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# Capitalist Heterotopia & Lost Social Utopia: Documenting Class, Work, and Migration in Post-Communist East-Central European Fiction

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## ABSTRACT

Some of the most acclaimed novels from post-communist countries deal with communism through an anti-communist ethos. The emerging international canon of post-communist representations of communism and transition to capitalism has always sought to enforce a convincing anti-communist ideal. Writers have only recently formulated critiques of the post-communist transition through what Boris Buden describes as post-communist cultures without social utopias. Those novels are not rooted in anti-communism but rather criticize the death of utopias following the fall of communism. Drawing on the Romanian case, we try to outline the heterotopias of capitalism in post-communism from the standpoint of novels on migration and work abroad, addressing contemporary understandings of capitalist realism, post-socialist realism, autofiction, and documented realism. Analysing novels by Liliana Nechit, Mihai Buzea, and Adrian Schiop, we reveal the subjective nature of the testimonial literature on migration and contrast it to the need to incorporate workers' agency into this literary process. While the description of Eastern European capitalism through novels about migration has become an indictment of communism and a subtle plea for a 'better' form of capitalism, the novels about internal migration recover a lost social utopia that ended with the 1989 collapse of Romanian communism.

## KEYWORDS

Romanian novel; migration; narration of displacement; capitalist realism; post-socialist realism; documentary realism

## Introduction

In their very recent attempt<sup>1</sup> to chart the sociology of the contemporary novel in Romania through a collection of interviews with high profile contemporary authors and essayists, Raluca Manolescu and Alex Cistelean start with Engels' famous claim that he had learned more from Balzac than from 'all the professed historians, economists,

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<sup>1</sup>See Alex Cistelean, Raluca Manolescu, eds., 'Sociologia romanului românesc contemporan' (The Sociology of the Contemporary Romanian Novel), *Vatra* 5–6 (2021): 39–119.

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and statisticians of the period together'.<sup>2</sup> The two scholars then used their interviews to explore whether something similar can be claimed about the contemporary Romanian novel, and whether such a statement would even be desirable. Their question is highly relevant, in our opinion, in respect to contemporary fiction on the topic of migration, since one of the primary factors transforming societies across central Europe, including Romania, is the migration of the work force. We cannot claim, like Engels, that we could learn more from the migration novel than from historians, sociologists and economists, numerous scholars have conducted ground-breaking research on this topic,<sup>3</sup> but we are especially interested in the stories told by these novels, which have not yet been accounted for in the scientific literature, as well as to what extent literature can be a tool for documenting acute social phenomena. Moreover, whereas in Engels' nineteenth century, literary realism provided a more accurate frame for analysing social realities, today's subjective approaches, which underpin contemporary fictional works, make them more prone to impose a socially unsubstantiated perspective on migration and their depiction of wider society.

In particular, this article explores the narrative voices that discuss the massive migration of Romanian workers to Western Europe and the United States which began in 1990, and examines what they convey about contemporary literary ideology. We make use of this concept of 'literary ideology' because looking into the forging of class consciousness in autofictional narratives is essential for understanding the dynamic of migration as a relationship between centre and periphery.<sup>4</sup> This relationship is expressed through fictional representation<sup>5</sup> and can often be useful for connecting narratives of displacement across peripheries that are otherwise dispersed geographically. Thus, the narratives of the caregivers and seasonal workers from Eastern Europe who have migrated westwards can be compared to migrants from the Global South who have also been forced to migrate as result of class exploitation to search for work and better living standards.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, we make use of this concept as it was defined by Mihai Iovănel who, through his 2016 *Ideologiile literaturii în postcomunismul românesc* (Literary Ideologies in Romanian Post-communism) and his 2021 *Istoria literaturii române contemporane*:

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<sup>2</sup>Friedrich Engels, 'Letter to Margaret Harnkess' (1888), in Martin Travers (ed.), *European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism: A Reader in Aesthetic Practice* (New York: A&C Black, 2001), 124.

<sup>3</sup>See Dumitru Sandu and Gordon F. De Jong, 'Migration in Market and Democracy Transition: Migration Intentions and Behavior in Romania', *Population Research and Policy Review* 15 (1996): 437–57; Dumitru Sandu, Cosmin Radu, Monica Constantinescu, Oana Ciobanu, 'A Country Report on Romanian Migration Abroad: Stocks and Flows after 1989', study for [www.migrationonline.cz](http://www.migrationonline.cz), Multicultural Center Prague (2004); István Horváth and Remus Gabriel Anghel, 'Migration and its Consequences for Romania', *Südosteuropa* 57 (2009): 386–403; Monica Roman and Cristina Voicu, 'Some Socio-economic Effects of Labour Migration on the Sending Country. Evidence from Romania', *Theoretical and Applied Economics* 547 (2010).

<sup>4</sup>See Immanuel Wallerstein, *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World-System* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1991).

<sup>5</sup>See Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London, UK: Verso, 1996) and WReC: Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

<sup>6</sup>Teresita Cruz-del Rosario, 'Love's Labors Lost in the Global South', in Russell West-Pavlov (ed.), *The Global South and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 173–84. For an analysis of the connection between peripheral translation and the rise of a Global South conscience in Eastern European fiction see Ștefan Baghiu, 'Translating Hemispheres: Eastern Europe and the Global South Connection through Translationscapes of Poverty', *Comparative Literature Studies* 56 (2019): 487–503; Ștefan Baghiu, 'Geocritique: Siting, Poverty, and the Global Southeast', in Alexandru Matei, Christian Moraru, and Andrei Terian (eds.), *Theory in the 'Post' Era. A Vocabulary for the 21st-Century Conceptual Commons* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), 235–50.

1990–2020 (History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990–2020),<sup>7</sup> put forward a new way of reading contemporary literature from across Eastern Europe by calling for it to be assessed as ideological texts that are engaging with a larger, and hitherto one-sided, public debate about the legacy of communism and the transition to capitalism after 1989. Our argument is that the emergence of testimonial literature such as autofiction during the past two decades has effected an *increased* interest in the realist depictions of contemporary society, but this interest was dominated by a strong tendency to impose a privileged perspective upon these depictions that resulted in a lack of understanding of systemic phenomena such as displacement and social dumping. Only recently has a literature emerged which shows a genuine interest in the lost social utopia that late communism and the later transition to liberal democracy has produced through massive displacement, class conflict, and dependency at all levels of society. This concept of a ‘lost social utopia’ draws on Boris Buden’s insight that towards the end of the communist period, East and Central European socialist structures forged ‘a society that had exhausted all its utopian potential and had reached the limits of its further expansion in terms of social justice and an overall social prosperity’ and ‘was facing its historical end, a society with no future whatsoever’.<sup>8</sup> This was followed by a transition to a capitalist heterotopia, where the waning social utopia of late communism became a dystopian state of inequality, labour migration, and social discontent prompting the loss of any communitarian ideals or aspirations. Moreover, as we demonstrate below, the emergence of the phenomenon of *anti-capitalist anti-communism* (as result of the fraying social safety net), ensured that the frustrations which originated during the late communist period echoed the discontent with the transition to capitalism after 1989, even though there was initially no coherent means of critically engaging with the new post-communist society.

### Anti-Communism as Social Idealism

Some of the most acclaimed novels written in post-communist countries reflect upon communism through the lens of an anti-communist ethos. This phenomenon owes mainly to the fascination of post-communist intellectuals, who had all grown up in Eastern-European communist societies, with the Western world and their endorsement of the complex narrative which demanded the urgent transformation of the entire region into democratic, capitalist-oriented societies, therefore effectively ‘Westernizing’ them. Authors who have produced harsh critiques of communism enjoy considerable renown, such as the Romanian-born Nobel prize winner Herta Müller, who follows in the footsteps of other famous anti-communist authors such as Imre Kertész, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and Czesław Miłosz.

In contrast, few novelists have depicted the lost social utopia during what Boris Buden called the post-communist ‘transition to nowhere’ and even many of these novels and other fictional works merely bemoan, oftentimes ironically, the dissolution of communism’s communitarian ideal. The concept of a ‘lost social utopia’ is, however, applicable to

<sup>7</sup>Mihai Iovănel, *Ideologiile literaturii în postcomunismul românesc* (The Ideologies of Literature in Romanian Postcommunism) (Bucharest: Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2017); Mihai Iovănel, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990–2020* (Iași: Polirom, 2021).

<sup>8</sup>Boris Buden, ‘Transition to Nowhere: Art in History after 1989’ in (ed.) Paolo Caffoni, *comp. Boris Buden and Naomi Hennig* (Berlin: Archive Books, 2020), 181.

those few novels that tackle the manner in which the implementation of a capitalist development model in Eastern-European economies led to serious shortcomings in regard to maintaining social safety nets for communities and even entire nations, and where the social contract was neglected in favour of corporations and large-scale capitalist developmental projects. As Slavoj Žižek stated as early as 1992, during the 90s, ‘the west found a sucker still having faith in its values’.<sup>9</sup> Of course, Žižek was exposing his general view on the centre-periphery imbalance in Europe, and his positions while defining abstract concepts such as ‘Central Europe’ and ‘Eastern Europe’ while insisting on the need for cultural and civilizational legitimation by the West are well known by now. Nevertheless, his observation that ‘the west’ found ‘a sucker still having faith’ in its ideals should raise questions. From a neoliberal perspective, why does this process entail a deception, as the development of Eastern Europe depended on its voluntary acceptance of the paradigm that manifested itself as centre-periphery exploitation? The explanation lies in the creation of a split ‘personality’ across all East European cultures after 1989, caught between the developmental neoliberal discourse created by the local elites, echoing the famous ‘capitalism without capitalists’ of Gil Eyal, Iván Szelenyi, and Eleanor Townsley,<sup>10</sup> on the one hand, and the phenomena of displacement and massive coerced labour migration, on the other. It is vital, therefore, to explore how novelists treated massive migration, even though, compared to the amplitude of migration itself (millions of Romanians working and living abroad as unskilled labourers), there are surprisingly few works that address this issue and even fewer that have received wide attention.

### Migration Fiction and Social Reality

As the ‘scarcity of goods’ was replaced by the ‘scarcity of money’, and post-1989 Romania was defined by the ‘unequal distribution not only of wealth, but also of access to money throughout society’,<sup>11</sup> many people turned to the (now accessible) outside world for new income possibilities in the form of seasonal labour. Unsurprisingly, their aspirations drove them westwards, to the neighbouring Hungary and Yugoslavia at first, and then to Germany, Spain, Italy, and the United Kingdom, as the demand for cheap labour in those nations increased.

Financial matters aside, one of the most prevalent arguments celebrating the migration into a foreign workforce was the claim they would, upon their return to Romania, ‘democratize’ and ‘civilize’ – essentially ‘colonize’ – their work market, slowly guiding it towards entrepreneurship, innovation, active competitiveness, and so on, whilst simultaneously instil in their peers a – presumably superior – western work ethic that would eventually eliminate ‘communist’ practices such as petty theft from the workplace, generalized absenteeism, and overall unproductiveness. It was thought that working abroad would compel the returning workers to start their own businesses, investing their foreign income to spur the growth of the local economy so that it could reach western levels. As Swanie Potot argued:

<sup>9</sup>Slavoj Žižek, ‘Eastern European Liberalism and its Discontents’, *New German Critique* 57 (1992): 25.

<sup>10</sup>Gil Eyal, Iván Szelenyi, and Eleanor Townsley, *Making Capitalism without Capitalists: Class Formation and Elite Struggles in Post-communist Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1998).

<sup>11</sup>Liviu Chelcea, ‘Informal Credit, Money and Time in the Romanian Countryside’, in *Fourth Nordic Conference on the Anthropology of Post-Socialism*, Copenhagen (2002).

Throughout their transnational movements, they acquire behaviour, knowledge and skills that are also reinvested in their home regions. In doing so, far from the projects of international cooperation or the programmes of cultural exchange supported by the ministries, the migrant networks promote a European standard of living which is progressively penetrating the countries that have only very recently joined the EU.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, what started out as a way of optimizing profits within a (presumably) morally neutral, open, and free market, was later reframed as a benefit for Eastern European cultures, which, having been oppressed by the communist state-controlled economy, could now ‘learn’ the capitalist ethos themselves in the west and eventually import it back to their countries of origin in the form of entrepreneurship and a vigorous private sector. Nevertheless, this striving towards a model of ‘imitative capitalism’<sup>13</sup> was an excuse, as the human cost of work migration clearly outweighed any theoretical advantages. Furthermore, the imitative capitalism builds towards a form of ‘labour extractivism’,<sup>14</sup> whereby Western nations ‘extract’ the human resources needed to meet their production demands, and the results of migrant labour abroad (fresh produce, for instance) reach the countries of origin in a paradoxical twist that deepens their dependence and limits their economic growth.

The emergence, cultivation, and trans-generational conservation of informal ties among the migrants did produce a genuine transnational community, networked across lower-earning communities especially from rural areas.<sup>15</sup> The Eastern semi-peripheric dependency<sup>16</sup> provoked a great deal of labour migration (Romania and Bulgaria, for instance, are some of the largest exporters of manual labour in Europe and the world, with 5 million Romanian workers active on the labour market of other countries, from a total population of 19.5 million). They are at once ‘dense and extended over long physical distances’ and ‘tend to generate solidarity by virtue of generalized uncertainty’.<sup>17</sup> This does not always mean that the narratives of migration are narratives of solidarity. Many of the empirical insights they offer often acquire condescending undertones in regard to the migrants, which they portray as ‘uncivilized’, held back by ‘communist’ mindsets, or riddled with idiosyncrasies that are inevitably psychoanalysed by invoking ‘communist legacies’.<sup>18</sup> With Romania’s integration into the European Union, the process of seasonal work was superficially regulated, with each host country implementing, at least in theory, a set of coherent legislations regarding foreign labour. Yet, this

<sup>12</sup>Swanie Potot, ‘Transitioning Strategies of Economic Survival: Romanian Migration during the Transition Process’, in Richard Black, Godfried Engbersen, Marek Okólski, and Cristina Panțiru (eds.), *A Continent Moving West? EU Enlargement and Labour Migration from Central and Eastern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 266.

<sup>13</sup>Raúl Prebisch, ‘A Critique of Peripheral Capitalism’, *CEPAL Review* 1 (1976): 11.

<sup>14</sup>Although the concept is preponderantly employed in regard to large-scale mining and forestry operations in Latin America, it can be broadened to cover other types of resources as well, including labour. For a more nuanced debate on extractivism see John O. Browder, ‘The Limits of Extractivism’, *BioScience* 42 (1992): 174–82.

<sup>15</sup>See Dumitru Sandu, ‘Emerging Transnational Migration from Romanian Villages’, *Current Sociology* 53 (2005): 555–82.

<sup>16</sup>We use the term proposed by Cornel Ban for the analysis of Romanian economy, following Immanuel Wallerstein’s envision of world system analysis. See Cornel Ban, *Dependentă și dezvoltare: Economia politică a capitalismului românesc* (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2014).

<sup>17</sup>Alejandro Portes, ‘Globalization from below: the Rise of Transnational Communities’, in Don Kalb, Marco van der Land, Richard Staring, Bart van Steenberg, and Nico Wilterdink (eds.), *The Ends of Globalization: Bringing Society Back In* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 260–1.

<sup>18</sup>Some recent documentation projects, among which *Pride and Concrete* can be regarded as the most visible, actually document the irrational opulence of returning émigrés, who build imposing houses in their native country. Oftentimes, this phenomenon is interpreted as compensation for the restrictions in the accumulation of private property during communist. See <http://www.prideandconcrete.com/>.

labour is still subject to exploitation, and, as stated in a recent article on this matter, ‘Europe’s food supply chains would fall apart without workers from eastern Europe’.<sup>19</sup> As Cornel Ban showed in *Ruling Ideas: How Global Neoliberalism Goes Local*, the case of Romania can be regarded as a form of ‘disembedded neoliberalism’,<sup>20</sup> in which the main policy was that the state should, ideally, intervene as little as possible in the market. This led to the fact that migration from Romania was proportionally larger than from any other country in the EU. Furthermore, between 2000 and 2015, Romania ranked second in the world by percentage growth in the number of emigrants, right after war-torn Syria.<sup>21</sup>

For most Romanian workers prepared to leave their home, language,<sup>22</sup> and the comfort of a familiar milieu, working abroad was not motivated by a wish to accumulate vast amounts of wealth, but rather by the aspiration towards a long-yearned, constantly denied, yet relatively normalized middle-class standard of living.<sup>23</sup> They did not follow a logic of enrichment, but of alignment to the lifestyles displayed by the strata of Romanian society whose transition from a socialist to a capitalist system was somehow successful, especially as it was precisely this lifestyle which was relentlessly advertised as ‘the norm’ in, for example, TV shows, newspaper advertisements, news programmes, and even political discourse. This norm always had a strong anti-communist background, as underdevelopment, far from being objectively analysed and placed in a global context, was constantly presented as a failure of the socialist system – therefore a local or regional issue at most –, so that the only way out of underdevelopment was thought to be labour migration. Failing to live up to the unrealistic middle-class ideal in their countries of origin (which was presented as not only desirable but also easily attainable) meant that the destitute and underprivileged were riddled with guilt rather than with anger: for the vast majority of those who had hoped for a better life after communism and for their offspring, the revolution did not precipitate this envisioned improvement.

This is why post-1989 fiction was the breeding ground for a peculiar paradox: the lack of a more nuanced anti-communism was often followed by the disappointment of being condemned to the menial labour that the migrants were forced to perform abroad. We therefore witness the emergence of a sort of anti-capitalist anti-communism, which cannot find a proper expression, given the lack of in-depth understanding of the centre-periphery relationship. This is visible in several novels that describe the migration process both before and after 1989, such as Cătălin Dorian Florescu’s 2016 *Vremea minunilor* (*Wunderzeit*). Albeit constructed around a bold anti-communist stance, the novel paradoxically also bears witness to problems that come from adapting to life and work in the United States. The 10-year-old narrator and his father escape to Italy under the pretext of seeking medical care for the child’s rare illness, Charcot-Marie. Afterwards, they travel to America, where the narrator receives medical treatment and his father washes dishes for a living. America is not what they had imagined:

<sup>19</sup>Valer Simion Cosma, Cornel Ban, and Daniela Gabor, ‘The Human Cost of Fresh Food: Romanian Workers and Germany’s Food Supply Chains’, *Review of Agrarian Studies* 10 (2020).

<sup>20</sup>Cornel Ban, *Ruling Ideas: How Global Neoliberalism Goes Local* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 5.

<sup>21</sup>Nica and Moraru, ‘Diaspora’, 410.

<sup>22</sup>Hanna Han recently discussed this aspect in relation to this phenomenon in Bessarabian migration fiction. See Hanna Han, ‘Multilingvismul și periferia: o analiză a romanului basarabean post-sovietic’, *Transilvania* 5–6 (2023): 74–81.

<sup>23</sup>Polina Manolova, ‘“Going to the West Is My Last Chance to Get a Normal Life”: Bulgarian Would-Be Migrants’ Imaginings of Life in the UK’, *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 8 (2019): 61–83.

At night, in his bed, father started whispering to himself that he can't take it anymore, that America is not much better than home, lunatics here, lunatics there, it's all the same, but the lunatics here all had a gun. Instead of getting used to it, we'd better head back home.<sup>24</sup>

Likewise, in Saša Stanišić's autobiographical novel *Herkunft* (2019), emigration to the West, this time to Germany, follows the outbreak of the Bosnian war; the protagonist's mother, a former political studies professor, is forced to work in a laundry, whereas his father, an economist, finds work on a construction site:

Contrary to what school did to me, work pushed my parents out towards the outer borders of the social and physically sustainable life. My father spent his time on construction sites in Ludwigshafen and in Brandenburg province. He ruined his back and was home only over the weekends. Mother died a thousand blazing deaths in the laundry. As a non-German woman, even worse so, from the Balkans, she was on the lowest end of the labour hierarchy, and nobody made it a secret to her.<sup>25</sup>

Employing cheap seasonal workers or – in the case of skilled labour – subcontracting the foreign intelligentsia to perform tasks deemed too menial/humiliating/hard/tedious for the Western workforce has gained so much traction precisely because, cynically, it still represents a form of social mobility for the workers involved and would not exist without their availability and willingness to perform them. What often happens, in fact, is that the unskilled labourers abroad are despised by the skilled labourers at home, although they are both part of the social dumping mechanism. In short, for unskilled labour, social dumping is a story of transnational exploitation (because the same amount of work, humiliation, and effort is involved in performing the demeaning, low-skilled tasks at home, the wage being the only significant difference), although recent studies have often seen 'a new cosmopolitan and post-national condition emerging'.<sup>26</sup> Members of the transnational intelligentsia performing skilled labour at home or abroad, on the other hand, reframe social dumping as social mobility.

In Romanian novels, the émigré's voice is frequently imbued with a false consciousness when addressing his own condition, which stems from a bitter disappointment in regard to the wasted potential of his émigré peers. As Manuela Boatcă, echoing Immanuel Wallerstein, argues, Romanian communism can be seen as 'a strategy used by the semiperiphery in order to resist economic decline that would transform it into a periphery, without, however, ceasing to be part of the global capitalist system',<sup>27</sup> but the ideological reading of the migrants' narrative voice changes these rules. In this case, the short story collection *Căpșunarii* (The Strawberry Pickers, 2013) by Dani Rockoff<sup>28</sup> and the quasi-epistolary novel *Cireșe amare* (Sour Cherries, 2014) by Liliana Nechita<sup>29</sup> have critical relevance precisely because the depiction of direct migrant experience brings issues about the systemic understanding of migration itself to the foreground. Focusing on seasonal work and homecare in Spain and Italy, the critical reception of the two works generally failed to notice and generate a debate on these themes. Nevertheless, they were

<sup>24</sup>Cătălin Dorian Florescu, *Vremea minunilor* (Iași: Polirom, 2005), 275.

<sup>25</sup>Saša Stanišić, *Herkunft* (Munich: Luchterhand, 2019), 235.

<sup>26</sup>Caren Irr, 'When the Migrant's Perspective Takes Center Stage', *English Language Notes* 58 (2020): 182–83.

<sup>27</sup>Manuela Boatcă, *Laboratoare ale modernității: Europa de Est și America Latină în corelație* (Laboratories of Modernity: Eastern Europe and Latin America in Correlation) (Cluj-Napoca: Idea, 2021).

<sup>28</sup>Dani Rockoff, *Căpșunarii* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2013).

<sup>29</sup>Liliana Nechita, *Cireșe amare* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2014).



perceptively highlighted by Alex Cistelean, who argues for an essential distinction between the two novels:

[...] as opposed to Dani Rockoff's *Căpșunarii*, with an overwhelming emphasis on the narrator's inner voice and desire to underline the difference in class, culture, or status from his émigré peers rather than the solidarity entailed by the same underprivileged condition, Liliana Nechita's book betrays a spontaneous compassion towards the other migrants, as well as an empathic comprehension of this massive phenomenon of displacement and 'lumpenproletarian-ization' that work-related migration today represents ('all the emigrants, regardless of country of origin ... possess a common past').<sup>30</sup>

Although Cistelean criticizes 'the lyricism' of these novels, he notes the 'advantage of revealing certain psychological mechanisms and subjective experiences inherent to migration, which are less addressed in the statistics and the sociological research on the phenomenon'. Cistelean's interpretation further discusses the immigrant's invisibility abroad when compared to his enhanced visibility at home:

Prior to being a way to flee poverty, migration is thus an escape from the suffocating moral code of the community [...]. Even in these instances – wherein the emigrant succeeds in regularly sending the necessary money to ensure the subsistence of the family – the apparent success is a mere effect of partial visibility: what seems a success from afar is experienced first-hand as continuous defeat, as an endless succession of failures and daily humiliation.<sup>31</sup>

The central paradox of literary representations of immigrant work is, from this standpoint, the impossibility of 'translating the first-hand experience of injustice into a coherent perspective on society or at least into a clear overview of the causes and social mechanisms responsible for the immigrant's condition'.<sup>32</sup> This means that, from the standpoint of Liliana Nechita's narrator, social issues are nearly always issues with *civilization* or *mindset* rather than systemic issues, often betraying a clear lack of empathy for the lower classes:

I don't understand why they're being allowed to sleep here on the ground. It's clear that those who don't work cannot make the rent. They're then homeless and steal. I'm not saying they should demolish their makeshift cardboard and plastic huts, but they could at least ask them what they do for a living, where they work, etc'.<sup>33</sup>

A different emphasis is evident in Mihai Buzea's 2017 *Gastarbeiter*, where a systemic understanding of migration precedes the narrator's migration to London, who offers a theoretical meditation on the reasons for leaving Romania. The narrator is a journalist and PhD candidate in anthropology attempting to write his thesis on the topic of migration and seasonal labour under the coordination of professor Vintilă Mihăilescu. The analytical objectivity granted by this approach confers the narrative the guise of scientific analysis, so that the anthropological inquiry precedes and guides the empirical investigation, creating the impression that everything taking place in the world of labour migration is *already understood*. This narrative strategy explains the novel's feeling of *wonder* in regard to capitalist heterotopia. In the world of migration, the 'combined and

<sup>30</sup>Alex Cistelean, 'Cireșe amare și gogoși dulci', *CriticAtac* (February 9, 2015). See also Alex Cistelean, *De la stânga la stânga. Lecturi critice în câmpul progresist* (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2019).

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Nechita, *Cireșe*, 134.

uneven' is experienced at the same time as it is constructed, which helps explain the lack of broader social perspectives that would eschew the brutal discourses prevalent throughout the country of origin: 'strawberry pickers', 'bums', 'parvenus', etc. The exceptions, as in Buzea's case, actually confirm this perspective, whereby the sensation that everything can be understood through the common differences in the language of the transitional period becomes a constant message underpinning the narratives. So that the characters – the workers – acquire agency solely through not conforming to the standard expectations regarding status and mindset they have traditionally been ascribed:

There was a rift between us, a rift I couldn't assign a name to. They were different from one another and had something in common, something I lacked, but I couldn't assign a name to this lack, I could only approach it timidly from afar: they were dexterous, I was clumsy; they were jolly, I was sad; they were young, I was old; they loved communism, I loathed it. This is what dumbfounded me: where the hell did their love come from, since they were all born after ... ?!<sup>34</sup>

We have to pause to remark on the clear distinction between the unskilled labourers performing seasonal work – poorly paid, poorly housed, mistreated, and sometimes even stripped of their rights in countries whose language they do not speak and whose laws they do not know<sup>35</sup> – and the preponderantly young, usually skilled migrants studying, travelling, and ultimately working abroad for longer periods of time and performing better-paying, more secure jobs in more technical and/or more 'intellectual' fields. Between these two classes, there is an entire array of different forms of labour and migration, a sort of narrative middle-class of migration; for instance, caregivers acquiring a superior social standing from that they had had in their country of origin (the caregivers from Western Europe, such as in Liliana Nechita's novel) or private companies working in the private and public sector, such as in Mihai Buzea's novel. But let us consider these two extremes: the menial labour migration and the *brain drain*. Whereas the narrative built by the former is illustrative of levels of inequality so demeaning that the only possible way of escaping it is through seasonal migration – with all things entailed: compromising one's health, separation from one's family, the risk of being exploited, not paid in full, sent back home, and so on –, the latter is frequently framed as the success story of an aspiring generation having the courage and skills to escape a country so corrupted by the wrong-doings of communism that it cannot appreciate it at face value, indeed, that it doesn't deserve it. In the first case, migration is a matter of survival or an attempt to alleviate extreme poverty, a phenomenon which has largely been overlooked in literature. Novels such as Adrian Schiop's 2007 *zero grade Kelvin* (zero degrees Kelvin), Liliana Nechita's 2014 *Cireșe amare*, and Mihai Buzea's 2017 *Gastarbeiter* therefore become perspectives on migration rather than documented accounts of it.<sup>36</sup> These are novels wherein the narrative voice is responsible for delivering a first-hand empirical account of the realities of the migrants' working conditions (in

<sup>34</sup>Mihai Buzea, *Gastarbeit* (Iași: Polirom, 2017), 324.

<sup>35</sup>See Costi Rogozanu and Daniela Gabor, 'Are Western Europe's Food Supplies Worth More than East European Workers' Health', *The Guardian* 16 (2020).

<sup>36</sup>Mihai Iovănel counts more in his *History: Adrian Schiop, zero grade Kelvin* (2009), Liviu Birsan, *Asylant* (2009), Albert V. Cătănuș, *El sueño español – jurnal de căpșunar* (2010), Cornel Bălan, *Escroc SRL* (Swindler LLC) (2013), Dani Rockhoff, *Căpșunarii* (2013), Dan Lungu, *Fetița care se juca de-a Dumnezeu* (2014), Mihai Buzea, *Gastarbeiter* (2017), Lilia Bicec-Zanardelli, *Testamentul necitit. Scrisorile unei mame plecate la muncă în Occident* (2018).

agriculture and construction work, among others), but in which explaining migration plays a crucial role. The second entails social mobility proper: in an open, borderless economy, travelling abroad in order to find work is nothing more than exploring the realm of opportunities the globalized world has to offer. Several contemporary narratives are built around this second perspective, most of them set in the intellectual diaspora, such as Ioana Baetica's 2011 *Imigranții* (The Immigrants). In addition to these narratives, there are also depictions of work abroad through the eyes of offspring whom the emigrants were forced to leave behind; most of them are sentimental fictionalizations of widely known realities,<sup>37</sup> such as *Kinderland*, by Liliana Corobca (2013), or *Fetița care se juca de-a Dumnezeu* (The Little Girl Who Played at Being God), by Dan Lungu (2014). This is why, considering the Romanian rendition of migration literature, one can easily fall into a methodological trap stemming from the apparent diversity of forms of migration, which makes it impossible to reach general conclusions on the phenomenon. Because of this, far from discussing the cosmopolitan migration, whereby working abroad is conditioned simply by the aspiration towards a better life, we will attempt to especially focus on the importance of representing the heterotopias where migration is an inescapable *fatality* when faced with Eastern European increasing inequality and the dissolution of any form of social utopia.

Of course, it would be unjust to blame the *only* documented literary accounts of this phenomenon for their *subjective insights*, since precisely this subjectivity allows for the experience of migration to become *comprehensible*. Yet, our suggestion is that, when faced with capitalist heterotopia, wherein the migrant cohabitates with the social actors from the centre within a *combined and uneven* paradigm, an important step would be, once the documentary literature is rehabilitated in regard to testimonial literature, recording these voices before orchestrating them in a symphony that is, in its turn, heterotopic. We consider the confessions of Adrian Schiop, one of the most renowned Romanian autofiction authors, to be highly relevant. His novels document the issue of labour-related migration in his 2007 *zero grade Kelvin*, as well as the internal migration from Bucharest's centre to one of its notorious peripheral neighbourhoods, Ferentari, in his 2013 novel *Soldații* (The Soldiers). Schiop admits that his interest for the social and economic implications of capitalist heterotopia stemmed especially from his contact to local critical theory:

I began writing *Soldații* after hanging out and drinking with a bunch of sociologists and coming into contact with the old-school Left around magazine *CriticAtac*. Up until then, I wasn't interested in where my characters came from, the context shaping them, what their mums and dads did for a living. Starting with *Soldații*, everything changed: what your mum and your dad were and the milieu you grew up in is darn important, this shapes you more than religious revelation of reading Kant.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup>See Alina Botezat and Friedhelm Pfeiffer, 'The Impact of Parental Labour Migration on Left-behind Children's Educational and Psychosocial Outcomes: Evidence from Romania', *Population, Space and Place* 26 (2019); Maria-Carmen Pantea, 'Grandmothers as Main Caregivers in the Context of Parental Migration', *European Journal of Social Work* 15 (2012): 63–80.

<sup>38</sup>Adrian Schiop, interview by Vasile Ernu. See Costi Rogozanu, 'Literatura anti-aspirațională. Greaua renaștere a "socialulului"', *Vatra* 5–6 (2021): 72–6. Schiop further declares: 'Regarding precarity and periphery, things started to come together because I was living in Ferentari and was surrounded by real people – who, in their position as *others*, as *alterity* of mine, seemed more interesting, even more so since their lives had a sort of excitement, risk, existential stakes – in contrast to the lives of my friends: their desk jobs, talking politics when going out at a pub, smoking a joint at home to fall asleep easier'.

The most relevant case-study we currently are aware of in contemporary literature stems from drama, through Gianina Cărbunariu's scripts, who in *Work in Progress* and *Do You Speak Silence?/ Sprechen Sie Schweigen?* first puts forward a *methodology* for the artistic representation of migration before building an actual perspective of it. The script of *Work in Progress* entailed conducting more than 100 interviews with Eastern European workers in Italy (ranging from hotel employees to carers and seasonal workers) and even with their employers (therefore delivering an account of advanced forms of racism or condescendence in regard to the migrants).<sup>39</sup> Her breakthrough in representing migration fiction, in addition to the *documented realism* itself, was made especially through documenting a 6-month-long strike in Castelfrigo, where workers from Albania, Ghana, China, etc. united, irrespective of the language barriers they faced, to protest against the factory's working conditions.<sup>40</sup>

### Capitalist Realism, Post-Socialist Realism, Documentary Realism

What does Eastern-European realist fiction actually mean after 1989? Following this insight into the issue of contemporary work-related displacement, our investigation focuses on the literary representation of these types of labour and the patterns of migration each of them involves. Contemporary Romanian and Eastern-European literatures are especially marked by autofiction, occasioned primarily by testimonial literature that seeks to satisfy the anti-communist expectations of the new reading public, as well as by the social realities of the new era (migration, transnational communities, transnational labour and its consequences: family dissolution, financial predicaments). Despite these very urgent social realities, literature seems to have fallen behind, unable to keep up. Before solving contemporary issues, Eastern-European nations felt compelled to tackle past issues: the communist closing of the borders and the ensuing limited access to western cultural products have been *more important* for post-communist literature than the present problems. While undergoing a shift from the state-sponsored culture to the free market and capitalist development, often viewed as 'capitalism without capitalists', where local intellectual elites pursued a capitalist agenda with no underlying capitalist reality, anti-communism was more of a mediator of western *aspirations* than of actual realities. Anti-communism, so as to avoid being replaced by hypothetical rehabilitations/ revisions of socialism following the revolution and to become the dominant ideology, generally chose to depict social mobility instead of coerced mobility and social dumping. As it becomes clear, post-communist literature was part of a larger 'project' of imposing an anti-communist ethos, which, in Rory Archer and Goran Musić's terms, had more to do with the dissolution of the 'working class' concept itself:

The dominant historiographical framings after 1989 were willing to recognize workers' struggles only if they could offer credence to the master narratives of national resistance to communism. Otherwise, the working class was deemed an outdated concept, a subject of the party-state, holding little analytical value at the dawn of unbridled consumerism,

<sup>39</sup>Gianina Cărbunariu, *Work in Progress* (Rome: Luca Sossella Editore, 2018).

<sup>40</sup>See also Thea Dellavalle, 'Work in Progress di Gianina Cărbunariu', *Mimesis Journal* 7 (2018). For an account of labour in Romanian cinema see Christian Ferencz Flatz, 'Two Forms of Precarity in Romanian (and Bulgarian) Cinema', in Elisa Cuter, Guido Kirsten and Hanna Prenzel (eds.), *Precarity in European Film: Depictions and Discourses* (Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2022), 143–60.

individualization, and politics based on national identity. Such perspectives rarely attributed agency to workers, while fetishizing a yet to be constituted middle class that David Ost terms ‘a vague concept signalling the prosperity and stability promised, but far from realized, by the post-communist project’.<sup>41</sup>

What we have tried to show is that the most important projects of ‘attributing agency to workers’ in contemporary literature came, surprisingly, not only through autofiction novels, but through drama and theatre, where the documentation process involved extensive field research in order to obtain a ‘proper’ insight into the lives of the workers themselves. Of course, several novels depict the problems of migration, but mainly through an anti-communist ethos that fails to acknowledge the issues arisen during post-communism. As Adriana Stan recently pointed out,

what was striking in such cases of self-fiction [i.e., autofiction] was that the crude narcissism they displayed was analogical to – rather than critical of – the economic and political formation of the post-1989 neoliberalism, whose underlying myths of individuation and free choice were reinforced by the rising consumerism.<sup>42</sup>

Meaning that the ‘lost social utopia’ was rendered invisible within the narratives of migration, enforcing a civilizing perspective of dis-embedded neoliberalism.

As Mihai Iovănel and Adriana Stan have recently coined the terms in Romanian literary criticism and theory, Romanian post-communist literature over the past 20 years can be seen either as an instance of ‘capitalist realism’<sup>43</sup> or as ‘post-socialist realism’.<sup>44</sup> Both terms make a voluntary connection between post-communist fiction and socialist realist fiction, although it is clear that the comparison needs further explanations. As Mihai Iovănel claims, ‘capitalist realism’ is the concept that perfectly represents the new narrative ideology within the contemporary novel; capitalism itself can be held accountable for its varied renditions in Romanian literature and across the national literatures of Eastern Europe, since narrative diversity mirrors

the diversification of life during the 2000s, when Romania’s assimilation into global capitalism started to finally take place through an increase in the population’s purchasing power. Capitalist realism is not reducible to a stylistic, rhetorical, or narrative set of tools, but can be identified through an ideological-philosophical relaxation. Communism had ceased to be the Alfa and Omega and had ceased to be the reference point of every other experience (albeit still being relevant), transforming into a secondary reference, mitigated by the neoliberal framework.<sup>45</sup>

Iovănel’s observation that communism ceases to be an obsession of contemporary writers should raise many questions, since Iovănel himself claimed that ‘the most resounding failure of post-communist literature is its failure to provide a convincing “novel of Romanian communism”, a need repeatedly emphasized by literary criticism’.<sup>46</sup> This much expected ‘novel of Romanian communism’ was, in fact, the manifestation of

<sup>41</sup>Rory Archer and Goran Musić, ‘New Perspectives on East European Labor History: An Introduction’, *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 17 (2020): 19–29.

<sup>42</sup>Adriana Stan, ‘Post-Socialist Realism. Authenticity and Political Conscience in the Romanian Literature of the 2000s’, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 62 (2021): 5.

<sup>43</sup>See Iovănel, *Istoria*, 408–36.

<sup>44</sup>See Stan, ‘Post-Socialist Realism’.

<sup>45</sup>Iovănel, *Istoria*, 409.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 291.

a strong anti-communist impetus,<sup>47</sup> the projection of an unrecognized but all too present need for literature to condemn communism ‘once and for all’ (along the lines of the most important *hardcore* anti-communist public intellectuals of the ‘90s and 2000s). And, as Iovănel himself argues, the general tone and nature of the anti-communist novel is highly metaphorical/allegorical. This marks a further elitist turn: deemed too ordinary to find literary representation, reality and realistic portrayals are set aside, whereas communism’s evil nature is often emphasized by comparing it to the Devil himself, in an attempt to raise the stake of political narratives following the diasporic intellectual tradition.

Iovănel puts forward three categories of the post-communist novel, building on the overarching concept of capitalist realism: postmodern metafiction, the petty bourgeois realism, and the minimalist autobiographical writing. The distinction between the latter two is significant in defining a contemporary ‘realism’, precisely because the first functioned mostly in an allegorical key.<sup>48</sup> The last two had to address two very important phenomena: capitalist heterotopia and lost social utopia. The petty bourgeois realism uses *capitalist heterotopia* in order to depict the social problems of the transitional period while framing them as stemming from communism. It is fundamentally anti-communist because it almost exclusively focuses on showing that the capitalist dream is failing because of a communist remnant deeply lodged in the social fabric, corrupting it much like a spectre. The allegations range from personal idiosyncrasies like in Dan Lungu’s 2007 *Sunt o babă comunistă!* (I’m an Old Commie!)<sup>49</sup> – where the main character is ridiculed for breeding nostalgia for the old regime, in contrast to her daughter, a successful émigré in Canada, who embraces the capitalistic ethos – to accusations of systemic ‘communism’. It is what drives Iovănel to conclude that ‘the anti-communist novel lacks materiality’ (i.e. materialism), and that ‘its world is populated by puppets’.<sup>50</sup> This observation was made in 2007 by Romanian literary critic Andrei Terian as well, who saw in Dan Lungu’s novel a sort of *reversed socialist realism*: schematic, imposing its thesis through highly ideologized narratives.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, the lost social utopia is mocked as a delusion of communist nostalgias, while the existence of an initial social utopia is strongly denied as its depiction is used solely to criticize the former regime.<sup>52</sup> The petty bourgeois realism did not address the issue raised by Eastern critical theory with increasing frequency today, namely the destruction of the social fabric through migration, exploitation, social dumping, coercion, and so on.

<sup>47</sup>See how Andrei Terian describes the general metanarratives over the communist legacy in Romanian cultural milieus in Andrei Terian, ‘Representing Romanian Communism: Evolutionary Models and Metanarrative Scenarios’, in Ștefan Baghiu, Ovio Olaru, and Andrei Terian (eds.), *Beyond the Iron Curtain: Revisiting the Literary System of Communist Romania* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021), 23–42.

<sup>48</sup>Here we have a generational battle as well, as Adriana Stan points out: ‘As a proletarianized generation of writers, who struggled between various jobs to make ends meet in Bucharest, or still lived as poor students on their parents’ money, millennials felt righteously angered at their older generation peers. They had a particular disdain for their immediate predecessors, the postmodern writers, who were the last to capture institutional positions in the literary system after 1989. Generational antagonism explains why millennial realism was programmatically shaped as a form of anti-literature, and rejected the estheticism with which the postmodernism of the 1980s was identified. Taking this dispute beyond the theoretical realm, millennials accused their postmodern peers of carrying on a type of poetics that remained tone-deaf to the social realities of post-communism’ – Stan, ‘Post-Socialist Realism’, 7.

<sup>49</sup>Dan Lungu, *Sunt o babă comunistă!* (Iași: Polirom, 2007).

<sup>50</sup>Iovănel, *Istoria*, 291.

<sup>51</sup>Andrei Terian, ‘Desfășurarea’ (The Development), *Cultura* 67 (2007): 10.

<sup>52</sup>See how Teodora Dumitru describes contemporary Romanian fiction and poetry in relation to living costs and rents in Teodora Dumitru, ‘Trauma locuirii ca traumă identitară în literatura română a deceniilor 2010–2020. Dușescu, Branște, Novac’, *Transilvania* 7 (2023): 36–43.

Minimalist autofiction, generally the product of acknowledging a critical moment during the transitional period of the 1990s (and enacted by young people belonging to increasingly fragile social classes falling just outside the urban environment, ostracized and precarious), sought to explore the contents that were overlooked during the process of capitalist expansion. However, given that it was highly autobiographical, the output of this type of literature remained extremely subjective and oftentimes exotic due to its close personal engagement in the depicted events. This is the fundamental contradiction of the early 2000s, that the type of novelistic form best suited to observe and address the issues of the transitional period is flawed by a highly subjective outlook and by the absence of down-to-earth, empirical observations that render it unusable in sociological investigations. The best example here is Adrian Schiop's 2007 *zero grade kelvin*, where the documentation of work emigration in New Zealand is obscured by the narrator's houellebecquian drive. The absence of a coherent class consciousness among the groups of authors active during the early 2000s owes in equal measure to the socio-economic context and to the capitalist ethos that had permeated their ranks and instilled a desire to distinguish themselves from their peers. So here we are: the *petit bourgeois* novel tackles reality from the standpoint of the 'creator' of realities, very often embracing neoliberal discourse, and the self-biographical minimalism tackles reality from the standpoint of the 'subject' of reality, very often forcing a certain unnatural agency on the emigrants. None, though, through documenting the plural agency itself.

Adriana Stan builds on Escude's concept of *peripheral realism* in order to correlate 'the aesthetics of post-postmodernism within the world-system economic and cultural dependencies that define post-communism'. She further argues that

Romanian millennial realism could address capitalism and the striking inequities brought by its post-communist establishment, only by incorporating typically capitalist ideologemes of subjectivity. As such, in post-communist literary realism, anti-capitalism overlapped with radical individualism, with the result that the latter weakened the critical edge of the former. One decade after the fall of communism, the capitalist system was not only too recently established to allow a reflexive distance but could hardly be criticized from a (semi)peripheral position.<sup>53</sup>

For Stan, Mark Fisher's concept of 'capitalist realism'<sup>54</sup> 'is not sufficient to account for the world-picture behind post-communist literary realism either'.<sup>55</sup> We argue, along the lines of the two critics, that both *capitalist realism* and *peripheral realism* are not suited to tackle such issues in contemporary peripheral literatures when it comes to narrative agency. In short, this is due to the complex process through which narrating migration takes away the agency of workers in fiction and, at the same time, imposes an anti-communist ethos where a systematic analysis of lost social utopias might be useful. We would like to observe, in return, the emergence of a 'documented realism', which

<sup>53</sup>Stan, 'Post-Socialist Realism', 5.

<sup>54</sup>See Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009).

<sup>55</sup>Ibid. See also Stan's further arguments: 'it is true that, in post-communist East-Central Europe, capitalism was advertised as the single, necessary direction for the future, in a manner that would discourage the capacities of any contemporary discourse to comment upon the structures of capital'; 'the alternative to capitalism, which Western societies had lost by the end of the 1980s, could still be imagined in post-communist cultures, albeit only through the (traumatic or nostalgic) memory of communism'. For a discussion on the representation of these shortcomings of the representation of the communist period in contemporary Romanian fiction see Bogdan Contea, 'Romanul comunismului românesc înainte și după Istoria lui Mihai Iovănel', *Transilvania* 5–6 (2023): 65–73.

developed its methods throughout documentaries and autofiction but managed to stay clear of the subjective nature of storytelling through artistic depiction of documented realities. This phenomenon was possible through the rise of progressive Romanian think tanks, to which authors such as Adrian Schiop, Lavinia Braniște, or Bogdan Coșa have declared their unwavering support. This is why the novels in which they depict *internal migration* and which offer a personal insight into social dumping (Bucharest's underdeveloped neighbourhoods, the former industrial small towns ignored by urban development after the revolution, the entire rural setting) have created, in addition to the autofictional narrative voice, a genuine social consciousness which, unlike the one from novels tackling external migration, acquired *materiality* through the use of critical theory. The birth of a leftist critical discourse led to an increased interest in *documented realism*, which in turn started, during the last decade, to replace the anti-communist and neoliberal gaze over the capitalist heterotopia – marked by inefficiency – with a critical gaze of the lost social utopia – marked by inequality. As Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge have recently summarized, the concept of *capitalist realism*, ever since Mark Fisher's famous 2009 study, is 'a general ideological formation in which capitalism is the most real of our horizons, the market-dominant present that forms the limits of our imaginaries'.<sup>56</sup> Starting from the Romanian case, we can summarize by saying that the heterotopias of capitalism in post-communism convey two main points of view: the novels featuring migration and work abroad are seen in this article as more or less subtle pleas for capitalism and anti-communist perspectives; the novels of internal migration in post-communist societies (from city centres to peripheries/towns/villages) as more or less subtle pleas for New Left approaches and against capitalist entrenchment. The former mainly describe post-communist landscapes with a very distinctive political insight, one in which the main element blocking social development is the legacy of communism in Eastern European societies and the everlasting communist mentalities. This owed especially to the emigrants' perspective, whose voice *imposed* the emigrant agency rather than *expose it for* what it actually is: a sociohistorical process anchored in the harsh realities of centre-periphery imbalances. The latter novels of internal migration see the post-communist heterotopia more as a result of the transition itself, pleading for a more articulate social state. While the description of the Eastern European capitalist society through novels discussing work-related migration has become, during the past decades, an indictment of communism and, generally, a plea for a 'better' capitalist development, the ones discussing internal migration sought to retrieve a lost social utopia, albeit without a communist nostalgia, which is preponderantly reserved for scoffing the presumably retrograde 'old communist hags'. In addition, there are a few documented cases of labour displacement and migration, as seen in the works of directors such as Gianina Cărbunariu or David Schwarz, which raise some important questions about documentary realism and revealing a desire to map out the exploitation of centre-periphery dynamics through non-fictional methods. This means that both interrogating capitalist realism, as well as the emergence of post-socialist realism are highly dependable on contemporary literature's availability to adopt a *documented realism* that would interrogate capitalist heterotopia before embracing or exoticizing it.

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<sup>56</sup>Alison Shonkwiler, Leigh Claire La Berge, eds., *Reading Capitalist Realism* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 2.



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