

## Urban Landfill: A Space of Advanced Marginality

*Enikő Vincze*

### Abstract

The article describes urban marginality in Cluj (Romania) as it has developed in recent years and has transformed the town's landfill into an inhabited area that hosts today approximately 1500 persons. To that end, the present article builds on experience gained by the author, as she has been involved in local civic activism against segregation ([www.gloc.ro](http://www.gloc.ro)) and in research concerning spatialization and racialization of social exclusion ([www.sparex-ro.eu](http://www.sparex-ro.eu)). Regarding theoretical assumptions, this article builds on analytic frames elaborated by Loïs Waquant and Susan J. Smith. Socialist state transformed Roma in Romanian workers since it subjected them to general policies regarding socialist economic growth, a process bearing heavy impact on Roma housing, too. During post-socialist transition in the 1990s (informed by ideologies of democracy and marketization) and later in an era of triumphant neoliberalism (that extended the market principle into every dimension of social life), assimilationist policies of former socialist regimes have been gradually replaced by racializing policies. Seen in the wider Romanian context of post-socialist transformations, Roma racialization is a particular technology that racializes processes of de-proletarianization and de-universalizes Romanian citizens of Roma origins. Anti-gypsy racism becomes an important building block of neoliberalism. Anti-gypsy racism legitimizes neoliberalism and its actions by defining Roma and non-Roma relations as a relation of (inborn) difference and not one of inequality produced by in-built systemic power hierarchies. Consequently, it interprets residential segregation as outcome of this difference, presumably biologic and cultural in the same time, and reduces possible solutions to a process of transforming marginal people into individuals who are able to meet the requirements set up by neoliberal ways of living without amending it. Meanwhile, residential segregation makes advanced marginality more isolating, multiplies deprivations, erodes social capital and human dignity, and creates extreme instances of human suffering.

### **Urban marginality: spaces of poverty in neoliberal regimes**

Advanced urban marginality is, according to Waquant,<sup>1</sup> the new form of social exclusion in neoliberal regimes. Advanced marginality has several characteristics such as accumulation of economic penury, social deprivation, ethno-racial divisions, and public violence in the same distressed urban area. This type of expulsion does not stem from economic crises or underdevelopment; it is rather the resultant of economic restructuring and its unequal economic

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<sup>1</sup> Loïs Waquant. *Urban Outcasts. A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality*. Oxford: Polity Press. 2008.

effects on the lowest fraction of workers and subordinated ethnic categories, as the author cogently demonstrates. The specific advanced urban marginality that emerges in full-blown and global neoliberal economic and political context has to be distinguished from former forms of urban poverty, which has been a characteristic feature of earlier stages of capitalism and, we may add, of late socialism in Romania. A series of factors make advanced urban marginality particular. According to Waquant these include: expansion of “free market”; commodification of social life; polarization of economic growth; fragmentation of paid work; transformation of occupation and increasing incidence of informal and unsecured jobs; autonomy of street economy in degraded urban areas; lack of jobs; de-proletarianization of the most vulnerable fractions of the working class; public policies focusing on cutting welfare budgets and abandonment of urban regulations.

Marginalization comes with its own distinct local history and form. Specific local articulations of the welfare states and/or of the market, dominant classification systems, and particular regimes of urban poverty structure its shape. Thus, we need to approach this phenomenon in the context of local realities and economic-political regimes, new and old ones. In the followings, I elaborate on the evolution of urban marginality in Cluj (Romania) that resulted in a residential space nearby the town’s landfill, which is home now for around 1500 people. I rely on my personal experience gained during ante-segregationist local civic activism ([www.gloc.ro](http://www.gloc.ro)) and during research on spatialization and racialization of social exclusion ([www.sparex-eu.ro](http://www.sparex-eu.ro)).<sup>2</sup> As for theoretical premises (as stated above) I build on Waquant’s analytic scheme,<sup>3</sup> and as well as on the frame elaborated by Smith.<sup>4</sup> The latter tracks changes in racial segregation in Great Britain, more precisely the way politics constructs this problem and tries to solve it relying on its conceptions about race. The author observes that all major decisions regarding housing in Great Britain after WWII have had direct and cumulative impact on racial division of residential spaces. In addition, she notes that inequalities have persisted in these particular systems not only as an effect of material forces (i.e. production and distribution of resources, including those

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<sup>2</sup> Here I would like to mention my colleagues I have worked and continue to work with on these initiatives: Cătălin Berescu, Adrian Dohotaru, László Fosztó, Hajnalka Harbula, Cristina Raț, and others.

<sup>3</sup> My analysis follows the six characteristics of urban marginality as identified by Waquant, which I am referring to in the context of the city of Cluj, Romanian. These characteristics include: paid job becomes a vector of social instability and uncertainty, while living conditions continuously worsen in these areas independently of macroeconomic trends; territorial designation and stigmatization of these more and more isolated and marked spaces as ones only those exiled from normality can “wish” to live, and which transfers its stigma to the inhabitants. Politics of place (of the Afro-American ghetto as place that protect from insecurities generated by the system) becomes policy of space (a hyperghetto as a battlefield where the aim is to survive). Given the lack of jobs and de-proletarianization of large masses of people, individuals cannot rely on informal networks but on individual strategies for self-support. There is social and symbolic fragmentation, inability to organize and make coalitions and mobilize around a collective imagery.

<sup>4</sup> Susan J. Smith: *The Politics of 'Race' and Residence. Segregation and White Supremacy in Britain*. Oxford: Polity Press. 1989.

regarding housing), but also because decisions have been legitimated by what has been considered normal, rational, and tolerable in liberal democracy.

### **Landfill in Cluj and racialized urban marginality**

Dwelling in improvised buildings on and around the landfill (in the area of Pata Rât) is a case of advanced marginality, an instance of spatialization and racialization of social exclusion in urban areas. This form of precarious housing has changed drastically (both in quantitative and qualitative sense, meaning numerical growth and deepening poverty, respectively) during transformations of urban political economy from socialism to post-socialism. From a material perspective, in this case “growth” goes together with worsening conditions, multiple deprivation and insecurities, which are reproduced from one generation to the next. From a social perspective, tensions of informal and underground economy – based on exploitation of the most vulnerable – grind down various groups according to how drastic is their isolation from the rest of the city. Symbolically, city dwellers cut off the entire area from a proudly held image of the multicultural city of Cluj. The symbolism of disposed waste is associated with people living nearby the landfill, while inhabitants embody odors and dirtiness of this toxic environment, and stigma attached to the milieu becomes integral part of their self-identification and the image others have on them.

Compelled to use Pata Rât as home and workplace, the population of the area has increased from four families living there in the 1960s (in the center of the old landfill) to nearly 1500 individuals living there today in four different settlements: Dallas, garbage dump, Cantonului street and new Pata Rat/Colina Verde. Out of them circa 42% were moved there by local authorities under different circumstances, but probably under the same “justification” that constructed a humiliating “argument” between people-to-be-moved there and the environment (while many of them are not working on the landfill). Roma people make up the overwhelming majority of inhabitants. They live in extreme poverty, substandard housing conditions, even though personal and collective histories of social exclusion produce various degrees of advanced marginality structured by the immediate physical, social, and economic space of the landfill, and by the wider political and economic context of the city and of the country. The images from below reflecting access to water express differences in social status of inhabitants within this common segregated space, which is in the same time internally divided.

*Divisions in the common, but internally divided segregated space of Pata Rât through photos*

1. The source of water in the landfill



2. The water pump on Cantonului street



3. The bathroom in Colina Verde/New Pata Rat



Some of the inhabitants of Pata Rât (around 300 persons in Dallas and 200 persons on the landfill, although their number fluctuates according to seasons, majority of them being Roma) get there by their “own will” (however, constrained by socio-economic shortages that provided them with very restricted alternatives, or betterly put, cut them off other choices). They have come on their own (as individual families) or as members of informal social networks (generally bounded by kinship ties, or by neighborhood relations, crossing the boundaries of the city and even of Cluj county). Patron-client-like financial dependence, usury, or informal commercialization of electricity (in other words, formal and informal economic authorities on the spot) on the one hand, and support of a neo-protestant Dutch foundation<sup>5</sup> on the other makes up the web on which cohesion and “discipline” in Dallas and on the landfill stands. There is a fine line between security and support, and exploitation in the life of this self-contained community, who is suspicious of every external element that is seen as dangerous to their limited resources or informal organization, including underground economic forms.

Starting with the end of 2012, the mayors’ office has relocated to Pata Rat area (more precisely to Cantonului street) – one by one or in small groups – families evicted from other parts of the town (Byron street, NATO block of Gheorgheni, Hangman’s House, Cipariu Square, the basements of blocks in Mănăştur, former working class neighborhoods, etc.) by administrative measures. Today, more than 130 families live on the Cantonului street, which hosted only 5 families at the beginning of 2013. Above those settled here by authorities, over half of the families established there informally and “willingly”, some of them have come from outside Cluj, many through lines of various underground economic networks. The population in Cantonului colony is extremely heterogeneous. It is grouped and fragmented on nuclear or extended families, having a set of extremely tense, even violent relations of cyclical mutual contestation, and a high level of mistrust regarding any kind of internal or external organization susceptible of intervening in the inner order. It is also marked by relations of financial dependence related to usury, procurement, and informal commerce with electricity.

Newcomers to Pata Rât are those 300 persons evicted from Coastei street under the regime of Mayor Apostu in December 2010, where they constituted a relatively cohesive community (a mosaic of several kinship networks, but also families not related to them). They hold on to the idea that they belong to the city; school and workplace have linked them to the town. They were moved into 40 apartments of modular houses allocated to them on contractual basis as “social dwellings” on the site named by authorities “Colina Verde”; other 30 or so families who did not get any alternative housing after eviction during winter time and remained practically without a dwelling, were told to build “illegal” shelters on parcels given to them “informally”. During the almost two years of living there, they showed capacity to organize and manage themselves: they made efforts for sending their children to their old schools, tried solving access to public transport, and began building new shelters and extended infrastructure of utilities. Probably, their capacity building and mobilization has been aided by the involvement of many local and international organizations (gLOC, Amnesty International, European Roma Rights Centre), which intervened to support community claims addressed to local authorities.

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<sup>5</sup> Their presence culminated in 2012 with the acquisition of the terrain of old Dallas, which has become a “private neighborhood” owned by Pro Roma Foundation.

Internal dynamics of housing in Pata Rât, just outlined above, takes shape in a larger context, involving wider mechanisms, whose intersectionality places poor ethnic Roma in positions of advanced racialized marginality. Wider context include: de-industrialization of economy, resulting in the fact that many former industrial workers today have access only to precarious jobs (unstable, informal, poorly paid, toxic); privatization of public dwelling stock and deregulation of estate market, so the most vulnerable tenants structurally cannot afford decent housing that satisfy national and international legal standards; withdrawal of central and local public administration from distribution of housing resources in the case of poor, while they favor the interests of the more privileged by the way in which they support the privatization of public spaces; this kind of actions dispossess marginal groups by eviction, while “deserving” people become owners of estates left empty by “undeserving” ones; criminalization of those who fail securing a house on “free market”, which is closely related to blaming the poor because they are poor; public discourses, both political and media, that associate Gypsies with poverty and/or garbage collectors; everyday discourses that use the category of “Gypsy” to identify the unwanted utter otherness, and thus to circumscribe all that is considered to be unworthy of modernity and civilization – with which even the poor belonging to the mainstream society wants to identify, and tries in this way, at least symbolically, to minimize the effects of their own economic misery.

In the following, I am going to outline how these mechanisms have worked across different political and economic regimes, and to show how particular definitions and conceptualizations of “Roma policies” were instrumental in the implementation of different regimes’ plans for economic growth. It will be observed that alongside with economic growth strategies and Roma policies, power regimes also legitimized particular identity constructions and classifications of citizens.

### **Socialist legacy – Roma transformed into Romanian workers**

Socialist authorities justified the disbandment of a compact Roma colony on Bufnitei Street in Cluj during the 1960s resorting to the belief that socialist economic growth based on industrialization and urbanization was going to solve problems related to majority’s (non)acceptance of Roma. On their part, Roma paid the price for embarking on this type of assimilation by renouncing their language, traditional crafts, and cultural customs since all of them qualified as “inferior” or “pre-modern” compared to majority culture, or in a more general sense compared to an ideal of the “new socialist man”. National communist regime did not give recognition to Roma as national minority and, contrary to Hungarians, they had been put through a process that transformed them into workers and Romanians. Such a transformation was seen as a positive trajectory for their social mobility and civility. Large-scale construction of blocks of flats and worker neighborhoods assured a relative success for this type of ethno-national politics. This minority policy worked out relatively well also because it fitted mainstream policies of the socialist era’s social engineering.

Apparently not more than a socio-economic investment into urban development, this was also informed by national-communist imagery. The newly built city districts (and the industrialization that made them necessary and supported them) had also the role to transform the ethnic landscape of the town (changing its name from Cluj to that of Cluj-Napoca in 1974). Before

1956 Cluj was a preponderantly Hungarian town, the parity in its ethnic structure had been reached in 1956, and, as later censuses showed, the percentage of ethnic Hungarians decreased steadily until today when they ended up representing only 16% of the population. Socialist state devised economic and ethno-national policies, including categorization of citizens, and transformed “Gypsies” into universal citizens defined as Romanian workers. Roma were getting apartments in block of flats and worked mainly as unskilled or skilled blue collars in local factories. Other Romani groups from Cluj, the Gabor Gypsies for example, continued to work in those traditional crafts that assured their living in the shadow of socialist industrial production. Still others, musicians called “lăutari” gained a sort of recognition in the entertainment industry. Roma’s older history (that transformed them into subjects of assimilation policies in Transylvania, and slaves in the Romanian provinces) has not been a subject of moral or financial reparation during socialism. Consequently, socialist regime reproduced their relatively deprived economic condition as well as their presumed cultural inferiority, both of which have been worsened after 1990.

The landfill in Pata Rât of Cluj (part of Someșeni, which was an independent administrative unit) was established at the end of the sixties in a place that became to be known later as Dallas. At the beginnings, four Roma families lived there. They came from a village not far from Cluj, named Dezmir. The landfill grew together with the city and the spread of industrialization. (According to the census in 1966, there were 185663 people living in Cluj, in 1992 the population was of 328602 individuals and today, counting students of various universities, there are 450000 persons producing large quantities of waste daily.)

### **Post-socialist legacy in the nineties: losers of state withdrawal from estate market**

Besides the long and tricolor reign of the nationalist mayor Gheorghe Funar (an important actor in the transformation of socialist workers into post-socialist Romanians),<sup>6</sup> the Caritas pyramid game dominated the public life of the nineties in Cluj. The landfill witnessed a boom regarding the quantity of waste deposited there, a situation that pulled many poor (mostly Roma) families to the landfill, families who were looking for income and cheap housing conditions. Caritas meant huge gains for some and the landfill has begun to look like a good business opportunity for entrepreneurs in waste management. However, Caritas also meant comparable high volume loss for others, especially for those who had sold their belongings hoping returns for would be successful financial investment. Few people warned and protected by the Caritas system gained a lot; but the majority of players were losers, many of them lost their lifetime savings.

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<sup>6</sup> As Petrovici aptly demonstrates, Funar’s ethno-nationalism legitimized workers presence in Cluj after the collapse of socialist industry, which has made workers redundant. Funar articulated the right to the city for the working class in terms of Romanian people’s right to Cluj in relation with ethnic Hungarians, while showing affinities with the frustration of workers related to the idea that they were robbed and dispossessed (Norbert Petrovici: “Articulating the Right to the City: Working-class Neo-Nationalism in Postsocialist Cluj, Romania”. In Don Kalb and Gabor Halmai (eds): *Headlines of Nationalism, Subtexts of Class*. New York and Oxford: Bergham Books, 2012).

Moreover, the landfill became a space of financial dependence and exploitation of those who could not sell anywhere else their unskilled manual labor. All these happened in the midst of massive de-industrialization and privatization of state owned industrial companies, which resulted in de-proletarianization of tens of thousands workers, who became unemployed. Changes put the heaviest burden on unskilled or poorly skilled workers whose chances to integrate into the new “free labor force market” were structurally very limited.<sup>7</sup> In that period, private construction industry absorbed some of the manual, skilled and unskilled labor force. For example, many of ethnic Roma who lived on Coastei, but also in other parts of the city, were hired or worked informally in constructions.

Alongside these local and national phenomena, what regards housing, Romanian post-socialist transition meant massive privatization of dwelling stock.<sup>8</sup> This happened through different processes. Firstly, former owners – dispossessed during socialist nationalization of properties – gained back their properties in a process of restoring their rights according to what they owned before socialism. Secondly, tenants of blocks of flats apartments, which had been distributed to them during socialism from their workplace, gained the right (which they did not know that it also was a great burden) to buy the formerly rented dwellings. Thirdly, the state almost completely abandoned construction of dwellings (excepting the so-called “ANL houses”<sup>9</sup>, which

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<sup>7</sup> Updates on these processes culminate in the alarming data about poverty in Romania.

According to EUROSTAT statistics in 2008, 17% of employed individuals lived below the poverty threshold, while the risk of poverty for women was of 23%, and for men 21.4% in 2009; the most affected were persons above 65 years. While in UE27, 23% of citizens experienced poverty risk and social exclusion in 2010, in Romania 41% were in the same situation. Further, according to National Statistical Institute, in the first trimester of 2012, Romanians spent 43.3% of their income on dwelling (for equipment, improvement and utility bills), and 40.8% on food and non-alcoholic beverage.

<sup>8</sup> As shown by EUROSTAT data, since it has become member of the European Union, Romania has been on the first place regarding the percentage of homeowners without bank loans (95.3%). Although apparently a positive situation, this indicator does not refer to high-level quality housing. Quite on the contrary, it shows that the once celebrated popular governmental measure implemented in 1990 has proved to be a trap for the population, being actually a measure that has diminished state responsibility regarding citizens’ housing needs and refurbishing the old socialist blocks of flats. In the same year, the rate of overcrowded housing was also the highest in Romania (55.3%, compared to 17.7% in EU27) and the percentage of those who lacked toilet in the dwelling was 42.5% (compared to the European average of 3.5%). Further, in 2009 Romania’s population confronted the highest level of housing deprivation in the EU (indicator that measures financial access to dwelling, physical proximity of local services and access to housing): compared to the 5.9 % average in the EU27, 28.6% of Romanian citizens were confronted with this problem:

[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Housing\\_statistics#Further Eurostat information](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Housing_statistics#Further_Eurostat_information)

<sup>9</sup> ANL (Agenția Națională de Locuințe), National Housing Agency was established in 1998 and it is subordinated today to the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism. At the beginning, the Agency built new houses or refurbished older ones, which were sold through mortgage. On its website it is stated that the Agency was the first institution from Romania offering housing



proved to be a public project privatized by those who were well-positioned in political and economic hierarchies). The presumably “free housing market” has become in fact a market of estate speculations and for those in key positions has had important contribution to primitive capital accumulation. Deregulation of estate gave a free hand to those close to information regarding political decisions on urban terrains and public spaces. All this converged to privatization of estates by local entrepreneurs supported by Romanian law, corruption and local networks of bureaucracy, which gave them protection.

Transformations have had the most negative impact on tenants of formerly nationalized and now returned dwellings. They have been evicted without receiving any state support or compensation. Manual workers were also hit hard; lost their jobs that would have given them material resources to buy apartments they had received from socialist enterprises or to pay the costs of utilities. Young generations were another vulnerable category; growing up in poor families without properties, they could not access housing on the “free” estate market due to structural inequalities they were subjected to. Consequently, they started to be evicted from their former apartments (some of them who did not enjoy protective informal networks withdrawn in woods, parks, under bridges or basements of block of flats) and increased the number of individuals who lived in improvised or abandoned buildings. The state ignored, or at best tolerated this situation for a while. Non-interventionism on the part of the state deepened the chronic lack of affordable and adequate housing. Non-intervention created long-term social implications of denying many people the right to decent housing.<sup>10</sup>

### **2000s – the racialization of segregated residential space in the landfill**

Anti-Gypsy pogroms in rural areas in the 1990s, which appeared in the context of privatizing land and agriculture, were the first signs of racialization of citizenship and interethnic conflicts stemming from issues of using public and private space. During these pogroms, Romanians and Hungarians tried to banish Roma from villages (for example in Kogălniceanu, Hădăreni or

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credit and it was the main promoter of the country’s mortgage market. In 2003 the Agency established public-private partnerships with several banks, so today its mortgage program is solely financed by banks. Since 2001, ANL also implements a program for constructing houses dedicated to youth under the age of 35, which are distributed by local councils. Owners might first rent, and after one year might buy these apartments.

<sup>10</sup> The right to housing is the right to “live somewhere in security, peace, and dignity ... [and] should be ensured to all persons irrespective of income or access to economic resources”. United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stipulates seven criteria of decent housing: legal security of tenure; availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; affordability; habitability; accessibility; location which allows access to employment options, health-care services, schools, child-care centers and other social facilities – all these for a reasonable price. United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights comment on “The right to adequate housing” (Art.11 (1)), 12/13/1991:

[http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/469f4d91a9378221c12563ed0053547e?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/469f4d91a9378221c12563ed0053547e?Opendocument)

Plăieșii de Sus) burning down their houses, holding that Roma became not only useless for local economy but also dangerous for the sacred nature of private property and community order.

The same phenomenon, although in a more subtle institutional form, appeared later in urban settings: while considering intensification of privatization as taken for granted and desirable, and sustaining that market logic should prevail in housing, local authorities started to “clean up” the town starting with the most vulnerable. They evicted vulnerable groups from areas integrated in the city’s circuits and pushed them off to the margins of the city. Local authorities gave several reasons for their actions ranging from an emphasis on urban regeneration (framing it as a neutral technical intervention), to supporting elitism in the city (“in the distribution of social housing we take into consideration that Cluj is a university city and we have to promote university graduates in this matter”). Other reasons were the “repeated complaints” of neighbors or “tenants who refused to accept Roma as neighbors” (thus authorities took off their shoulders the responsibility of non-discrimination and transferred the matter on the allegedly self-defensive anti-Gipsy attitude of majority population). Moreover, there were some cynical and false arguments stating that “eliminating poverty zones” in downtown and moving tenants out, is a first step toward “improving quality of life” and “social inclusion” (of Roma).<sup>11</sup>

At the turn of 2002-2003, authorities choose to evacuate Roma from several places of Cluj and moved them to Cantonului Street, in the Pata Rat area, providing them with some metal barracks.<sup>12</sup> Back then, public opinion already saw Pata Rat as the space of waste, misery, garbage, wilderness, of things thrown away and hidden out of sight of the city’s “civilized” population. People living in Cantonului Street are themselves connected to the waste industry. The majority of those who work in formal economy (around half of the active population) have found employment in one of the local sanitation companies. Some of them go every now and then on the landfill.

Meanwhile, the city landfill already extended south, while Dallas, the older wasteland, was “ecologized” (disintegrating waste was covered by a layer of soil) and continued to host the landfill workers. After Andrei Schwartz lunched his film entitled “*Auf der Kipe*” in 1998, no one could deny the inhumane living and working conditions of Roma on the landfill. Media

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<sup>11</sup> See about the articulation of this discourse, particularly regarding the actions of Mr. Cherecheș, mayor of Baia Mare, in Enikő Vincze: *Zidurile rasismului și eliminarea pungilor de sărăcie*. Critic Atac. 19 June 2012, <http://www.criticatac.ro/17250/ziduri-bimrene-eliminarea-pungilor-de-srcie/>

<sup>12</sup> In 2004 and 2005, mayors Gheorghe Funar, and Emil Boc respectively signed an agreement with Ecce Homo Foundation. According to this agreement, the foundation placed there 50 single room shelters (called “thermopan houses”). When in 2011 the Romanian Railway Company went to court to request immediate eviction of those who lived in these shelters, the agreement and contracts between Ecce Homo and tenants served as proof showing that people have settled there legally, since town hall allocated them the place. See for details:

[http://www.petitieonline.ro/petitie/petitie\\_privind\\_posibila\\_evacuare\\_fortata\\_a\\_peste\\_120\\_de\\_familii\\_de\\_pe\\_strada\\_cantonului\\_din\\_cluj-p60638048.html](http://www.petitieonline.ro/petitie/petitie_privind_posibila_evacuare_fortata_a_peste_120_de_familii_de_pe_strada_cantonului_din_cluj-p60638048.html);

[http://gloc2011.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/comunicat-apel-reconciliere-gloc-23-august2011\\_final.doc](http://gloc2011.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/comunicat-apel-reconciliere-gloc-23-august2011_final.doc); [http://www.sectorulcultural.info/gloc/?page\\_id=509](http://www.sectorulcultural.info/gloc/?page_id=509)

discourse, most of the time interested in sensational events on the landfill (adults and children run by bulldozer or sanitation company's trucks, or burned to death in their own improvised shelters; random rallies of local police, which burned down their shelters and chased them away; conflicts between politicians regarding the statute of this toxic landfill), has had its main share in constructing the public image of those living on the landfill. This image is a mixture of humanitarian compassion and criminalization of victims based on racial beliefs that "only this ethnic group can live in such conditions". It also fuels the prejudices stating that the "Roma lifestyle" on the landfill is the cause and not the result of their marginalization.

Despite such media noise, local authorities and sanitation companies mostly chose to deny or mitigate the fact that people live on the landfill. They said, "no people live there" or "you find there only one ethnic group" as if they were not human beings and their life did not count. They talk less or not at all about multiple complicities between the City Hall, other local or county authorities, sanitation companies, and waste management firms, or about slavery relations on the landfill, or about how the complicity between forces of order and "managers" of the landfill permits the exploitation of the most vulnerable people. One can hardly hear in these discourses about accountability regarding authorities, about assuming responsibility for those who have been selecting waste for decades for very small amount of money or in exchange for daily food necessary for survival; or about who benefits the most from the inhumane work done by Roma on the landfill.<sup>13</sup> Ignorance, inertia, and non-interventionism on the part of authorities – it is the least to say about why informal economy of waste management could grow for such a long period in this space. And it is more than cynical to voice opinions that qualify as humanitarian those who "allow" "poor Roma" to work and live on the landfill.

Three generations, in the past four decades have become synonymous with the material and symbolic meanings of this place. Absolute dependency on this location as residence and source of income make these needy people unable to organize for claiming their rights, which in the given context means simply the right to live in a city for which they provide its ecological interests without any recognition.<sup>14</sup> Profiteers of this system create the official and illegal context

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<sup>13</sup> Petty "patrons" are usurers that facilitate the functioning of the current waste management system. They are also the persons who link the landfill (the invisible work of those who collect and sort garbage) and the outside world (rubbish speculators sometimes existing in the form of formally established waste management firms). They begin by crediting poor people and families (some of them staying there just during summers). Afterwards, people work for them until they pay back their debts, and they cannot leave the area without permission from creditors. Without any money, working to pay their debts, people also "buy" food on credit from their patrons paying a higher price to goods than they would pay in shops. There is no electricity on the landfill, and there is one and only source of water. People collect firewood on the spot. Few who are not indebted, receive cash when they turn in collected iron, plastic, and paper.

<sup>14</sup> "I am a garbage worker, too", action of gLOC on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2012 that combined a street manifestation (participants were collecting and selecting waste from downtown and delivered it to a representative of the county council) with submitting a petition to local authorities (county council and town hall). The petition referred to local authorities' duty to consider the human dimension of the "new waste management centre" EU-funded project, to publicly recognize that people of the old landfill were performing informal, dangerous and underpaid work that was useful for the whole city, and to the need that authorities should support

within which they engage in a work that is informal, precarious, underpaid, and damages their health and endangers their life.

In 2005, authorities put a sign on the entrance to the new landfill stating that it does not meet the standards required by European legislation and it is closed (de facto it still functions even today). The garbage dump closed again, apparently in July 2010, when the owner (relative of the manager of the sanitation company) faced huge penalties under the pressure of the European Union. Despite this fact, the landfill that closed for many times has been reopened in July 2012 by the Regional Agency for Environment “for sorting recyclable waste”. But this is not possible to do, because domestic waste is not selectively collected across the town. Meanwhile, the county’s new prefect (belonging to the Socio-Liberal Union) contests procedures for establishing the new waste management centre in Pata Rat. Those procedures were launched by the former prefect (on the part of Liberal-Democrat Party) and were delayed for several years due to contested public tenders.

Furthermore, regarding Pata Rat and waste collection, courts of justice treat differently illegalities committed by authorities and little people respectively. The latter are imprisoned while the former are losing, at best, some of their political capital (or political positions connected to economic privileges). Peoples’ testimonies show that almost every family have had at least one member incarcerated at a given moment for stealing scrap iron or for illegally occupying an abandoned space. Double standards have been broken somewhat with the arrest of former mayor, Sorin Apostu in 2011 on grounds of corruption. Even small penalties (fines for travelling without bus ticket or for expired identity cards) have dramatic implications for these people: those fined lose their social benefits and consequently their health insurance and access to free public healthcare. All this happens although people work 72 hours on the behalf of the city community to receive social welfare. This work means different things (from street cleaning to cleaning up the dwellings or improvised shelters left behind by homeless people in the nearby forests after being evicted by authorities).

Local authorities have come to recognize only recently and implicitly – when the European Union forced them to close it down – that the old landfill is very toxic and the entire environment is polluted. The same authorities ignored the very same argument, namely the disastrous impact of pollution on people’s health (not to mention the dramatic implications of living in a symbolically and physically isolated neighborhood), when they relocated to here the families from the Coastei Street.<sup>15</sup> Their new and old living space was the object of land transaction made

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them in their effort to be hired in the planned ecologization of the old garbage dump, the construction of the new waste management centre and into jobs provided by the new recycling facilities: <http://gloc2011.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/scrisoare-deschisa-pata-rat-23-032.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> See protests, petitions and several programs of civic organizations, which constituted Grupul de Lucru al Organizațiilor Civice (Working Group of Civil Society Organizations) in January 2011. [http://www.petitieonline.ro/petitie/impotriva\\_ghetoizarii\\_romilor\\_din\\_oraul\\_cluj-p19395057.html](http://www.petitieonline.ro/petitie/impotriva_ghetoizarii_romilor_din_oraul_cluj-p19395057.html); <http://www.sectorulcultural.info/gloc/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/propunere-protocol-24-mai-2010.pdf>; [http://www.sectorulcultural.info/gloc/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/referat\\_de\\_constatare\\_20-sept-2010.pdf](http://www.sectorulcultural.info/gloc/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/referat_de_constatare_20-sept-2010.pdf); <http://voxpublica.realitatea.net/politica-societate/mutarea-romilor-linga-groapa-de-gunoi-in-cluj-lupta-continua-57979.html>; <http://gloc2011.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/whd-comunicat-de-presă.doc>; [http://gloc2011.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/invitatie\\_19dec2011\\_dreptate-](http://gloc2011.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/invitatie_19dec2011_dreptate-)

by the mayor's office: the land where they lived on the Coastei street, five months after eviction, was allocated for free by the mayor's office to the Archbishop of Feleac and Cluj to build a campus for students in Orthodox Theology at the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj; on the other hand, for the parcel where the Roma were relocated in Pata Rat, the Brantner-Veres sanitation company got another, more suitable area in Cluj.

Besides material deprivation and loss suffered due to eviction, a moral trauma hit these families and individuals, namely the trauma felt because of moving them nearby the landfill and chemical waste station. Even if, by necessity, they try to adapt to these new living conditions by improving their dwellings or extending them, symbolically they emphasize their distance from this space. Relations with older inhabitants, with those from Dallas in the first place, but also with individuals from Cantonului colony, mediate building up their relations with Pata Rat as physical place. They strive to maintain their positive self-image in a negative natural and social environment, trying repeatedly to prove that they are different from the "autochthonous" population, and that they do not belong to this location.

In the case of societies in advanced marginality, too internal hierarchization is an important element of self-identification and of othering. Almost every category of person finds someone related to whom they can prove their moral superiority, while all assume their Roma or Gypsy identity. For example, in the relation between the residents of modules and those from the landfill, the arguments are the following: "we send our children to school"; "we do not work on

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[sociala.doc](#); [http://gloc2011.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/invitatie-17-dec-2011\\_program-copii-pata-rat.pdf](http://gloc2011.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/invitatie-17-dec-2011_program-copii-pata-rat.pdf); [http://www.sectorulcultural.info/gloc/?page\\_id=653](http://www.sectorulcultural.info/gloc/?page_id=653);  
[http://gloc2011.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/scrisoare\\_deschisa\\_gloc\\_ian2012.pdf](http://gloc2011.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/scrisoare_deschisa_gloc_ian2012.pdf)

The main results of gLOC until now is signaling to the National Council for Combating Discrimination the eviction from Coastei street and the inadequate housing conditions in the new location from Pata Rat, which resulted in the decision of this body regarding the discriminatory nature of these acts (<http://www.sectorulcultural.info/gloc/>); organizing a Stocktaking visit in Pata Rat entitled "Getting closer – EU strategy for Roma and local realities" on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2011 with Roma communities, local and national civic organizations, and international organizations, which accepted the invitation (European Commission, United Nations Development Program, Amnesty International, European Roma Rights Centre) ([http://www.sectorulcultural.info/gloc/?page\\_id=335](http://www.sectorulcultural.info/gloc/?page_id=335)). This was a meeting that launched dialogue with the mayor's office, who accepted to elaborate a strategy and a pilot project on integrated housing benefiting people from Pata Rat and aiming at territorial desegregation ([http://www.undp.ro/projects.php?project\\_id=68](http://www.undp.ro/projects.php?project_id=68);  
<http://gloc2011.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/suggestions-for-the-implementation-of-the-undp-project.pdf>). Moreover, since then, with the aim of empowering people, gLOC organized several actions together with Amnesty International and European Roma Rights Centre, and also facilitated the participation of some children from Pata Rat on cultural programs within public spaces that otherwise would have been inaccessible to them. At the beginning of the summer of 2012, gLOC was accepted to take part as watchdog on the *Preparatory phase project* run by Cluj Municipality in a partnership with UNDP, the North-Vest Regional Development Agency and the Babes-Bolyai University ([http://www.undp.ro/projects.php?project\\_id=68](http://www.undp.ro/projects.php?project_id=68)).

the garbage”. Meanwhile, in the relation of Dallas and Cantonului people say: “we do not send our women to prostitute”, or “we are more united”. Regarding relations between sub-groups right in the core of the landfill, classifications are used with the same end: “Hungarian Gypsies from Harghita county are different breed”, “they are violent” – it is said on the one hand; while on the other part people state: the “travelers are the most aggressive”, “we are Romanized Gypsies”, “we are peaceful”.

### **From assimilation to racialization – social differentiation through racial segregation and intensification of criminalized marginality**

Roma assimilation policy in socialism served the production and assurance of labor force necessary for industrialization and “multilateral development of the Romanian nation”. (Also, in the same context, women’s emancipation policy aimed the same end with all its economic and ethno-national dimensions). For those who wanted but did not dare to assume Roma identity, the price paid for “integration into the socialist labor market” was renouncing to this identification.

Alongside post-socialist changes during the 1990s (supported by an ideology of transition to democracy and marketization) and the triumphant neoliberalism of the 2000s (the widespread extension of market principle on all domains of social life), assimilation was gradually substituted by policies of racialization. In the case of assimilationist politics Roma represented a cultural problem that was supposed to reach resolution as soon as they adapted to the cultural norms of socialist society (socialist state used this model of social engineering for Romania’s entire pre-modern and rural population, seeking their necessary transformation into urban workers). After 1990, Roma racialization, as unintended and perverse consequence of their recognition as ethno-national minority who was supposed to enjoy cultural and linguistic rights, and the need to explain why they lived in poverty without acknowledging its economic and political causes, transposed the difference and inequality between Romanians/Hungarians on the one hand and Roma on the other into the realm of biology and physiology. Viewed in the wider context of post-socialist transformations in Romania, Roma racialization is a specific technology of de-proletarianization and de-universalization of ethnic Roma Romanian citizens.

This endeavor articulates well with larger scale initiatives to reinvent citizen’s subjectivity in relation to a reorganized state. Beyond a legal facade imposed by joining the European Union, the nationalist discourse in post-socialist Romania reconstructed an ideal of national purity and “authentic Romanianness”. In a similar vein, discourses related to Europe created the image of the “European Romanian” (enjoying the right to free movement) in contrast with “nomad Gypsies” who became in this way “another species” or “different breed”, which should not to be associated with Romanians or more, became considered as an obstacle to Romania’s Europeanization.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> I mention here some cases, which prove that racism is part of a political culture that transcends political parties: ministers of exterior have called on it to define Romania’s problem in international relations and identify solution to them. These observations/explanations are not technical issues; they denote a deep consensus between some of the Romanian political elite and intellectuals regarding anti-Gypsy feelings and ideology. See Mr. Baconschi’s diagnosis related

Segregated space epitomizes processes of differentiation between insiders and outsiders, or those who deservingly belong to society and those who do not deserve belonging, or between middle class and pauperized social categories. Segregation is a terrain on and through which – after the disintegration of homogenizing socialism – various social actors negotiate from unequal positions on a consensus regarding who should be included and who should be excluded from the societal space. Spatial segregation is a process that creates and maintains differentiation of “deserving” and “undeserving” citizens, constructed at the intersectionality of ethnicity and social status, for example between members of mainstream society and those social categories that cannot hold on to norms established by the former. Moreover, claiming that poor ethnic Roma are poor because they do not want to work and because they are only looking to live on welfare, authorities consolidate the idea of majority as “responsible” and “deserving” citizen who does not expect to be “assisted” by the state; this idea suggests that those who are living on welfare act as Gypsies or even become Gypsies. On the other hand, when public authorities evacuate and relocate Roma in segregated areas they may create a feeling of moral superiority among majority people, including poor, who can feel themselves as “normal citizens” that are not banished in polluted, isolated areas, which are unworthy of human beings.

Today, racialized segregation becomes more and more acute due to neoliberal domination both as generator and as manager of economic crises, which deepens poverty in Romania producing various forms of advanced marginality (such as the precarious housing in the stigmatized, polluted, and isolated space of the landfill in Cluj). Local and central governmental policies related to housing are not neutral techniques that bring solutions to “naturally” defined problems, but they are means of power marked by political ideologies and personal convictions.<sup>17</sup> Apparently non-interventionist and “free market” oriented policies in housing and estate (which in reality have an important role in creating the illusion of “free market” and in covering up suspicious transactions on the residential market) are in fact saturated by neoliberal values.

Arguments and public positioning of policy makers and managers support privatization and marketization of housing, and construct distinctions among “deserving” and “undeserving,” or responsible and welfare-dependent citizens, or those who can secure a dwelling on the “free housing market” and those who are “not able to do that because they do not like to work”. Further, these public positioning classify ethnic Roma as “undeserving poor”, and transform them into symbols of state-dependent citizens, while the state refuses to take any measure for them and grants privileges to those already privileged by their economic condition, social capital or gains on the neoliberal “free market”.

Created through such symbolic procedures, eviction of Roma from informal poor urban settlements becomes easier to legitimate and justify. Consequently, “their” inability to adapt to the times and place they live in serves as explanation for relocating them into marginal

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to “Roma’s physiological criminality”; or voicing the need “to deport Roma criminals in Egyptian desert” in Mr. Cioroianu’s cleansing scenario; or Mr. Marga’s fear that “Roma beggars endanger our effort to close the Schengen dossier”.

<sup>17</sup> According to Shore and Wright policies work as means of governance, vehicles of ideology, and agents that construct subjectivities and organize people within structures of power and authority (Chris Shore and Susan Wright: *Anthropology of Policy. Critical Perspectives on Governance and Power*. London and New York: Routledge. 1997).

neighborhoods of the city (such as the landfill, perceived by some as the “natural environment of Gypsies”). Society punishes them for losing their ability to integrate into mainstream society through education or work as if their own will and free choice would be responsible for this situation. Some classify their ability to live under sub-human conditions as “natural trait of their ethnicity”; others even say that they deserve to live in the polluted and isolated environment of the landfill. Thus, anti-Gypsy racism becomes an important element of neoliberalism. Such racism legitimizes its actions in terms of framing Roma and non-Roma relations as a relation of (inborn) difference and not as a relation produced by power hierarchies built in and by the system. Therefore, residential segregation comes to be interpreted as natural result of putatively biological and cultural difference, and solution to segregation is correspondingly imagined as a process of transforming marginal people into individuals who meet the requirements of neoliberal regimes, without changing the latter. Meanwhile, residential segregation deepens advanced marginality making multiple deprivations chronic, eroding the social capital and dignity of people, and creating extreme instances of human suffering.