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Roma Settlement Formation in a Small Romanian
Town – Instances of Ghettoization and Reduction to
Bare Life

Intersections. EEJSP
2(1): 183-198.
DOI: 10.17356/ieejsp.v2il.91
<http://intersections.tk.mta.hu>

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Abstract

Based on findings from a comparative qualitative contextual inquiry carried out between 2012 and 2014, the article analyses the formation of two Roma settlements in the larger context of a small sized town in Romania. The article aims at understanding the constitution of these areas as reflected through people's narratives, while also accounting for the influence of economic and political developments on where and how they were and are placed on the social and geographic map of the city. Altogether, the article illustrates the similarities and differences between how the two settlements were founded under different political regimes and how are they nowadays subjected to ghettoization and reduction to bare life, understood as processes characteristic for contemporary global capitalism. At the same time, the analysis highlights the limits of the approaches informed by these conceptual frames and ends up by pinpointing the need to complete them with a perspective that links the politics of spatial marginalization to the understanding of how the latter is part of a political economy that exploits the spatially marginalized.

Keywords: Roma settlements, ghettoization, bare life.

1. Introduction - the empirical and theoretical grounds of our analysis

The empirical material used in this article was generated by the means of field-research conducted between 2012-2014 in 25 localities in Romania within the umbrella of the qualitative contextual inquiry *Faces and Causes of Marginalization of the Roma in Local Settings: Hungary - Romania - Serbia*.¹ In this paper we are relying on the last phase of this investigation (*Causes and Faces of Exclusion of the Roma in Local Communities*), conducted in Romania between October 2013 and July 2014 in three localities (two towns, and one village) selected from the 25 settlements addressed during the prior research phase (Vincze et al., 2013; Vincze and Hossu, 2014; Vincze, 2014). Given the geographical and historical heterogeneity of Romania, during the selection process of localities in this country we also had to make our choices regarding the historical region the chosen settlements belong to: Transylvania, Moldova, and Muntenia/Oltenia. The Romanian Kingdoms (Wallachia and Moldova) were subject to a history of Roma slavery for about 500 years (being abolished at the middle of the 19th century), while Transylvanian administrations subjected Roma to ethno-cultural assimilation policies ever since the Habsburg domination. Consequently, socialist industrialization and the assimilation that accompanied it had different outcomes for various local Roma groups, historically embedded from different socio-economic statuses into diverse power regimes.

According to the methodology we have agreed upon for selection of fieldwork sites in the last phase of the research, in Romania – similarly to what our partners have done in other countries (Szalai, 2016, this journal issue) – we opted for three types of settlements: (1) a town with mainly exclusionary tendencies, within which there is at least one extremely disadvantaged area and another less poor residential zone; (2) a town with mainly inclusionary tendencies having a deeply deprived area inhabited by Roma and another housing territory where Roma have a better material condition; (3) a commune near an urban centre, which is generally isolated and poor, and comprises areas inhabited mainly by Roma groups, one of them very deprived while the is other better-off. The selected towns of Aiud and Calafat, respectively commune Lungani (from the Centre, South-Vest and North-East development regions of Romania) embodied the local stages where several Roma groups (some of them deeply impoverished and others better-off) were taken part in different ways in the life of the larger local society. Aiud was pointed out at a particular time of our research as an ‘exclusionary town’ mostly due to the eviction practices of the municipality and the ‘Gypsy school’ functioning on its territory. Commune Lungani (and in particular its composing villages with a majority Roma population) was chosen to exemplify the case of a rural locality characterized by generalized poverty and exclusion. Calafat was selected at its turn to illustrate the case of an ‘inclusionary town’ since there, during the

¹ *Faces and Causes of Marginalization of the Roma in Local Settings: Hungary - Romania - Serbia*. Contextual inquiry to the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011. A joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Open Society Foundation's Roma Initiatives Office (RIO) and the Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma Inclusion program, and the Central European University/Center for Policy Studies (CEU CPS). October 2012 - June 2014. <http://cps.ceu.hu/research/roma-marginalization>

prior phase of our research, we could notice that one of the local Roma groups was settled in a district close to the town centre and in time managed to override the boundary between its 'own' spoitori area and the larger Dunării neighbourhood hosting Romanian dwellers. Nevertheless, at the end of the research on the faces and causes of marginalization of the Roma in local contexts we concluded that the combinations of inclusionary and exclusionary tendencies identified at the level of each locality displayed a much more complicated and nuanced picture of adverse incorporation (as also analysed in Vincze, 2015).

While focusing on one particular aspect addressed by our complex investigation about faces and causes of Roma marginalization, i.e. the social and historical formation of predominantly Roma-inhabited housing areas, in this article we are restricting our attention to the town of Aiud. Aiud is a small sized town with 22,876 inhabitants, out of which, according to the 2011 Census, 4.06 percent declared themselves as Roma. The empirical material displayed in this article, which describes the historical constitution and recent developments of two residential spaces from this town (locally named *Bufa* and *Poligon*), illustrates how are ghettoization (Wacquant, 2011) and reduction to bare life (Agamben, 1998) shaping the condition of the inhabitants of these housing areas founded under different political regimes. *Bufa* exemplifies a trend of the formation of a Roma-only settlement as a result of economic in-country migration of an extended Roma family and the growth of the settlement that they established on the periphery of Aiud during socialist industrialization and urbanization, as well as the tendencies of impoverishment and stigmatization that they are running through during current de-industrialization, privatization and retrenchment of state from its social roles. On the other side, *Poligon* illustrates the creation of a precarious informal housing area under the very circumstances of the collapsing socialist political economy, including among others its particular employment and housing policies. *Poligon* resulted from the relocation of Roma families forcibly evicted from the gentrifying town centre beyond the town's boundaries, but not accidentally very nearby to *Bufa*, which during these times started to gain more and more predominantly the meaning of a space associated with poor Gypsies. Our analysis demonstrates that although one settlement appears to be 'voluntarily' formed during socialist times, it was created under the constraints of those times and nowadays it becomes more and more isolated due to a severe process of a social and ethnic/racial stigmatization, while the other was constituted due to the involuntary removal/relocation of a group of poor ethnic Roma from one area to another, they both carry elements that illustrate how are the current local practices of economic and political power pushing the inhabitants of these areas into urban marginality through ghettoization and reduction to bare life.

The discussion in this paper is mainly based on the analysis of 15 family interviews conducted in Aiud, with members of the Roma ethnic minority living in *Bufa* and *Poligon*.² Interviews were conducted in the other two Roma inhabited areas of Aiud as well (*Feleud* and *Bethlen Gábor*), but in this article we will refer only to *Bufa* and *Poligon* in our attempt to describe and compare the two settlements in the

² Fieldwork in Aiud, including these family interviews was conducted by Florina Pop and Rafaela Muraru during both the phases of the investigation.

light of our theoretical background. The interviewees were identified based on specific criteria (e.g. families having children under the age of 14, families having at least one child aged 14-18, families in which none of the adults is employed, families in which at least one adult is employed either permanent or seasonal, families in which at least one adult is involved in public employment) so as to achieve a diverse qualitative 'sample' from the point of view of people's employment status and demographic characteristics. We identified our interviewees by the snowball method, while making use of the contacts we established in the settlements in the previous phase of the contextual inquiry. We conducted the interviews in the respondents' homes, after they were informed about the purpose of the investigation, the means for dissemination and the ethical aspects of the research. With regard to the history and formation of the settlements, the interviewees were asked to share what they know about these aspects, either from their own experience or from the memories learnt from their parents, grandparents or other inhabitants. We then analysed these interviews together with other information collected from interviews or informal discussions with local authorities' representatives and with data collected from local monographs.

Drawing on Wacquant's (2011) approach towards urban marginality, we suggest addressing the analytical potential of the term ghettoization for describing the processes that our settlements are subjected to. He defines the ghetto as 'a bounded urban ward, a web of group-specific institutions and a cultural and cognitive constellation (values, mind-set, or mentality) entailing the socio-moral isolation of a stigmatized category as well as the systematic truncation of the life space and life chances of its members' (p. 1). According to the same author, a ghetto includes four specific elements, following economic and social domination functions: stigma, constraint, spatial confinement and institutional parallelism. Wacquant subsequently argues that the ghetto is an instrument of power and control for the dominant group, but at the same time it can have an integrative role for those inhabiting the ghetto. More precisely, in the face of external hostility, the ghetto becomes a place for social and cultural exchange for the confined population, thus providing protection for its members and to some extent replacing the dominant norms and structures from which they are excluded. The restrictive physical and social boundaries among the two groups deepen the divisions and eventually create even more prejudices about the confined population, which may be perceived as exotic or inferior.

On the same lines, Marcuse and Van Kempen (2000) conceptualize ghettos as realms of social exclusion, described by involuntary separation enforced by a dominant group which views the excluded population as inferior and ascribes negative social, political and economic characteristics to this group. Considering a 'new spatial order of cities', the authors discuss the ghetto as a form of urban poverty, promoting spatial divisions and boundaries, as well as social hierarchies. In their view, specific forms of socio-spatial formation based on ethnicity or developed through exclusionary processes are the ethnic enclaves and the excluded ghettos, hosting the urban poor, a group which is long-term excluded. An important aspect in this conceptualization of ghettos is that the market is accounted as responsible for the production and reproduction of these divisions, under the overarching umbrella of the state, which can as well create and perpetuate inequalities through its social structures.

Stigmatization of excluded groups is also explained by Wacquant (2009) as penalization or criminalization of poverty. Wacquant (2001) argues that criminalization of poverty has become a specific approach through which the neoliberal state addresses social insecurity via economic policies which foster state and particularly social-welfare retrenchment. In terms of 'punishing the poor' (Wacquant, 2009: 166), we argue that there are new forms of penalization, such as informal labour kept under surveillance and sanctioned by the police or blaming informal housing as a form of crime, while restraining the excluded group's access to local employment and housing opportunities.

From this perspective, it becomes essential to search for a complex understanding of how the state and its structures can create spaces where power becomes discretionary enforced, as discussed in Agamben's (1998) biopolitics, drawing on the work of Foucault (1978-1979). The author employs the concept of camp to describe a hybrid 'space of exception' (Agamben, 1998: 99), grounded on security reasons and often having a racial or ethnic character. The exception comes from the fact that the laws become suspended, since they are used to exclude a certain population, but also to put them under the strict control of the state, creating a gap between citizenship and human rights. De-nationalized, but under the control of the state, the inhabitants of the camp are refused any protection such as that offered by a political status. The author further highlights that in this case the state of exception becomes 'a new and stable spatial arrangement inhabited by the bare life that can no longer be inscribed in that order' (Agamben, 1998: 113). The concept of bare life is used together with that of sovereign or unmediated state power to explain how in present day democracies the individual can be deprived of his/her basic human rights and be reduced to bare life, having no political relevance, in the absence of any juridical protection.

Based on these theoretical assumptions, in our paper we argue that the development of the investigated settlements in Aiud (*Poligon* and *Buřa*) illustrate specific patterns of social exclusion encompassing elements of ghettoization or discretionary use of power depriving individuals from their human rights or pushing them into the instances of bare life. In these urban marginal spaces, the impoverished Roma are held responsible for their poverty status and are stigmatized and ascribed negative characteristics of inferiority in order to explain their exclusion from the city. Some of the exclusionary practices that they are subjected to are the forced evictions, the reluctance to legally recognize informal housing and to provide local resources for the improvement of housing conditions, and the discretionary use of local policies in the field of housing, employment and political participation.

2. Processes of Roma settlement formation in the larger context of Aiud

Aiud is located in Alba county, in the Southern part of Transylvania, in the Central Development Region of Romania. This locality has been heavily affected by the collapse of one of the biggest industrial platforms in the country, the Aiud Metalurgical Company (*Întreprinderea Metalurgică Aiud*), which provided employment for approximately 9000 people in 1990. Other medium-sized and small-

sized companies in the field of garment manufacture or construction have also collapsed or have significantly reduced their activity. At present, according to interviews conducted with local employers in the previous phase of our research, there are scarce employment opportunities, particularly for people with a low educational background. Besides Aiud Penitentiary, which is an important local employer but not accessible for the low educated, there are some small employers in the field of garment manufacture, construction and footwear, the majority having between 50 and 200 employees. Other important economic activities in the larger geographical area of the town (*Fabrica de Sodă Ocna Mureș, Salina Ocna Mureș, Mechel Câmpia Turzii*) have also collapsed or have significantly reduced their activity in the last decades.

According to statistics provided by the National Agency for Employment, the unemployment rate in Aiud in 2013 was 5%, compared to 5.7% at the national level. The percentage of registered unemployed out of the 18-62 age group was 7.9%, thus opening the discussion about hidden unemployment in the form of agricultural unemployment, seasonal migration or informal labour. As will be discussed in the next sections, the Roma illustrate to a large extent the phenomenon of hidden unemployment, but in the absence of formal data about the ethnic structure of unemployment, we cannot provide statistics about the percentage of unemployed Roma and about their participation in support programmes for the unemployed, as stipulated by the national legal framework.

The monograph of Aiud published in 2010 refers to the local Roma population only in terms of the census statistics produced over the years. Roma (named Gypsies in this monograph) are first mentioned in the 1920 census, when Aiud recorded 8108 inhabitants, of whom 1954 were Romanians, 5604 Hungarians, 103 Germans and 447 of other nationalities ('the majority of them Gypsies'). At the 1992 census, the total population of Aiud was 31,894, of whom 1170 self-declared as Roma. According to the last census (2011) only 930 persons declared themselves as Roma and the total population has decreased to 22,876 persons.

With regard to Roma political participation in Aiud one should notice that until 2013 the Roma minority was not represented at all within the Town Hall. Since 2013, the Local Council has an elected Roma councillor (nominated by the National Liberal Party). Although positively appreciated by the Town Hall representatives and the majority of the local Roma population, his activity regarding the representation of the needs of his ethnic fellows in the City Council is limited by the unequal distribution of local funds between areas that are considered worthy of development and items which are cut out of development funds. The support that the local Roma councillor provides mainly in one of the Roma settlements (*Feleuș*) is based on external funds received by the NGO he administers rather than on local public funds. At the same time, the local Roma Party which according to the national legislation is the main central and local representative structure is hardly recognized by the Roma in Aiud. On the contrary, this structure is highly contested by the local Roma population. Throughout the interviews, many people mentioned that they felt that they have been used in the political struggles because of the votes they brought, but overall they had no influence on the local decision making processes. This appeared to be relevant particularly with regard to local housing policy and infrastructural development. There

were only few developmental projects which targeted the areas inhabited mostly by the Roma population of Aiud, which promised to be participatory and sustainable, but had restricted and little effect on the systemic causes of social and territorial marginalization, while most importantly they were conceived under the new, neoliberal paradigm of entrepreneurial development and competition for external funds (Vincze, 2015). As will be discussed in the next section of our article, the areas inhabited by Roma generally lack developmental investments, which perpetuate their territorial and social exclusion. Therefore, we argue that because of the past and recent local policies, as well as due to how they were historically formed, *Bufa* and *Poligon* became marginalized areas that nowadays are both subjected to ghettoization and reduction to bare life.

Besides *Bufa* and *Poligon*, already mentioned in the introductory chapter of our article and discussed in more details in the paragraphs below, the town of Aiud presents the other two cases of 'Roma neighbourhood' formation. However, briefly presented below for the sake of signalling their existence and the patterns they illustrate, we are not going to discuss them in details, since our aim is to demonstrate the similarities and differences between two housing areas that nowadays are both subjected to ghettoization and reduction to bare life, but were founded during different political and economic regimes.

Feleud (the informal name of *Aiudul de Sus*) is a former village, approximately 2-3 kilometres away from the centre of Aiud, which was lately annexed by the Aiud municipality. This area is inhabited by Romanians, but also by several Roma groups, some of them self-identifying as *caștalăi*, others as *căldărari* or *corturari*. Most of them recall living in *Feleud* ever since they were born, however some state that their families migrated here because of the employment opportunities at the factories in Aiud during socialist times. At present, there are Roma families living in *Feleud* that constantly migrate to Switzerland, Spain or France, where they are usually engaged in informal labour. There is public transportation from *Feleud* to different locations in Aiud including the hospital and the Town Hall. However, in *Feleud* one can find a 'Gypsy school', a segregated school, as well as poor Roma families for whom migration could not function as successful means to overcome poverty.

Bethlen Gábor is an area located in the vicinity of the Town Hall. The housing security of Roma living in this building has worsened during the last years, since the building they lived in formerly as renters of social homes was redeemed by its former owner (the Transylvanian Reformed Church District). People were informed that they would have to move out eventually, but the old/new owner of the building extended the renting contract with the former tenants for a few years. However, according to the post 1990 Romanian legislation the state would have had the obligation to provide alternative housing for the tenants of the retroceded buildings, until now only a couple of families were offered an apartment in the social houses newly built right in the vicinity of *Bufa*. Even if many old tenants from *Bethlen Gábor* street, Roma, Romanian and Hungarian, can hardly imagine themselves being moved from the city centre to the proximity of the marginal 'Gypsy neighbourhood', the City Hall continues the plan to develop this territory as a social housing area even if this plan evolves very slowly.

3. The formation of the century-old Roma settlement of Bufa

The history of the area is described differently by different Roma inhabitants. One of the interviewees, a Roma female, reports that *Bufa* was named after her grandfather, who supposedly was a very wealthy man. This part of her family came from *Târgu-Mureş*, where some of her relatives still live. From what she could remember, he was an employee at Aiud City Hall. She also stated that her grandfather owned a large part of the land and had a horse herd established on the land where *Bufa* is located today. From what her mother has told her, her grandfather lost all his belongings and all the title deeds in the 1970 flood. In Aiud's monograph we find evidence stating that in 1970 a flood produced damages of ten milliards, *Bufa* and the industrial area of Aiud being the most affected areas.

They were very wealthy indeed, they were very wealthy in those times and my grandfather... he graduated college, he was educated, he wanted to become a priest (...) and he employed people like these ones from our neighbourhood. (Roma inhabitant, *Bufa*).

With regard to employment, she reported that her grandfather had some sort of relation with the town's cleaning company and public toilets and also with people's transportation to the town by wagon. It is possible, she stated, that her grandfather employed inhabitants from *Bufa* for those jobs. She considered that the majority of the Roma living in *Bufa* were related to each other because they were descendants of the old family named *Bufa*. Another interview described what kind of jobs did the early *Bufa* inhabitants carry out:

Early on, where you cross the barrier (...) on the railways from the depot, there came woods and there was some kind of fuel from woods and coals (...) and people came there (...) and people from all over Aiud bought woods (...). They were waggoneers, my father had a horse and a wagon... and he had the best horse out of all. He went to the depot and my father had a lot of orders from people to deliver the wood, he knew that money can be made out of transportation. (Roma inhabitant, *Bufa*).

Another interviewed Roma considered that his grandparents built their houses there because they were not allowed to enter the town. From what his grandmother told him, approximately a hundred years ago, near the place where nowadays the *Bufa* houses are built, there was a forest in which wild animals were often times spotted, especially wolves.

There used to be a forest here, all this hill used to be a forest before. And there were some houses here of my grandparents, and they stayed here... They stayed here because in the past, as it is now with us here, they were not allowed to enter into other parts of the town, as we are not allowed today to enter as well... They believe we are savages. It is not different now from what it was back then. Because if they would have had a place to build a house in the town, we would

be in the town now, but they stayed here and so did we. (Roma inhabitant, Bufa).

From another interview we find out that *Bufa's* history is related to the town's cleaning industry. An ancestor named *Bufa* is mentioned again, who lived here and was responsible for the town's cleaning, with some employees. It is important to mention that during family interviews, the information that the grandparents or parents were employed at the town's public toilets and at the Aiud Metallurgical Company came up several times. Finding a place for building a house or for agricultural activities was another common aspect described in the interviews, reflecting the inequalities people of Roma ethnicity had to deal with through the years. Even at present, the inhabitants of *Bufa* do not possess property or housing documents,³ however they do pay taxes for land and house and have done so since three years ago, when the address where they now live was recognized in their identity cards.

There was a community here, there was someone from here, an old man, Bufa. (...) He was in charge of the town's cleaning (...). They enclosed us here, the place where the crops were, we called it Berek, a sort of wood, in Hungarian. We are Hungarian gypsies, but nowadays the majority of us doesn't speak the language. Only a few of us know what this means and what it is, the ancient ones. (Roma inhabitant, Bufa).

Today an approximate number of 100 persons live in Bufa, all of them Roma. When asked about the history of the settlement, they answered that they were born there, and as well as their parents and grandparents did. According to the stories the settlement is supposedly one hundred years old. About their lineage, they state that among them there are *caștalăi*, *băieși*, *căldărari* and *geambași*,⁴ but nowadays they do not consider this as an important identification. A part of them speak Romani language, usually the elderly.

From the local authority's point of view, there is a strong, allegedly cultural difference between Roma from *Bufa*, and Roma moved recently in its vicinity (the *Poligon* area, whose formation is discussed in the next paragraph). They note:

Even the Roma can be divided into two categories, the ones you can reason with, who respect the law, such as the community from Hotar, meaning Bufa,

³ However, there is no published information yet on this recent development, we were told by Simona Ciotlăuș, national expert at the Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion (LERI) programme of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, which runs in 22 localities across Europe and among them in Aiud, that as a result of the local activities, the group created in Aiud under the LERI programme managed to establish a relationship of cooperation with the Town Hall and this endeavour ended up very recently with the legalization of several units of informal housing in the Bufa area.

⁴ These Roma 'nations' (neamuri), sub-groups, people, were delimited on the one hand according to their traditional occupations. *Geambași* Roma were known for their horse trade, while *căldărari* (Kalderash) Roma were metal workers manufacturing buckets or pots, and the *băieși* (Boyash) Roma, also named as *rudari* 'originally' were dealing with gold processing. Some denominations refer to the extent to which Roma kept up their traditions. Relative to the groups from above, the *caștalăi* are distinguished as those who do not speak Romani any more. The term *băieși* might also refer to sub-groups who supposedly are of an archaic Romanian origin and do not speak the Romani language.

where there is discipline and order and there are people with common sense, clean and they seem to be more emancipated and there are those you can't reason with, they just want, and they have only rights and no obligations. (Local authority representative, Aiud).

4. The constitution of a new Roma settlement in Poligon

The official name of this area is Hotar 101 street. The Roma from this area do not identify with a certain lineage, nevertheless they recall their parents identifying as *caștalăi*, *băieși* and *romunguri*. Only a few of them speak the Romani language. This settlement was established in 2010, when local authorities evicted approximately 25 Roma families from a building in the town's centre. The authorities partially explained their decision by the fact that this building, used in the past for social housing, was restored to the owners; but often they justify this action by associating the Roma with a form of threat or deviance:

They lived in the centre, in nationalized housing, which was in good condition. All they had to do is pay rent, a modest amount. They destroyed the houses, turned them into pest holes. They were demolished and they had to relocate the ones who lived there. This happened two and a half years ago. Some of them are mentally retarded. The majority of them have a mental or a physical handicap, although not all of them have a handicap certificate. We now have a project through which 31 social houses are being built in the Hotar area for those who were relocated.⁵ (Local authority representative, Aiud)

The evicted persons state that when they were told about their relocation, they were also informed that the municipality had built (or was about to build) social housing for them in another part of the town. People remember that they were forced to move their belongings with the trucks from the town's cleaning company. They were also told to take all the materials they could use to build a house on other land. The location where they were taken was an empty field, except for some remaining wall of a former construction project and was located on Mureș' river bank, a place used in the past as a military unit, shooting ground and auto park for the army. Nowadays, the Roma inhabitants of this area live in improvised wood, textile materials, cardboard or clay barracks. As in the case of *Bufa*, they do not possess any property documents relating to their houses, however, they are also paying taxes for the use of the land where they have built their houses informally, on the basis of a verbal agreement with the Town Hall.

I didn't know anything. My mother-in-law came and told us we have to move but they didn't give us another place to live, what are we going to do, where will we go? They just said that we would have to move tomorrow. So we arrived

⁵ Out of this project in 2014 only three such social houses were built near *Bufa*, but none of its apartments was distributed to the new inhabitants of *Poligon*.

here and we saw we had no house, nothing (...). And then we started collecting the bricks after the demolition. We collected iron, we made some money and started building... It was very difficult, and it still is... (Roma inhabitant, Poligon).

There used to be a military unit here. They banished all the Gypsies here, so that they don't live in the centre of the town any more. (Roma inhabitant, Poligon area).

Bufa inhabitants recount that in the past this area was well attended, with luxurious cars, parks and cabins. Then a vehicle park belonging to the military unit was established here, but afterwards this was also dissolved.

Why did it [the car park] remain a desert? Because the bosses from Bucharest intervened, they came here to Aiud, others came (...) and got everything out of it. And after what they did, everything was empty, they took these people [the Roma now living in Poligon], they had places in the market, in the bus station, in the back, in the vicinity of an attorney (...) they saw they were filthy, and they struggled until they got them out. (Roma inhabitant, Bufa).

According to the interviews with *Poligon* inhabitants, it seems that some of them, but also the parents of the now middle aged adults living in *Poligon*, migrated to Aiud during socialism because of the employment opportunities at the local cleaning company or the Metallurgic Company. Both *Bufa* and *Poligon* inhabitants stated that on the field where today the houses of those from *Poligon* are built there was a lot of scrap-iron and they dug after it and sold it. Nowadays, the Roma from *Poligon* still search for iron on this field, but it is very hard to find any because the field has already been dug over many times before.

5. Conclusions

The stories of the families whom we interviewed revealed that they were very much related to the broader social and economic histories of the localities, closely linked at their turn to the changes of the larger political regime, including its policies towards ethnic Roma. These structural circumstances determined when and how they settled down and what kind of conditions could provide for themselves on these territories including the areas of the locality where they were allowed or moved or forced to inhabit. Family narratives show that their individual or collective options regarding spatial mobility were on the one hand resulting from their need to provide sources of income compatible with their traditional occupations and other skills acquired in time, and on the other hand were moulded by the potential and limits of the changing economic and political orders.

In the case of the *Bufa* settlement in Aiud, the interviews informed us that most probably the Roma ethnics migrated here because of local employment opportunities, and were allocated (or tolerated on) marginal land, with restricted access to the town. In the socialist times, being formally employed made the Roma feel 'more included',

as this provided various opportunities for inter-ethnic interactions, as well as a more valued social status. But when narrating about the times when they were employed, the interviewees still mention that frequently the Roma were accepted in the inferior and lowest paid jobs, or even having the same status as today, meaning being involved in informal labour. During socialism, the Roma in Romania were provided opportunities for school participation and employment, but in many cases this went together with their forced assimilation and destruction of traditional communities, as well as the embargo against practising traditional occupations. In terms of education, gaps persisted between the Roma and non-Roma population and discrimination further deepened the difference in attainment levels between Roma and the non-Roma. This in turn, along with other factors such as discriminatory practices on the part of employers led to Roma unemployment or to enrolment in low-skilled and underpaid jobs in heavy industry and agricultural state holdings. However, the redistributive social policies implemented by the socialist state had a positive effect on the poor Roma to some extent, although it often meant low paid jobs and marginal and substandard housing. The collapse of public employment caused a severe increase in the unemployment rate of Roma. The low-skill levels of Roma and low educational attainment made re-entering the labour market difficult for them and determined a high rate of long-term unemployment. Furthermore, the deceleration in implementing social protection measures for the unemployed contributed to the reproduction of a state of poverty especially among Roma, followed by prejudices and discrimination that were often initiated at a political or mass media level (Raț, 2011).

More recently, the neoliberal trend in social policies has encouraged the development of 'welfare dependency' discourse that was soon legitimated by local authorities, who became managers of local funds as an effect of decentralization. This opened the way to discretionary use (and abuse) of power on the part of the local authorities who were more or less prepared to approach local problems using professionals such as social workers. In the case of Aiud, this shift to a neoliberal logic was easily depicted in local authorities' discourse, who explained that poverty is created by the poor people themselves and with few exceptions the poor themselves are the only ones to be held responsible for their situation.

In my opinion, poverty is made by the person himself. They [those of Roma ethnicity] expect only to receive, they don't even try to find employment, they don't want to work, not even as seasonal or daily labourers. There's no way to reach any agreement with them. All they do is wait for the social aid [the Minimum Income Guarantee]. (Local authority representative from Aiud)

The collapse of public employment, the discourse and actions promoted by central and local authorities to limit and discourage state subsidies, social benefits and services are some of the reasons for the social exclusion of impoverished Roma. Moreover, the local housing policies have not yet clarified the housing situation of the Roma living in Bufa and Poligon.

Whether the Roma have voluntarily decided to settle in *Bufa* is difficult to assess, given that no other alternative was available for them at the time when they initially moved there. We argue that this form of constraint corresponds to

Wacquant's (2011) understanding of the involuntary nature of an urban space characterized by marginality. The isolation of this area from the town is a strong element of constraint and confinement, which eventually restricts access to opportunities: there is no public transportation to *Buĉa* and the inhabitants here have difficult access to public utilities. There is neither access to running water nor a heating system. For their water supply, people use a common pump installed in their area and they share the costs. Because of arrears in paying electricity bills, it often happens that a great part of them are disconnected and have improvised common access with their neighbours and they share those costs as well.

Social boundaries within the city are created and recreated through local policy decisions, such as offering the land in the vicinity of the houses in *Buĉa* to the non-Roma, who have chosen to use this land to raise animals or to cultivate vegetables. In contrast, the houses of the Roma are limited to very small pieces of land. These local decisions empower social hierarchies, promoting the inferiority of the Roma, who are physically and socially restricted in this area. As a mechanism to address stigmatization and poverty, the Roma ethnics living in *Buĉa* have developed their own internal surviving strategies including helping each other to build or renovate the houses in the absence of any state support, a loan system, or finding informal labour networks that would accept people of Roma ethnicity as a cheap labour force. Less impoverished compared to the Roma from *Poligon*, some of those of Roma minority ethnicity from *Buĉa* are positively appreciated by local authorities' representatives. The reason for this is precisely the institutional parallelism, as described by Wacquant (2011), meaning that the Roma from *Buĉa* have somehow substituted state support services with their own informal support networks, thus expecting and asking less support from the local authorities, who have failed to answer their needs. Another important element revealed in the narratives was the penalization of informal labour, while offering no other formal employment opportunities or, moreover, while restricting access to formal employment. Interviewees described how collecting scrap-iron is sometimes arbitrary sanctioned by the local police, while at the same time there is no employment support provided by state institutions, although as Minimum Income Guarantee beneficiaries they would be entitled to receive such support. In addition, in some interviews carried out with local authorities' representatives, living in informal settlements was considered to be illegal, and thus perceived as a local form of law-breaking on the part of the Roma, yet ethnic tolerance towards the poor Roma on the part of the local authorities.

Furthermore, drawing on our theoretical approach and particularly on Agamben's (1998) work, we can observe how such a settlement becomes a 'space of exception', controlled by the state. The inhabitants are excluded as local housing policies are enforced and kept at the margins using the same local development policies which are discretionary applied. For example, the municipality states there is no public transportation because the roads are in very bad condition, but the local development plans in the last years have not included any infrastructure work in the area. The Roma population in *Buĉa* remains under the control of the state, which goes beyond the law and keeps them in an informal status of housing and employment. The 'bare life' concept is relevant to notice how the excluded Roma are deprived of their rights, an action which is explained by local authorities' representatives as them

not deserving state support since as citizens they contribute very little to the local well-being.

Another aspect revealed in our research was the eviction-based pattern of Roma settlement formation. That is justified in the frame of a discourse regarding 'the undeserving Roma', who are to a higher extent perceived as 'outsiders' and pushed even further away than the better-off Roma. *Poligon* area is the settlement in Aiud which encompasses most visibly the ghetto and camp characteristics as described by both Wacquant (2011) and Agamben (1998). The forced eviction of the Roma from the centrally placed social houses to an empty river bank illustrates discretionary power enforced to exclude a group of people, in the context of arbitrary use of the national and local legal framework. Local authorities explain they had no control over the relocations because the building was restored to its former owner, but at the same time they stated that the Roma were evicted because of their poor hygiene. Moreover, as stipulated by the law in force, it is state's responsibility to allocate other social housing to social tenants evicted from buildings after restitution. Similar to *Bufa*, no legal documents were provided for the improvised houses in *Poligon*, but the inhabitants here were asked to pay taxes for the use of the land and the houses on the basis of a verbal agreement with the Town Hall. The withdrawal of state responsibility in the field of housing leads to even more impoverishment for the Roma, who are refused their housing rights, yet asked to pay taxes in order to be accepted as local citizens. Other similar elements between *Bufa* and *Poligon* are the absence of public transportation and difficult access because of the unpaved roads. The conditions in *Poligon* are even more precarious than in *Bufa*. There is no access to electricity (apart from an improvised connection), nor to water and neither is there a heating system. There used to be an improvised pump but during the winter it froze and it could not be used any longer. At other times it was disconnected because the inhabitants in *Poligon* could not pay the costs.

The perception of local authorities is that the Roma in *Poligon* are themselves responsible for their poverty status and their housing insecurity. In their view, they do not deserve state support because they do not make enough efforts to improve their situation. In one of the narratives, one local public stakeholder explained that all social benefits should be cut off in order to end the social welfare dependency of the Roma. In addition, the same interviewee stressed that the difficult situation of the Roma in *Poligon* and their inability to overcome their poverty status might be explained through the state of mental or physical disability of the people living there. In line with Wacquant's (2009) approach on stigmatising the poor, in this case we notice how poverty together with ethnicity are convened as a pathology, an inferiority status for which local authorities do not want to carry any responsibility. The *Poligon* area functions as a ghetto, involuntarily formed in order to address the demand of a dominant group, while excluding a minority group. A series of negative characteristics are attributed to the excluded group, in order to explain their exclusion from the town: mental illness, poor hygiene, unwillingness to work and to participate in the educational system. The relocation of the poor to the margins of the town constructs a new spatial order of the town, as Marcuse and Van Kempen (2000) notice, ascribing an inferior spatial and social position for the Roma.

Our analysis showed that the economic prospects in the form of employment or trade market opportunities determined the Roma groups before socialism and during socialist times to internally migrate to and settle in a certain urban area (from) where they could play economic (and other) roles accepted and required by the mainstream society. Such trends may have resulted in the 'voluntary' formation of the *Bufa* Roma settlement in Aiud, whose inhabitants were to some extent economically embedded in the local society. However, we could observe that their placement in this very area depended on where they were allowed to settle. Likewise, we could also notice that after 1990 this residential space also displayed the characteristics of ghettoization and reduction to bare life. Besides this trend of formation of residential areas inhabited by impoverished ethnic Roma, in Aiud one could also identify instances when impoverished Roma groups were forcibly evicted from one vicinity of the town to another neighbourhood. The case of *Poligon* reflects that after the collapse of socialism new residential territories characterized by severe physical and symbolic isolation and precarious housing conditions were created for impoverished people by local public policies. The latter case is most visibly embodying the signs of ghettoization that takes place at the intersection of ethnic enclosure and socio-economic exclusion as a manifestation of advanced marginality (Wacquant, 2008), i.e. of the new form of social exclusion in neoliberal regimes, characterized by accumulation of economic penury, social deprivation, ethno-racial divisions, and public violence in the same distressed urban area.

Nevertheless, the approach of ghettoization and reduction to bare life as understood by the authors used as reference points in our analysis proved to have an analytical potential, the cases of Roma settlements in Aiud discussed in this article demonstrated that their formation should not only be addressed through them. There is a need for further analysis from a perspective that might enlighten how these ghettoized areas are reduced to a bare life adversely incorporated into the city's life both as lands and housing areas that generate taxes for the Town Hall while still maintaining people's housing insecurity, and as territories providing homes to people whose informal labour is highly exploited by both public institutions and private companies.

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