self-development, serve to satisfy pleasures and mobilize individuals to enact daily solidarity with distant suffering.

In this sense, giving was bound to an ambivalent modernity in the second half of the twentieth century. It embodied the growing possibilities of ordinary citizens to ‘do something’ not only on the local or national level but across geographic and geopolitical borders. At the same time, giving relied on the personal initiative of individual donors and groups of volunteers to mitigate the disastrous societal costs of austerity in Romania. As the dramatic unravelling of socialist state welfare began a decade prior to the economic restructuring of the region through shock therapy in the 1990s, this quixotic project heralded the return of private networks of provisioning, with their peculiar and overlapping ethical and relational motives.

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Romania. National grants from the American Historical Association, the Association for Slavic, Eastern European, and Eurasian Studies, and the Social Science Research Council, among others, have supported his dissertation project. E-mail: ccapotes@umich.edu

## Notes

- 1 I thank Pamela Ballinger, Andrew Tompkins, Phillip Wagner and two anonymous reviewers for their extensive comments and helpful suggestions. I am also grateful to Brian Porter-Szűcs for insights on an earlier version of this paper and to Eric Schewe for his editorial assistance.
- 2 Letter addressed to the Federal Foreign Minister of West Germany on November 21, 1981, Political Archive of the Foreign Federal Office of Germany (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts der Bundesrepublik Deutschland - PAAA), B 83, Bd. 1388.
- 3 David Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Chicago, 1968).
- 4 I borrow here Theodore Bestor's fitting expression from 'Supply-Side Sushi: Commodity, Market, and the Global City', *American Anthropologist* 103:1 (2001) 76–95.
- 5 A growing literature on Eastern Europe has emerged around these topics. On socialist tourism see, among others, Anne Gorusch and Diane Koenker (eds), *The Socialist Sixties. Crossing Borders in the Second World* (Indiana University Press, 2013) and idem, *Turizm. The Russian and Eastern European Tourist Under Capitalism and Socialism* (Cornell University Press, 2006); Cathleen M. Giustino et al. (eds), *Socialist Escapes: Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013). For the latter phenomenon of shopping and trader tourism see Anna Wessely, 'Traveling People, Traveling Objects', *Cultural Studies* 16:1 (2002) 3–15; Liviu Chelcea, 'The Culture of Shortage during State-Socialism: Consumption Practices in a Romanian Village in the 1980s', *Cultural Studies* 16:1 (2010) 16–43; Włodzimierz Borodziej et al (eds), *Schleichwege. Inoffizielle Begegnungen sozialistischer Staatsbürger zwischen 1956 und 1989* (Böhlau, 2010).
- 6 See Didier Fassin, 'Heart of Humanness: The Moral Economy of Humanitarian Intervention', in Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (eds), *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions* (New York, 2010) 274.

- 7 For an overview of such social movement activism across socialist Eastern Europe see Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe, 1989* (Princeton, 2002).
- 8 Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason. A Moral History of the Present* (University of California Press, 2012) 4–5. See Ulf Hannerz, *Exploring the City: Inquiries Toward an Urban Anthropology* (Columbia University Press, 1983).
- 9 See Fassin, ‘Heart of Humanness’, 274.
- 10 George Marcus, ‘Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995) 95–117; Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, 2005); Annemarie Mol, ‘Actor-Network Theory: Sensitive Terms and Enduring Tensions’, *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 50:1 (2010) 253–269; Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Sherry Ortner, ‘Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26:1 (1984) 126–166; Iris Clever and Willemijn Ruberg, ‘Beyond Cultural History? The Material Turn, Praxiography, and Body History’, *Humanities* 3 (2014) 546–566.
- 11 Cristina Petrescu, ‘Entrepreneurial Tourism in Romania: A System-Stabilizing Factor?’, in Włodzimierz Borodziej et al. (eds), *Schleichwege. Inoffizielle Begegnungen sozialistischer Staatsbürger zwischen 1956 und 1989* (Vienna, 2010) 115–133.
- 12 Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu’s Romania* (Berkeley, 1998).
- 13 See Giustino et al., *Socialist Escapes*.
- 14 Katherine Verdery, *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania’s Secret Police* (Budapest, 2014) 85–86.
- 15 Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics: Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism* (Chicago, 2010).
- 16 See Mark Keck-Szajbel, ‘Shop Around the Bloc: Trader Tourism and Its Discontents on the East German–Polish Border’, in Paulina Bren and Mary Neuberger (eds), *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford, 2012) 374–377.
- 17 Judd Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics, and Consumer Culture in East Germany* (New York, 1997); Paul Betts and Katherine Pence (eds), *Socialist Modern. East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor, 2007). A newer literature has critically probed into the domain

- of East-West identity formation/cultural perceptions/mentalities in the period of the Cold War: György Péteri (ed.), *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh, 2010); Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain* (Oxford, 2011); Milena Veenis, *Material Fantasies: Expectations of the Western Consumer World among the East Germans* (Amsterdam, 2012).
- 18 A burgeoning anthropology of ethics has been of particular help to formulate some of the key propositions of this paper: Michael Lambek (ed.), *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action* (New York, 2010); James Faubion, *An Anthropology of Ethics* (Cambridge, 2011); Didier Fassin, *A Companion to Moral Anthropology* (Hoboken, 2012); James Laidlaw, *The Subject of Virtue: An Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom* (Cambridge, 2014).
- 19 Webb Keane, 'Minds, Surfaces, and Reasons in the Anthropology of Ethics', in Michael Lambek (ed.), *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action* (New York, 2010) 65.
- 20 Most poignantly formulated by Janos Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Princeton, 1992); Steven Sampson, 'The Informal Sector in Eastern Europe', *Telos* 66 (1986) 44–66. Cf. also Anders Aslund, *Private Enterprise in Eastern Europe: The Non-Agricultural Private Sector in Poland and the GDR, 1945–1983* (London, 1985); John W. Cole, 'Problems of Socialism in Eastern Europe', *Dialectical Anthropology* 9:1–4 (1985) 233–56; Gregory Grossman (ed.), *Studies in the Second Economy of Communist Countries* (Berkeley, 1987); Elemer Hankiss, *East European Alternatives* (Oxford, 1990).
- 21 Alena Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favors. Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge, 1998); Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley, 1999); see Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, 1996) 22.
- 22 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift. Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London, 1966).
- 23 See Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986) 13. On the strategic deployment of gifts, see T.O. Beidelman, 'Agonistic Exchange: Homeric Reciprocity and the Heritage of Simmel and Mauss', *Cultural Anthropology* 4:3 (1989) 227–259; Alan Smart, 'Gifts, Bribes, and Guanxi: A Reconsideration of Bourdieu's Social Capital', *Cultural Anthropology* 8:3 (1993) 388–408.

- 24 Jerzy Kochanowski, *Jenseits der Planwirtschaft. Der Schwarzmarkt in Polen 1944–1989*, trans. by Pierre-Frédéric Weber (Göttingen, 2013); previous exploratory articles on this topic include the aforementioned Wessely, ‘Traveling People, Traveling Objects’ and Chelcea, ‘The Culture of Shortage during State-Socialism’.
- 25 I am grateful to Pamela Ballinger for inspiring the term of post-transactionalism in a recent conversation. An excellent recent discussion of post-Maussian economies of exchange in Islam offers Amira Mittermaier, ‘Bread, Freedom, Social Justice: The Egyptian Uprising and a Sufi Khidma’, *Cultural Anthropology* 29:1 (2014) 54–79.
- 26 Liisa Malkki, *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism* (Durham, N.C., 2015).
- 27 For the use of this ethnic category of belonging cf. James Koranyi, ‘Voyages of Socialist Discovery: German-German Exchanges between the GDR and Romania’, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 92:3 (2014) 479–506; James Koranyi and Ruth Wittlinger, ‘From Diaspora to Diaspora: The Case of Transylvanian Saxons in Romania and Germany’, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 17:1 (2011) 96–115.
- 28 Georg Weber et al. (eds), *Emigration der Siebenbürger Sachsen. Studien zu Ost-West-Wanderungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 2003); Konrad Gündisch, ‘Annäherungen an die siebenbürgische Ortsgeschichte’, in Georg Weber and Renate Weber (eds), *Zugänge zur Gemeinde. Soziologische, historische und sprachwissenschaftliche Beiträge*, *Studia Transylvanica*, 24 vols (Cologne, 2000), XXIV, 153–177; Othmar Kolar, *Rumänien und seine nationalen Minderheiten 1918 bis heute* (Cologne, 1997).
- 29 Despite expropriation of the community’s corporate landholdings and increased competition from Romanians ethnic Germans weathered, unlike the Hungarian minority, the changing political and socio-economic landscape in Romania fairly well. Germans enjoyed, as Katherine Verdery points out, ‘special access to certain kinds of resources: trade secrets, business skills, unentailed land, ‘free’ labor, and merchant wealth for investment’. I would argue that this privileged status survived, albeit in a new guise, into the postwar period through the community’s exclusive access to Western supply channels discussed in this paper. See Katherine Verdery, ‘The Unmaking of an Ethnic Collectivity: Transylvania’s Germans’, *American Ethnologist* 12:1 (1985) 72–74.
- 30 Verdery, ‘The Unmaking of an Ethnic Collectivity’, 74.
- 31 See Verdery’s argument related to this point (ibid.).

- 32 Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, 1996) 4; see Koranyi and Wittlinger, 'From Diaspora to Diaspora', 104.
- 33 Koranyi and Wittlinger, 'From Diaspora to Diaspora', 104.
- 34 Notably, the Expellee and Refugee Law (*Bundesvertriebenen- und Flüchtlingsgesetz*) from 1953 and the Law on the Regulation of Questions of Citizenship (*Gesetz zur Regelung von Fragen der Staatsangehörigkeit*) from 1955, see Koranyi and Wittlinger, 'From Diaspora to Diaspora', 102.
- 35 Other destinations for Romanian German immigration included Austria and Switzerland.
- 36 Pamela Ballinger, 'Wartime Evacuations and the Restoration of Italian Families after 1945: A Critical Prehistory for Family Reunification Policy?', unpublished manuscript; Verdery, 'The Unmaking of an Ethnic Collectivity', 75.
- 37 PA AA, B 2, Bd. 146; B 2, Bd. 239.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Between 1950 and 1967 approximately 16,000 Germans migrated to West Germany. Even after *Operation Kanal* was negotiated migration numbers remained highly fluid: in 1968 little more than 600 Germans were issued travel visas to West Germany; a decade later the number sharply rose to 12,000 cases per year. With 23,000 Germans leaving Romania in the last year of the Ceaușescu regime alone, the total number of German emigrants that had left for the West since 1968 reached 210,000. To this day, however, there exist conflicting numbers on the exact emigration numbers, estimates ranging from 210,000 to 236,000. See Hannelore Baier, *Kauf von Freiheit. Dr. Heinz-Günther Hüscher im Interview mit Hannelore Baier und Ernst Meinhardt* (Sibiu, 2013); Florica Dobre et al. (eds), *Acțiunea 'Recuperarea'. Securitatea și emigrarea germanilor din România (1962–1989)* (Bucharest, 2011).
- 40 Verdery, 'The Unmaking of an Ethnic Collectivity', 74.
- 41 Interview with Matthias Seiwert and private collection, Gundelsheim, 29 July 2013.
- 42 Interview Seiwert.
- 43 Interview with Margareta Steinmeier, 30 November 2015.
- 44 Interview Steinmeier.
- 45 See Berdahl, *Where the World Ended*, 124; Chelcea, 'The Culture of Shortage', 33–37.
- 46 E-mail correspondence with Silke Rodel, 23 June 2014.

- 47 Berdahl, *Where the World Ended*, 122.
- 48 Correspondence Rodel.
- 49 See Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*.
- 50 Cumulatively, such Western gifts and donations infused Romania's economy with substantial amounts of foreign products bolstering the countries trade balance with billions of US dollars' worth in consumer products, customs fees, and financial remittances intercepted by state officials, cf. National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității - ACNSAS), D 008853, Vol 21.
- 51 PA AA, B 58, Bd. 459.
- 52 E-mail correspondence with Margareta Steinmeier, 21 November 2015. *Diakonische Werk (der EKD)* is a charitable organization of Protestant churches in Germany and part of the umbrella association of the *Diakonie Deutschland – Evangelischer Bundesverband*.
- 53 PA AA, B 85, Bd. 1683.
- 54 ACNSAS, D 008853, Vol 21, 118.
- 55 See Kenney, *Carnival of Revolution*, chapter 4.
- 56 See Kligman, *Politics of Duplicity*.
- 57 Hungarian Press of Transylvania, 'Rumanian Customs Officials Refuse Shipment of Medicine', 4 November 1988.
- 58 Dragoș Petrescu, 'Worker and Peasant-Workers in a Working Class' 'Paradise': Patterns of Working Class Protest in Communist Romania', in Peter Hübner et al. (eds), *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus. Ideologischer Anspruch und soziale Wirklichkeit* (Vienna, 2005).
- 59 Michael Shafir, *Romania. Politics, Economics and Society. Political Stagnation and Simulated Change* (Boulder, 1985) 107–119.
- 60 Scînteia, 'The Program of Rational Diet', 15 July 1982.
- 61 Ibid.; see also Shafir, *Romania*, 107–119.
- 62 Chelcea, 'Culture of Shortage', 22.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 The Romanian state followed a consistent line of policy dismissing Western humanitarianism as economically obsolete and politically motivated since the 1970s, see *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1975* (Institut für Zeitgeschichte München/Berlin) 1725–1727.
- 65 Interview with Achim Barth, Hans Hartzsch, Susanne Hartzsch-Trauer, and Rainer Pohl, Zwickau, July 13, 2014.

- 66 Interview with Béla N6vé, Budapest, 16 January 2015.
- 67 See Ildik6 Zakariás, ‘The Production of Solidarity: A Case Study of Voluntary School Programs of Ethnic Kin Support’, in Jochen Kleres and Yvonne Albrecht (eds), *Die Ambivalenz der Gefühle: Über die verbindende und widersprüchliche Sozialität von Emotionen* (Wiesbaden, 2015) 145–169.
- 68 Peter Redfield, *Life in Crisis: The Ethical Journey of Doctors Without Borders* (Berkeley, 2013) 18.
- 69 Redfield, *Life in Crisis*, 18.
- 70 Interview Barth et al.
- 71 Kenney, *Carnival of Revolution*, 13.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Interview with Uwe Schwabe, Leipzig, 23 November 2015.
- 74 Kochanowski, *Jenseits der Planwirtschaft*, 16–82.
- 75 Interview Barth et al.
- 76 Interview with Achim Barth, Zwickau, 24 November 2015.
- 77 Interview Barth et al.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Keane, ‘Minds, Surfaces, and Reasons’, 68.
- 80 See Johanna Bockman and Gil Eyal, ‘Eastern Europe as a Laboratory for Economic Knowledge: The Transnational Roots of Neoliberalism’, *American Journal of Sociology* 108:2 (2002) 310–352.
- 81 Lambek, *Ordinary Ethics*, 7.