

Coal power

Class, fetishism, memory, and disjuncture in Romania's Jiu Valley and Appalachian West Virginia

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ABSTRACT: This essay compares the social disjuncture of coal's decline in Romania's Jiu Valley and southern West Virginia/Appalachia. In both regions coal is fetishized, concentrating belief and creating a paradigm of meaning. But when fetishes lose power, social dislocation results. Coal's decline is often thought to produce common conditions in former coal regions. However, we suggest four factors shape regional variation: 1) political economy of class and industrial control; 2) state power over mining; 3) extent and diversity of non-governmental organizations related to the industrial control system; and 4) gender activism, emerging from political economy. We examine social conditions, coal memory, and nostalgia related to the above. In the Jiu Valley, there is a weakening of organization, coal nostalgia, as well as decline in coal-related disjuncture with existing conflict now largely a province of regional elites. In West Virginia, however, a weak state, active organizational environment, and women's activism produce conflict between coal supporters and detractors. These circumstances also influence the regions' futures. Jiu Valley people are protected by state intervention, but this weakens class identity and the intensity of change efforts. In Appalachia the tensioned organizational environment perpetuates conflict but creates an intensity toward the future.

KEYWORDS: DEINDUSTRIALIZATION, DECLINE OF COAL, CLASS AND MEMORY, ROMANIA, APPALACHIA.

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Coal's decline: Generalities and particulars

Global energy transformation is gathering speed, fostering major alterations in local, regional, national, and international energy beliefs and practices¹. Not least are declines of coal mining and consumption due to coal's disappearing market (Martin 2015; Parker, Ho 2013; Paterson 2016), environmental costs (Blunden, Arndt 2015; Johansen 2015), and health implications (Epstein *et al.* 2011; Lockwood 2012). Steadily, coal is replaced by natural gas, solar, wind, and hydropower. Yet, coal's decline is uneven. Estimates suggest significant coal consumption for minimally the next four decades (Johansen 2015: 81; World Coal Association 2017). People in some coal-dominated locations are confident of their economic mainstay. Others assume the end of coal. But in all instances debate is joined over coal's decline and its influence on regional conditions.

Coal's decline is analogous to deindustrialization, though foundational and further reaching. Deindustrialization is also fraught with erosion of worker identities, wreaks havoc on entire regions, contributes to social pathology, and generates political struggle over its meaning and remediation (Walley 2015). But coal and its mining are the *ur* features of industrialization, historically preliminary, and enabling the factory system itself. Thus coal's decline is transformative not only to regional industrial structures, but to industrialism's philosophical underpinnings and its core energy system. The reach of the coal industry into every niche of the industrial system also ramifies coal's decline beyond deindustrialization. Each sector of the coal coalition of mining, power, rail transport, equipment manufacture, and banks and other financial institutions, is implicated by coal's decline, though insulated from loss in deindustrialization's shift in manufacturing from high to low wage zones. Furthermore, coal today is condemned in a more generalized way than other aspects of industrialism², even considered responsible for destruction of the planet³. Coal's historically determinative quality and unity with industrialism have produced elaborate mythological and folkloric traditions with intensely contrastive views of the element, its history, and present-day conditions. Miners were thus either heroes or villains in indus-

1. Thanks to Theresa Burriss and two *Anuac* reviewers for comments on an earlier draft.

2. See, for example, the Sierra Club's campaign, *Beyond Coal* (Sierra Club 2018), challenging every aspect of the coal industry. Coal executives, trade organization representatives, and most active miners I interviewed for this paper mentioned the Sierra Club campaign as responsible for today's prejudiced treatment of coal.

3. Even nuclear power escapes the generalized condemnation of coal.

trial imaginaries about tales of strikes and labor violence in mining history (McKay 1987). However, the meaning of coal-related violence such as West Virginia's Mine Wars of the 1920s or the Welsh coal strikes of the late nineteenth century, is differentially interpreted, suggesting either the heroism of labor struggle and the birth of labor syndicalism (Corbin 2015), or the death-throes of an anachronistic system and its sub-human miners⁴.

By virtue of coal's decline, the class interests supporting coal are especially threatened, producing urgent and hyperbolic rhetoric that links coal's decline with vast and unvarying social problems (Coal Industry Advisory Board 2003); unemployment, poverty, malnutrition, and drug abuse. But this essay challenges this. In fact, coal-related dislocation seems more about coal's integration within specific regional systems than its changing fortunes *per se*. I argue four factors influence the connection between coal and social dislocation: 1) the political economy of industrial control and the class relations emerging from that; 2) the nature of state power over the operation and transformation of mining; 3) the extent and diversity of non-governmental organizations supporting or challenging the industrial control system; and 4) the space and practice of gender activism, itself emerging from political economy. Hypothetically, private mining and complicit states allow markets to dictate change in mining while collectively owned systems and interventionist states neutralize dislocation by managing decline. Active organizational environments challenge systems of political economic control and enable alternatives to withering economies. Women activist practices might parry decline at community and household levels. Through such interventions, dislocation might be rendered positive, forcing people into economically more viable futures.

Romania's Jiu Valley in the Western Carpathians and Appalachian southern West Virginia were mono-industrial zones whose experience in coal's fall is broadly similar. As coal employment declined, hardship followed. In the Jiu Valley, the mining industry (*minerit*) that employed slightly over 50,000 people in 1990, today employs about 4,000. Meanwhile in Appalachia, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (2016) suggests the number (of active Appalachian coal miners) fell from 171,000 in 1970 to 27,749 by 2015, trends exacerbated by industry automation, global economic crisis in 2008, low cost natural gas, and expanded renewable energy. Social pathologies also stalk both regions. Suicide, domestic abuse, and family abandonment

4. A Franco-Romanian production of the film, *Prea târziu (Too Late)* by Romanian director, Lucian Pintilie, based on a novel by Răzvan Popescu (1996) is especially representative of this genre, with miners depicted as murderous, naked, near-savages as their industry implodes around them.

became common Jiu Valley experiences (Grecu 2014), while in West Virginia opioid addiction, inter-personal violence, broken families and petty criminality abound⁵.

Nonetheless, significant differences define the zones, not least over class ferment and the differential abilities to continue to “earn a living”, i.e. access or dispossession from wages, which Carbonella and Kasmir (2015: 45) consider a key diagnostic of difference in capitalist economies. The Jiu Valley has shoots of entrepreneurialism and some large lumbering and wood processing enterprises. The European state provides degrees of safety-net protections for disappearing miners, conflict is minimal, but so is energetic high-spiritedness. The state managed decline limits precarity, but other economic options are few, and initiative illusive. In West Virginia, pathologies appear bottomless. Vacant homes and empty towns are common. Poverty, homelessness, and declining life expectancy mark the precariousness of regional life. Conflict over coal, sometimes violent, is everywhere, especially marked by loss of substantial miner wages, with only peasant-like subsistence an option for many (Stoll 2017). But underneath this troubled surface, one sees intense and bubbling change, and widespread challenge to both the *status quo ante* and the region’s coal dependency. These variations thus beg explanation.

Coal fetishism, class, and regional mythologies

The profound and generalized significance of coal in the Jiu Valley and southern West Virginia produces a valuation that operates much like a religious, class-inflected fetish. Fetishes are contradictory, provoking devotional joy or abject fear. Devotees believe fetish powers effect assistance, protection, or malevolent intervention. Venerating fetishes link worshippers and objects of their worship (Pool 1990: 116). Originating in ethnological observations of African religions, Western fetishism is generalized to food, shoes, the future, the nation, flags, political parties, and sports heroes. But the object of devotion obscures the modeling of key relationships, which are often based on structures of domination. For example, June Nash (1979) shows how the “Tio (uncle)” fetish in Bolivian tin mines aids miners’ safety, but only if offered tobacco and liquor. Elsewise Tio threatens and destroys, thus essentially fetishizing the relationship of miners with the foreign interests, at that time controlling the mines and labor.

5. Appalachian and West Virginian degradation is hotly debated. The overwhelming popular narrative celebrates the work of J.D. Vance (2016) and his jaundiced view of regional life. Elizabeth Catte (2018) offers a more nuanced approach that sees Vance’s portrayal of Appalachian struggles as essentialized and ignoring great regional difference.

The efficacy of fetishes articulates disparate elements; weather, wealth, affection, illness, thus creating a «paradigm of thought [...] incorporate(ing) humanity, social relations, and the world at large» (Taussig 1980: 26). Pietz (1985: 8) suggests:

[...] Components appropriated into an identity by a fetish are not only material [...]; desires and beliefs and narrative structures [...] are also fixed [...] by the fetish, whose power is [...] to repeat its originating act of forging an identity of [...] relations between [...] otherwise heterogeneous things.

But when fetishes decline, this provokes fear, uncertainty, and economic, social, political, and emotional conflicts (Böhme 2014: 29). World and world-view crumble as the fetish's paradigm disaggregates, producing dissonance in key relationships; family, community, social organization, natural phenomena. Most critically, failure of the fetish especially lays bare the class relations on which the fetish was predicated.

Marx's insight (1887: 43-5) saw how commodities act as fetishes, masking essential relationships of ownership of productive wealth and labor control. Thus class relationships are first and foremost embodied within the commodity that, through its veneration, obscures those same qualities of ownership and control. Coal as fetish thus frames critical relationships between those owning the land, minerals, and technologies of extraction and the legal principles which vest ownership in them, with human labor power that actually wrests coal from the earth and the social groups, like family and community, that provide the material and emotional sustenance of those who labor. In the Jiu Valley coal especially illustrates the state, that institution enabling the industry and its formative role in Valley culture, and now via policies of the European Union, the industry and the region's dismantling. In Appalachia, meanwhile, the coal fetish is defined by a political economic system supporting private operators, railroads, and power companies, whose practices create oppositional communities and institutions.

Coal fetishism thus celebrates and/or denigrates the material element together with the class institutions, i.e. state or company, that operationalize labor to extract that element and set in motion regional history and settlement (Caudill 1962, Baron 1998) and social unity and fracture (Bell, York 2010; Crăciun, Grecu, Stan 2002). Coal was deemed to create wealth and wellbeing (Bădău 2014; Freese 2003), but now in decline, loss and violence (Galuszka 2012; Kideckel 2008). Coal determines environmental health or lack (Ahern *et al.* 2011; Barbat *et al.* 2012), potentially bringing suffering and death (Erikson 1972; Moraru, Băbuț 2012). Ubiquitous symbols create memory and belief that coal shapes destiny. Coal images are found on buildings and sculpture in Petroșani, Vulcan, and Uricani. Miner graves are marked with pickaxes and mine lamps, but also hammers and sickles in testi-

mony to the socialist state behind the *minerit*. Icons of Saint Barbara, the miners' patron saint, are found at both mine sites and civic spaces. In West Virginia, bumper stickers and flags flaunt Friends of Coal identity. Community toponymy is often coal-based; Coal River, Coalton, Coal City, Coalfields, Montcoal, Stone Coal, names often based on the company operating the local mine. Towns advertise "Coal Days". Monuments to dead miners celebrate community, obliquely condemning company. Thus, such signifiers delineate the importance of state or community, the degree and significance of non-governmental organizations, and women's activism, and in so doing recapitulate and affirm regional histories and class relations.

Jiu Valley: The state, national ownership and control, and a benign paternalism were essential to the *minerit* since its mid-nineteenth century beginnings. Austrian entrepreneurs, chartered by the Habsburg state, founded the industry, towns, railways, and other institutions to extend imperial control at the Empire's margins (Baron 1998). Thus, Valley mines from the first dovetailed with national development, a unity furthered after the First World War, when the region was incorporated into "Greater Romania" and and some mines nationalized. Both Austro-Hungarian and Romanian states provided the wherewithal for meaningful community life for the mining population, originally from across the Habsburg Empire, and encouraged identity formation of miners, if not workers as a class. The region was replete with voluntary associations based on region of origin and religion, including a lively labor union movement. Brass bands and theatre and dance troupes were popular. Women played significant roles in many local institutions.

Socialism marked the heyday of state control, stultification of regional voluntarism, and women's marginalization. Post-Second World War the Valley became dominated by SOVROMs, joint Soviet-Romanian companies transferring war reparations to victorious Soviets. The Coal Sovrom was founded in 1949 and operated until 1964 when a Romanian nationalist government took over the industry (Montias 1967: 19-20). The *minerit* under the Romanian state, achieved its greatest growth from the mid-1960s until the late 1980s. Coal mining became even more tied to national development, as mine production, miner well being, and working class pride were used as symbols to justify Party control (Jowitt 1971). By the mid-1980s fourteen mines employed roughly 50,000 workers. Coal power provided electricity, heat, and hot water for Valley towns. State institutions serviced the industry, including the Workshop for the Repair of Mining Equipment (URUMP), the National Institute for Research and Development in Mine Safety and Protection from Explosions (Insemex), and the Salvamin mine safety institute.

Thus, throughout the Jiu Valley the *minerit* and the state became linked as main sources of wellbeing and identity. Mines assured workers' housing. The unitary and powerful syndicate organized outings and vacations. Mine clinics cared for miners and families. The *minerit* organized professional schools and athletic teams. State ownership provided a modicum of resources in economic slowdowns. But by encapsulating all people into official institutions, controlling all organizational structures, and developing a powerful surveillance apparatus, the Party assured destruction of most voluntary associations, sowing seeds of distrust between individuals. Furthermore, the industry became heavily masculinized as women were shunted to domestic spheres⁶.

Political change intensified miner class transformation. After increasing labor demands pushed miners to strike in 1977, the state replaced many of these workers, often from old mining families, with rural migrants and military and prison populations. Large salaries compromised the new miners, forcing women further into the home, where high birth rates ensured they remained. When socialism fell the miners reacted against reform, and in support of socialist paternalism. Fearing loss of status, they marched on Bucharest three times in 1990 and 1991, called there by the new Romanian president, Ion Iliescu, successor to Communist dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu. These so-called "*mineriade*" committed violence against persons and property, thus defaming the miners, and hastening reform (Perjovschi 1999)⁷. Mass layoffs began in 1997 (Government of Romania 1997). By 1999 three mines had closed. Ancillary industries were privatized and scrapped. *Mineriade* repercussions furthered distrust, shaping angry miner interpretations of the past (Rus 2007; Kideckel 2008, 2011).

The *minerit* is now a shadow of its past. A state-owned joint stock company, the Hunedoara Energy Complex (CEH), now operates the industry. Romania joined the EU in 2007, so the *minerit* depends on EU energy policy. A recent decision (European Commission 2010) required closing inefficient mines, essentially marking the entire *minerit* for extinction. To manage that process, the Romanian government formed the National Society for the Closure of Jiu Valley Mines (SNIMVJ), with a goal of shuttering all Valley mines by 2020. Currently only four mines and the regional power plant, on reduced schedule, remain open. Four successor organizations remain from the once-powerful League of Syndicates of the Jiu Valley Mines (LSMVJ). Though Salvamin and Insemex remain, most of the Gerom plant, successor

6. Exceptions, like the Viscoze textile plant in Lupeni, employed many women workers.

7. Most Romanians reviled the miners for their actions, though some supported them. Children played «*minerii și scuterii*» (miners and motor-scooterists), the former heroes, the latter villains.

to URUMP, has been scrapped and sold, often illegally by so-called “magnets”, criminal elements attracted to the metal (Kideckel 2018). Though union action has thus far delayed final judgment for two mines, coal mining in the Jiu Valley is on its way to extinction.

Appalachia: The West Virginia coal industry, though also supported by state policy and regulation and born out of national needs during the US Civil War, is essentially a creature of private industry. West Virginia’s coal story is extreme, dividing locals into opposing camps. Industry leaders proclaim how private companies assure the population’s livelihood. They claim coal is the region’s near-sole source of value and modernity (Hamilton 2015). Others say the companies viciously exploited and manipulated regional labor through oppressive policies that destroyed miner health and safety, and even enabled the sexual abuse of coal camp women in exchange for food (Kline *et al.* 2017). Absentee owners largely control the West Virginia land, further assuring depletion of resources and capital (Boettner *et al.* 2013). Domination of coal subjects Appalachia to booms and busts typical in raw material-dependent nations. West Virginia coal is especially dependent on externalities; war increases demand, recessions produce disaster. Meanwhile, despite company attempts to foster division in its multicultural population, the region’s coal industry produced intense labor activism. Miner rebellions in the so-called 1920’s Mine Wars (Corbin 2015), and region-wide strikes in 1977 and 1984 further divided supporters and critics, as did expansion of destructive surface mining from the 1950s to today.

Appalachia is thus fertile ground to both support and challenge coal’s economic and environmental practices. The union movement, specifically the United Mine Workers of America, is exemplary. Most union locals staunchly oppose company practices, but coincidental to coal’s decline, the unions have fragmented into company supporters and critics, and the number of non-union mine employees has grown in the last years (Brown 2017), as companies shut down union mines, reopening them as non-union shops. Aside from the unions, other groups supporting regional economic development arose following creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission, dating to the Kennedy years (Eller 2008: 104). Those challenging coalmining practices expanded after passage of the federal Surface Mining Control and Regulation Act (SMCRA) in 1977. SMCRA «grants...citizens the broadest rights to participate in administrative and judicial proceedings in a federal environmental statute» (Squillace, Dotter 2011: 37). Citizens can challenge surface mining practices, mine permitting, coal transport, site reclamation, and deposition of overburden in valley fills⁸.

8. “Overburden” is rock, soil, and vegetation covering surface coal deposits. Once removed, overburden is generally dumped often near stream headwaters, creating “valley fills”, themselves contentious between activists, coal company representatives, and state regulators.

Emboldened by SMCRA, dozens of environmental groups operate in Appalachia today. Coal people call them «tree huggers»⁹. Many were founded and are staffed by women, whose activism grew from participating in mine labor struggles through the 1920s and 1930s, and in welfare activism in the 1960s and 1970s (Reichert 2001; Wilkerson 2018)¹⁰. Some were created by motivated individuals, like Judy Bond at Coal River Mountain Watch (CRMW), whose activism grew from health concerns, or Larry Gibson at Keepers of the Mountains, who fought coal to preserve a family settlement. Other groups, like the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC) or the Kanawha Forest Coalition (KFC) focus on water quality or outdoor accessibility, while groups like Radical Action for Mountains and People's Survival (RAMPS)¹¹ broadly critique capitalist economy.

Big coal counters these challenges. West Virginia coal's main support is the West Virginia Coal Association that in 2002 formed the Friends of Coal¹². Other groups created by the industry include United Citizens for Coal (UCC), the Coalition for Mountaintop Mining (CMM), or the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity (ACCCE). Individuals tied to the industry, like the retired miner who founded UCC, typically organize these male-centered groups. The board of CMM is a «who's who» of West Virginia mining with representatives from the «coal coalition of operators, power and transport companies, and equipment manufacturers» (Vietor 1980: 17). Citing Habermas, Bell and York (2010: 117-118) maintain that these organizations facilitate ideological construction and cultural manipulation to neutralize a crisis of legitimation in the industry at this time of coal's waning significance.

These specifics shape regional responses to the crumbling coal fetish. Thus, in the Jiu Valley the generalized diminishment of working class identity and organization, state domination, the thin organizational environment, and women's invisibility help limit coal's power except among elites. State intervention encourages small hopes for initiatives to preserve regional life, but little action. Meanwhile, the private economy and rich organizational life of central Appalachia produce and reproduce a contentious social environment where coal and non-coal forces persistently face off. This bi-

9. Tree hugging derives from the «Bishnois» branch of Hinduism. In 1730 some 350 Bishnois men and women died protecting trees also inspiring the 1970s Chipko («to cling») movement, when peasant women threw their arms around threatened trees.

10. Mary Harris («Mother») Jones (1837-1930), co-founded the Industrial Workers of the World (i.e. Wobblies), challenged coal company rapaciousness, and goaded miner union organizing.

11. RAMPS name comes from the wild leek (*Allium tricoccum*), a heritage food growing throughout central Appalachia.

12. «Friends of Coal» was founded to challenge a campaign to regulate coal truck tonnage.

furcation is evident everywhere in West Virginia, from the mine working classes, down to individual households and relations between neighbors along the “hollers”, narrow inter-mountain valleys where streambeds drain toward major rivers. Pro-and anti-coal action is constant, and coal is a persistent focus in regional life even while receding in the market.

Disempowered coal in regional social life: Memory and practice

Coal’s decline colors visions of the past and of uncertain futures. In the Jiu Valley, the EU works to empty coal of meaning. Pensioners still hold strong memories of coal’s heyday, but coal conflict today is mainly waged between governmental, company, and union elites over EU demands. Elite conflict is masculinized, with women involved mainly over industrial heritage. In Appalachia, private companies retain power and wealth, producing large environmental consequences, despite the choppy market. Challenging or supporting organizations make coal contentious at every social level, and prominent gendered activism contrasts the masculinized industry, articulating the battle over coal with family, household, and community.

The strength, and now decline, of coal fetishism encourages nostalgia in both regions¹³. But people differ about the meaning of the past, reasons for coal’s decline, and how or even whether to respond. Nostalgia is often bimodal, like the nostalgic and nostophobic (i.e. repugnant) views of Welsh coal miners (Dicks 2008: 441). Daphne Berdahl saw nostalgia in post-unification East Germany as hegemonic or oppositional; accepting domination of the current system, or rejecting the same with «feelings of longing, mourning, resentment, anger» (Berdahl 1999: 203).

Jiu Valley: Here nostalgia expressed by pensioners and some miners is mainly oppositional. People blame *minerit* destruction on corruption enabled by the postsocialist democratic state. One pensioner, formerly employed in the Petrila mine suggested:

(The *minerit*) worked well in Communism but everything was broken when “democracy” came. In communism, in the gallery you would find one engineer, a few miners, one party secretary. By ’97, when I pensioned, there would be 8 engineers, 20 foremen, 17 secretaries, and two workers in the gallery. That was the situation in democracy...the engineers with their large salaries left whenever they wanted. They would take a wagon of coal for themselves, but certainly wouldn’t pay us well.

The current coal company, the CEH, is a hotbed of corruption and mismanagement (Matei 2015), but diffuses blame by parrying EU demands to disassemble the *minerit*. Meanwhile, throughout the Valley, no matter one’s

13. Some West Virginians also experience intense solastalgia, fear from a threatened environment (Albrecht *et al.* 2007).

background or tangent with the *minerit*, people disparage the National Society for the Closing of the Jiu Valley Mines (SNIMVJ). Miners and pensioners see SNIMVJ actions as precipitous. Pensioners claim Valley coal could last 100 years, and question why production can't be maintained. The SNIMVJ is also attacked for disrespecting the past. People complain that closing Valley mines destroys regional patrimony without regard to cultural or monetary value. Oppositional nostalgia is enhanced by widespread rejection of pejorative views of the *mineriade*. These events transpired more than a quarter century ago, but are still debated in Romania¹⁴. Romanians, referencing the *mineriade*, define Valley miners as violent and backward (Dâncu 2016). These views' duration and pervasiveness reinforces miner anger at the democratic state and defense of their past actions.

State domination and interpersonal mistrust limit Jiu Valley organizations, especially those concerned about coal, environment¹⁵, and related issues. Remaining organizations include rump labor unions, a pensioner organization, and a group concerned with industrial heritage. The *minerit's* degradation is underlined by conflict between union leaders, contrasting the integrated union's halcyon days. Tiberiu Vintan (2006) calls this a «duel between the unions», where leaders accuse each other of betraying miners and of corrupt dealings with the CEH. The leaders of the *Noroc Bun*¹⁶ union at Livezeni mine, and of the Sindicatul Muntele (Mountains Union), publicly battled throughout 2016 over the miners' labor contract¹⁷. Conflicts have grown over the decade as unions compete for members, and for financial gain from resources freed up by mine closures.

State neutralization of coal memories is evident at the few sites dedicated to memorializing the industry, such as the Muzeul Mineritului (Museum of the Mining Industry) in Petroșani, the main Valley city. The museum, was founded in 1961 and expanded in 1984, and is now overseen by city government and the Romanian Ministry of Culture. Exhibits near-exclusively emphasize technology, but steadfastly ignore difficulties confronting the industry, the *mineriade*, post-1997 unemployment, and miner social circumstances. According to the Museum's sole employee¹⁸, insufficient resources make change impossible. One visitor called the museum «a sad place, and

14. Two popular journals recently published collections about the *mineriade* Dâncu 2016 and Martin 2015.

15. Since coal's decline, often-illegal timbering, supported by foreign firms, became an economic mainstay. However, a Greenpeace website to report these activities produced great response. A new Romanian law also limits these practices.

16. Miners greet each other with «noroc bun» (good luck) as they change shifts.

17. The conflict ended when the *Noroc Bun* leader was convicted and imprisoned in a 2017 anti-corruption initiative.

not helpful to understand the Valley». Meanwhile, other important *minerit* architectural remains are turned into private clubs and restaurants and holidays celebrating miners and *minerit* are pale, poorly attended exercises (Kideckel 2018).

Women's absence in Valley organizational life compounds institutional tensions. Some few women are active politically, councilors at regional town halls, in political party women's organizations, or as entrepreneurs. However, *minerit* masculinism (Kideckel 2004; Rus 2003) marginalizes women in the unions, in pensioner organizations, and in the CEH¹⁹. Women's invisibility is pernicious. The male register of public life perpetuates division of the world into "us and them," "our and yours," clumping people into cliques (sing. *gașcă*), characterized by trust, friendship, and commensality. However, beyond clique and family, trust and affect dissipate. Though questionable whether female participation would nullify this, women's participation might provide different voices to reconfigure meanings about coal's past, present, and future. Still the likelihood of this is absurd; economic decline force women's constant efforts for their families, further removing them from the public square. Small attempts to preserve *minerit* heritage is one area of female visibility. Women activists from Bucharest, together with a local artist, spearheaded an attempt to save the Petrila mine (Constantinescu, Dascălu, Sucală 2017). However, their efforts came to nought (Kideckel 2018), as town and SNIMVJ leaders dismissed the group, partially due to its gendered activism (Ilinca Constantinescu, personal communication).

Appalachia: Unlike unified oppositional Jiu Valley nostalgia, coal memories are contentious in West Virginia. Absent a strong state, regional forces contest civic space, generating both oppositional and hegemonic coal nostalgia. Communities split over coal's uncertain future, especially reproducing a class divide growing within miner ranks. Many cling to coal as to a life preserver. Others run from the discredited fetish, with renewed commitment to overturn its hold. Memories of coal's heyday are strong, and the companies encourage hegemonic longing for those days (Bell, York 2010) and the necessity of coal for regional identity and living standards. Against all evidence of market or automation, they blame decline on Obama's "war on coal" and over-active environmentalism. But environmentalists loudly demand redress of coal's damages, support alternative regional development, and view coal as impeding new economic practice. Contending narratives cloud people's minds. Some long for coal's return:

18. The last Director died four years ago. One remaining employee now serves all necessary museum functions, e.g. director, custodian, ticket taker.

19. One women's NGO concerned with domestic abuse was active in the mid-2010s but has ceased operation.

Many elderly informants experienced a sense of hopelessness with increasingly deteriorating conditions in the coal economy, and a sense of nostalgia for the “better days” is often present in their narratives (Reichert 2001: 12).

Others express opposite views. Among others, positive and negative memories of sociability and class anger and wage and environment contend, such as the disabled miner who said:

I spent twenty years in the mines, and loved darn near every minute, especially getting up early and bullshitting. I had great relations with everyone. People we worked with are like family. Everyone around here is connected. I was on the safety committee. The mine wanted to keep me on their good side. They didn't fire you if you did your job. But now if you blink your eye wrong they fire you. When I went on disability I was making almost \$100,000 a year. Not bad for a guy without a high school education. We need the mines and coal jobs, but the mines are killing us now and coal is messing up the world. I am for coal 100%. There has got to be a way to clean coal. But I don't think coal should be burned, if it is going to destroy the earth. But there has got to be technology out there so coal can be burned. I am for people having good-paying jobs. But I'm against people destroying the earth.

The battle over coal is waged on multiple fronts; in political debates, public education, at memorials, and in newspapers and journals. Public education especially supports the extractive economy, often relying on curriculum materials provided by the Coal Education Development and Resource of Southern West Virginia, Inc, (CEDAR), a Friends of Coal-sponsored organization (Bell, York 2010: 135). Meanwhile activists in Mingo County, led by a female former teacher, are developing a labor and environmental-oriented curriculum. Their optimism is infectious, though given the labor-friendly lessons, questions abound whether the educational establishment will accept this curriculum. Still, voices against coal in education are muted as coal's decline means population loss, school consolidation, longer student commutes, and falling severance taxes for educational budgets²⁰.

Unlike the anodyne Jiu Valley Mining Museum, West Virginia museums contest coal's memories. The Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine Museum is organized by Friends of Coal and operated by its ladies auxiliary. The Museum and model coal town offer antiseptic views with orderly houses and accompanying text suggesting a benign relationship between company, miners and families. Retired miners, sympathetic to coal operators²¹, lead tours of the model mine. Some mining dangers are mentioned, but challenges for better working conditions or unionization are left unstated. Countering Beckley's

20. The Spring, 2018 West Virginia teachers strike, led by women activists, reversed declining labor activism and fostered ties between their union and the United Mine Workers.

hegemonic evocation, the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum in Matewan celebrates opposition. The “mine wars”, lasted for about a decade until the early 1920’s, and were the largest US twentieth century labor insurrection, mobilizing thousands of miners seeking union rights, resulting in dozens of fatalities (Corbin 2015). Activist labor, private donations, grants from public institutions, and some monies from the United Mine Workers of America created the Matewan Museum, strongly contrasting Beckley’s corporate provenance. Exhibits detail miner hardship and struggle, but also the ultimately successful unionization fight.

Contention and ambiguity over coal’s meaning is thus mapped onto the region’s social and organizational field, and given over-lapping social relations, people’s responses are unpredictable. In the rural hollers of West Virginia people depend on each other, often requiring modulated sentiment in dealing with neighbors and others. But the class contentions of declining coal are always present like “white noise” in the background of Appalachian life. Thus, at some sites where mine permits are challenged, or during events sponsored by environmental groups, defenders and detractors of coal are intensely confrontational. At other times, at funerals and cemetery clean ups for example, shared Appalachian values, common sentiments of ill-treatment at outsiders’ hands, and commitments to overcoming current health and economic crises, bring people together in gatherings where they accept, even celebrate, each other²². Thus, family stories abound where some from the same household worked for coal operators while others were staunch union members, each warning the other about anti-union or anti-company actions. Yet, at other times, family relationships can founder when individuals with environmental and pro-coal sentiments meet. Some informants claim they’ve been given the «silent treatment» for years by relatives «since I became a tree hugger».

To an extent, the intensity of the “tree huggers” vs “working people”/Friends of Coal conflict is ontological. “Hugging” implies love and merger with the natural world. But “working people” are defined by labor in a coal-dependent relationship. Stacy Alaimo (2016: 29) calls tree hugging a «utopian mode of inhabiting», defining a moral economy of reciprocity and integration within natural law. But the “tree sit” is antithetical to and sub-

21. Two retired miners who acted as guides fondly mentioned Don Blankenship, convicted of a misdemeanor for his role in the Upper Big Branch mine disaster, killing 29 miners. As Massey Energy CEO Blankenship deemphasized safety for production (Haight 2017, Murphy 2015). The men, who had worked at Massey mines, said «Don was a great leader and made us a lot of money».

22. These responses were noted during 2016 field observations.

verts “working peoples” labor. Tree huggers enter work sites illegally, halting activities at the cost of a working person’s income. An environmental activist said:

If you are sitting in a tree they can’t mess with you. So if you position your tree sit where they are about to blast, they have to move their equipment to another portion of the site and it costs them a lot of money.

Like the working person’s labor, coal’s “friendship” is capitalist-based and class-infused. To befriend coal means to not just accept its dominance, but to sell your self for the means to live. Further, the position of Friends of Coal in West Virginia’s political scene emphasizes its patronage in West Virginia communities reinforced by strategic altruism. Though friendship depends on affect, relationships with Friends of Coal are solidly instrumental. A coal trade official responding to my statement that «I’m not a friend of coal, but of coal miners», starkly illustrated the contrast.

Why can’t you be a friend of coal? Notice all the high school football fields supported by mine companies, or talk to railroaders who work for CSX, who suffer because we are not moving the same volume of coal. We are part of this community as well.

Women’s organizational visibility contributes to both effective activism as well as mediation of difference. Though women worked in West Virginia mines more often and in more capacities than the occasional female Jiu Valley topographer or engineer, Appalachian coal mining is still thought a masculine endeavor. However, the situation is often reversed in activist organizations, where women lead and men serve supporting roles. The women’s presence in local environmental organizations and in miner strikes made these actions more effective by virtue of «informal leadership that bridged the concerns of coalfield communities» (Anglin 2002: 568). But alongside their activism women help define the importance of place in Appalachia (Smith, Fisher 2012), spurring people on to defend their beloved mountains.

Going forward

Thus, in West Virginia and the Jiu Valley, regional transformations show a few important parallels, but some key differences. Commonalities include demographic decline, persisting social pathology, and continued disparagement in national imaginaries. But the key characteristics and variations in the two regions discussed above—the particularities of class domination, the nature and degree of state involvement, local organizational life, and gendered activism—point very different ways forward. Though the circum-

stances of class that shaped key regional differences continue to operate, contemporary global energy politics and market and environmental threats to coal profits have greatly transformed that which Gavin Smith (2015:73-74) calls the conditionality of «class potential» for the deflated working class of the Jiu Valley and the conflicted communities of central Appalachian West Virginia.

In the main, the Jiu Valley's coal fetish was deposed as the *minerit* was deemed inefficient and irrelevant in global production (Friedman 2003) and largely removed from the same by the imperious actions of Romania's new European masters,. Simultaneously manifestations of class-consciousness melt away, lost in the practice of dependency and massive corruption in remaining *minerit* institutions. The European safety net and capital infusions provide a modicum of resources to forestall social unrest and help the zone to muddle along. Consequently, the final verdict of mine closure is delayed, if not postponed indefinitely, for two mines and the regional power plant. While this is greeted as good news, the net effect contributes to regional inertia. New outlooks and practices are foreclosed as coal nostalgia and antipathy to state institutions is affirmed by miners and pensioners. Though some give lip service to the need for alternative practices, and despite occasional state initiatives, the region feels moribund economically and frustrated facing the future. Regional human capital drifts away while heritage resources of coal and environment remain minimally valorized. Many have left who might have challenged prevailing ideologies, most as labor migrants elsewhere in Europe. The Valley is now a place of pensioners, a double-edged sword for the future. State pensions and minimal healthcare maintain economic viability. Petroșani's lively terraces and restaurants can be traced directly to mine pensions. However, domination by the elderly implies the absence of the energy needed to shape a different future. Neither coal's past or an alternative future seems viable. The past is past and the future neither beckons nor inspires. A local journalist summed up the problem:

People here are not people with vision, but people with interests. Their enviousness makes their main problem how to steal amongst themselves. History no longer means anything to them. Look at this former mine. Everything...its galleries and shafts, and tools and meaning, all intentionally exploded into nothing. Once the *minerit* will be closed, the Valley will lose all meaning and potential. All that will be left will be old people and the others...with their interests (Marian Boboc, personal communication).

West Virginia's story is more conflicted. Regional degradation due to coal's decline is very real, as is coal's continued symbolic and political power. With recent regulatory change the coal economy may be picking up,

though seemingly more for company profits than miner employment (Cohan 2017). Many admit coal is not likely to return to prominence, but others pin their hopes on a resurgent industry as few other resources offer the number and remuneration of coal jobs. Industry groups like Friends of Coal especially enable ambiguity about coal's future. Their actions and campaigns further help confound class relations by driving a wedge between those who fear loss of wage and status with declining coal and those seeking to break free of those ties and reclaim a life constituted around new values and resources. This wedge is also gendered, aggressively supporting the masculinity of mining against community and environment inclusivity (Smith 2014). Consequently, as much as the region's conflicted geographical and social terrain, the meaning of memory is also contested. To those struggling to overcome the ambiguous inheritance of coal and position the region for tourism, new energy, or other development, «the past is the future». Coal is but one of many heritage resources whose history is useful for regional development, for museums and tourism, and for a negative imaginary to galvanize abundant wind and solar power resources. To others working to maintain coal as a major resource and hoping for industrial resurgence, aided by Donald Trump's love of fossil fuels, «the future is the past». They hope coal's return will power the region to regain its lost status and predictable work places. In both views of the future, coal is still essential, with people attracted or repelled by its power. The coal fetish is still alive in southern West Virginia. However, though the region's problems are legion, there is vision aplenty, for now pulling in different directions, but with potential for vast transformation beyond the decline of coal.

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Coal power: Class, fetishism, memory, and disjuncture in Romania's Jiu Valley and Appalachian West Virginia

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