

The making of a racialized surplus population Romania's labor-housing nexus

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Abstract: In capitalist Eastern Europe, surplus population is created at the intersection of economic restructuring, leading to the decline of jobs, the absorption of housing in broader circuits of capital accumulation, and the state's disinvestment in social housing. Drawing on the lived experiences of the impoverished Roma from Baia Mare (Maramureş county, Romania), I analyze how racialization produces them as surplus-as-laborer and surplus-as-tenant. The article explores the historically constituted labor-housing nexus. Capitalist enterprises are interested in having permanent access to a cheap and flexible labor force that reproduces in housing conditions that are as low cost as they are inadequate. Private real estate capital excludes those who cannot afford the fast-rising level of the ground rent while the post-socialist state refuses to invest in public housing.

Keywords: Baia Mare, deindustrialization, marginalization, racialization, Roma, Romania, surplus-as-laborer, surplus-as-tenant

Introduction: Understanding surplus population and racialization

The article contributes to understanding the creation of a surplus population at the intersection of production and social reproduction, or labor and housing, in global racialized capitalism, more specifically post-socialist Romania. It explores how impoverished Romanian Roma became a surplus population in the context of the transition from state socialism to neoliberal capitalism, how they were racialized, and how this was driven by the labor-housing nexus.

The original Marxian theory of surplus population referred to the creation of surpluses in the sphere of production, where capital extracts

surplus value from waged labor. The concept of classes of labor (Bernstein 2007, 2021) is crucial for depicting who is included in the surplus population (or when they leave this sub-class). Unwaged workers, the industrial reserve army includes several categories of laborers, such as the unemployed (who seek a job), the non-employed, the underemployed, the unemployable, and the domestic laborer, who all are considered unproductive (Neilson and Stubbs 2011).

In what concerns housing, I view it as a capitalist social relation (Soederberg 2018). On the one hand, it is a sphere of social reproduction possessing a use-value for the labor force (Castells 1977). On the other hand, it is a site of capital accumulation (Berry 1979). Workers



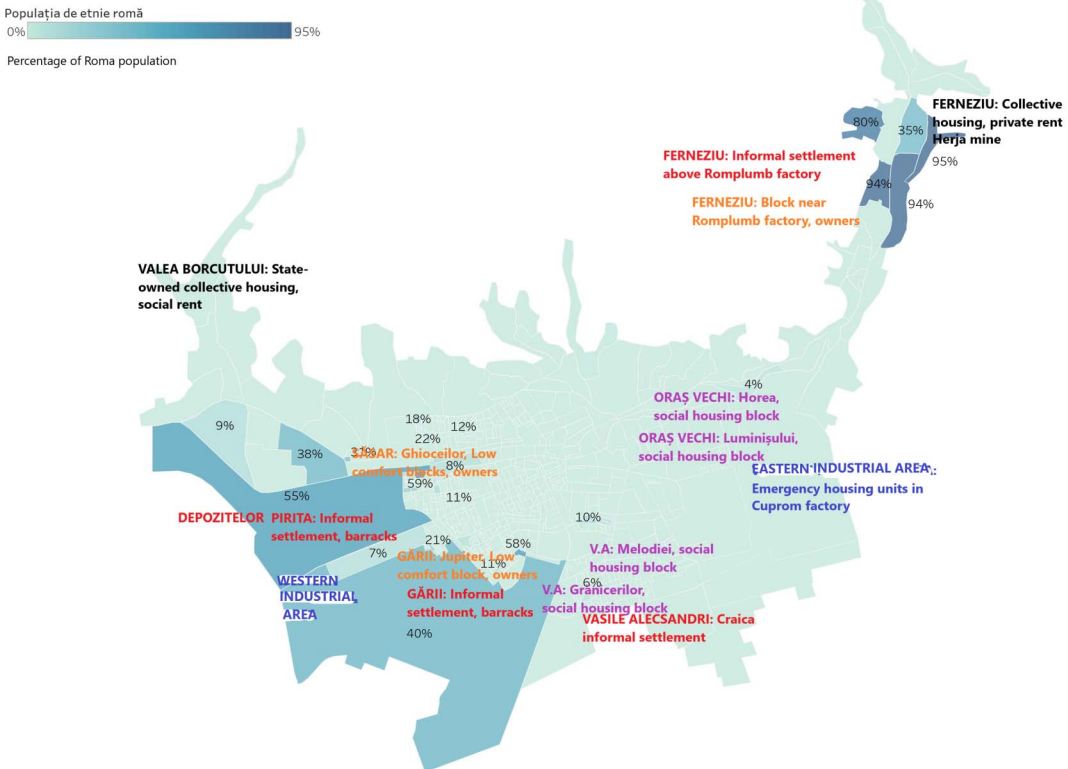
who are turned into an unemployed surplus usually face a crisis in their housing situation, even when they eventually return to low-paying jobs. To rethink the classical Marxian theory of surplus population (Marx 1976), I apply it to housing—a domain used by capital as its secondary circuit, alongside other locations of the built environment (Harvey 1985).

The case from Baia Mare illustrates how de-industrialization transformed Roma workers into a redundant class of labor.¹ Famous for its gold and silver mining, the county seat Baia Mare, occupying a peripheral position in the North-Western Region of Romania, dates to the fourteenth century. Extractivism in the area expanded considerably during state socialism. Metal mining supported a population that increased three-fold between 1965–1992. After its peak in 2002 (152,000 inhabitants), in the past 20 years Baia Mare’s registered population decreased by 12,000 persons, almost 10 percent, and de facto certainly

more, a trend linked to the town’s post-socialist industrial collapse, now partly reversed by its re-industrialization within global value chains.

My material is about the labor and housing conditions of the impoverished Roma in deprived neighborhoods located in 7 of the 12 districts of Baia Mare (Vasile Alecsandri, Gării, Depozitelor, Săsar, the Eastern industrial zone part of Oraşul Vechi district, Ferneziu, and Valea Borcutului). Map 1 helps the reader imagine their territorial marginality and how they overlapped with the 2011 census areas with the highest percentage of Roma across the city.

The stories of the Roma people living in the forementioned areas show various processes behind their impoverishment. Roma people in the city lost their jobs due to the closing of local industries and are now often in precarious employment in the new industries or in services. Their vulnerability on the labor market matches their precarious housing conditions. Unable to



MAP 1. Locations of the PRECWORK interviews. Original map by Ionuț Foldes.

pay their rent and bills, many Roma gave up their apartments and relocated to informal settlements. Others were forcibly evicted and relocated into emergency homes on a closed but still-toxic industrial plant. A third group has been steadily moving in and out of special social housing for vulnerable people.

My thesis is that, alongside the economic restructuring that leads to a shrinkage of jobs, housing as part of the secondary circuit of capital accumulation co-creates surplus populations (Wigger 2021). While they are being dispossessed of adequate living space, Roma people are racialized in the sense of being constructed as an inferior race. Their labor, housing, bodies and subjectivities are devaluated simultaneously in a co-constitutive process. The ghettoization of Roma in Romania has emerged as a result of the racialization of ethnicity, labor, and residential spaces, and is further fed by it (Vincze 2018).

Roma living in deprived neighborhoods of Baia Mare are not excluded from formal waged employment. But their jobs are based on very low salaries, at or below the national minimum, as for example in the new Aramis furniture factory that works for IKEA. But many, while working in insecure and underpaid informal jobs in manufacturing industries or the construction sector, are also periodically unemployed.

In addition to their precarious position in the labor market, Roma in Baia Mare are also considered surplus from the point of view of the capitalization of local real estate. In 2022, the rent of a one-room apartment in Baia Mare was around two hundred euros per month, while the minimum income in Romania was as low as three hundred euros, which makes 66 percent of income. In the lower-quality neighborhoods of the city, a one-room apartment was sold for an average of 30,000 euros. A minimum income would not qualify as eligible for a mortgage. Reinforcing these market trends, impoverished Roma from Baia Mare also came to appear surplus from the point of view of the local public administration, treated solely as a cost. In the 2000s, reduced public budgets for social housing hardly covered the needs of the low-income population.

The article is structured in four sections. Before focusing on the world of housing and labor-related lived experiences of impoverished Roma in Baia Mare, I discuss the political economy of the labor-housing nexus in Romania (section one) and give information on the marginalized urban settings where the interviews were conducted (section two). The conclusion summarizes my ethnographic material's contribution to theorizing the creation of a surplus population.

The political economy of the labor-housing nexus in Romania and Baia Mare

Housing and industrialization

During state socialism, the housing sector was a core part of the productive economy. It was linked to the need to produce an affordable and extensive public housing stock in order to support industrialization. In Baia Mare, the leading extractive industries were the Săsar, Valea Roșie, Borzaș, and Herja mines. There also emerged several connected enterprises such as the Mechanical Enterprise of Mining Machines and Equipment, the Metallurgical Company of Non-ferrous Metals, the Car Company of Tools and Accessories, and plants producing sulfuric acid and chemical products, Phoenix (later called Cuprom) and 1 Mai (later Romplumb), the lead producer. Additional platforms of light industry were also created, such as Maratex (textile), Faimar (ceramic), the Milk Factory, the Marmalade Factory, and others.

Across Romania, socialist blocs built for the workers were rented out at a low price, with only a few being built to be sold to wealthier residents. The state also supported the construction of private homes by offering cheap loans to different categories of employees. State socialism created a market where the state itself was an important actor, both as a supplier and as regulator (Vincze 2022). The price of homes was low, and the state-owned savings bank offered

the population loans at low interest rates. In 1990, Romania had approximately eight million homes, of which approximately 30 percent were in state ownership. This percentage was higher in urban areas, 50 percent to 60 percent. Before 1990, 55 percent of the total housing stock in Maramureş county was public property.

Between 1965 and 1992, when Baia Mare’s population increased threefold with one hundred thousand persons, there was a rapid growth of the built environment—homes, roads, social and cultural infrastructure. The socialist planning system was good at this. A few two-level blocs appeared already in the 1950s in the Lenin neighborhood, now part of the better-off Republicii district. But substantial development started first in the 1960s in the old low-density Săsar neighborhood, formerly populated with family homes and agricultural lands. Other districts followed during the 1970s, such as Progresul and Republicii, Gării and Depozitelor. These were divided among districts of better-off eight- or ten-story blocs and simpler apartments in four-floor blocs. There were also some low-quality worker dormitories for mobile workers (some of them Roma). One of the last socialist districts to be built in Baia Mare, Vasile Alecsandri, had been in planning since the second part of the 1970s and was initially named Cărămidarilor, or brickmakers’ district, probably because it was projected on a territory called

Hatvan, where brickmaker Roma lived in old, to-be-demolished family homes. By 1990 the state had built around 16,000 apartments in Baia Mare.

Housing and deindustrialization

In the early 1990s, the public housing sector was privatized and policy now prioritized private construction (Vincze 2017). As a result, homes became accessible almost exclusively through the market and became in fact asset values. In Romania nationwide, the percentage of public housing radically decreased from 30 percent to below 2 percent. This happened through the right-to-buy and through retrocession legislation. The state withdrew entirely from housing production, accelerating in the 2000s. Real estate is produced for-profit and circulates as a financial asset.

In Baia Mare, the population decline accelerated after 2002 with almost 12,000 emigrated persons in the last two decades. This happened in parallel with the diminution of local industries and the radical reduction of public investment into new public housing, as Figure 1 shows. The local rate of homes in public ownership decreased from 55 percent before 1990 to 31 percent by 1990 and 1.6 percent by 2001.

The reconfiguration of the socialist housing system was simultaneous with the decades of deindustrialization in the 1990s to the 2000s.

Finalized homes in Baia Mare, total and from public funds, INS, 1990-2016

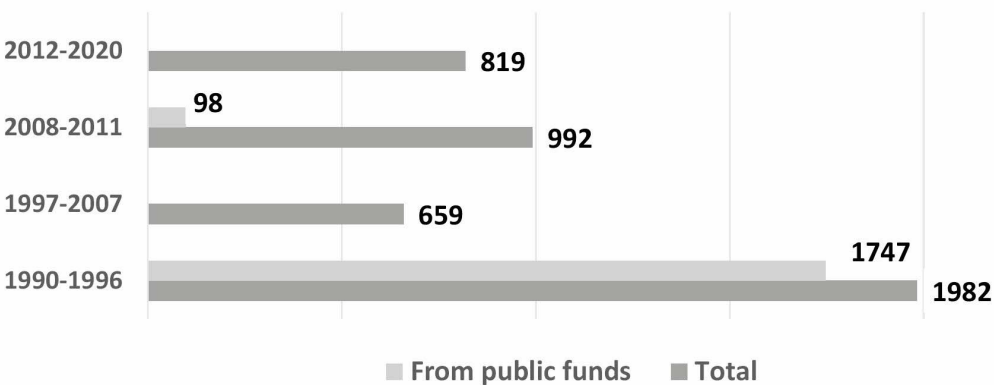


FIGURE 1. Finalized homes in Baia Mare, Source: NIS, the author.

In the case of Romania, as elsewhere in CEE, deindustrialization was based in political decisions (backed up by international financial organizations). It led to job losses, unemployment, declining trade unionism, disappearance of formal wage bargaining, and urban shrinkage. However, as Figure 2 shows, Romania was still among the countries with a high contribution of industry to gross value added.

In Romania, privatization evolved in several phases, triggered by specific legislation. The pace of deindustrialization followed these stages. After the transformation of state-owned enterprises into commercial companies, they were targeted by restructuring measures, including reducing the number of workers in order to reflect global average productivity. In 10–15 years, the state managed to sell the industries to local or foreign companies. Subsequently, many factories were closed, sold in pieces, or demolished, creating space for real estate development. In Baia Mare, the cleaned spots of Maratex and Faimar were occupied by Dedeman, Selgross, and Kaufland; the Vivo Shopping Mall replaced the Milk Factory. The heavily polluting mining sector, extracting non-ferrous metals such as lead, zinc, gold, and silver was entirely closed in 2007, at the European Union’s urging. The enterprises serving the mines were closed shortly thereafter, as were the plants that processed the

raw materials from the mines, Phonix/Cuprom in 2009 and 1 Mai/Romplumb in 2012.

Housing and reindustrialization

In parallel with the dismantlement of socialist industry, a reindustrialization process slowly took place in Romania, mostly driven by the local arrival of global value chains. Hundreds of thousands of new enterprises with Romanian or foreign capital emerged in various labor-intensive sectors, the majority small and mid-sized. They usually manufacture sub-assemblies for global production chains, and have a radically different production and management structure than the one that characterized the centrally planned economy.

Altogether, in Romania, between 1992 and 2020, there was a 20 percent decline in employed persons, a decrease of 43 percent of those employed in industries, and a drop of 45 percent in the industrial contribution to GDP. In 2019 out of the total of 689,700 companies, only 9 percent (65,400) were in the industrial sector, of which 6,400 were in manufacturing and 1,400 were in the extractive industry.

In Maramureş, the number of people employed in industry collapsed from 71,014 in 1992 to 33,786 in 2010 and then gradually climbed up again to 45,053 in 2021 (Source:

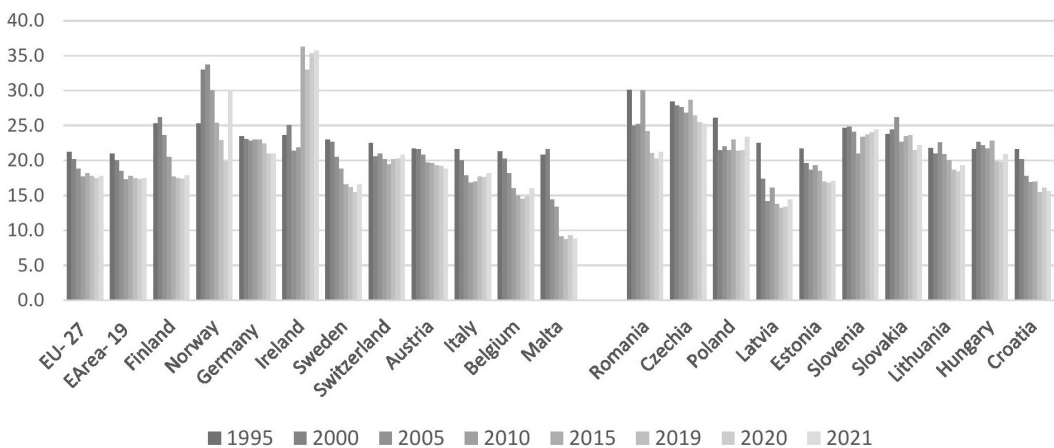


FIGURE 2. Percentage of gross value added by industry in EU and EEA states with more than 20 percent in 1995, Source: Eurostat, the author.

National Institute of Statistics/ Tempo online, accessed 11 August 2023). Aramis, probably the most famous local post-socialist business with Romanian capital in Baia Mare, today with circa 5,000 employees, was established in 1994. It developed as an integrated chain of furniture companies, exporting final products for IKEA. Also in the furniture industry, Italsofa opened in Baia Mare in 2009, with around 1,500 workers. It supplies Natuzzi, the Italian furniture multinational. Both Aramis and Italsofa need a cheap and unskilled labor force. Aramis especially has many Roma workers, many of whom commute from neighboring rural areas. In the restructuring process, the former Maratex and Faimar state enterprises, the two former local giants in the textile and ceramic industry, were closed, and their buildings demolished. But small new enterprises have been founded by former managers of these companies, which mostly serve again as suppliers for foreign firms. These companies, too, rely on a cheap, primarily female labor force. The Car Company of Tools and Accessories has not been liquidated but passed through several new owners and was finally revived as a metal processing company in 2013 under the ownership of a Czech firm.

Roma were often the first workers to be laid off and are currently among those dependent on lowly paid and precarious industrial employment. But their precarious predicament was made worse because of their housing situation. Few of them had the means to buy their apartments in the early 1990s. Others lost housing because of health expenses or family tragedies. To this moment, the Roma population has not recovered from the marginalized and deprived condition into which they were pushed both as laborers and tenants in the period from 1990 to 2008, despite the piecemeal reindustrialization and renewed economic growth of the town. The low wages paid in the new industries and the lack of support for housing from employers and the state perpetuates this situation for the pauperized classes of labor.

While adequate housing is only accessible through an upwards drifting residential market,

low pay also endangers the housing situation of social renters. The local administration keeps the tiny social housing stock reserved for the most vulnerable segments of the population. That segment, however, is subjected to close monitoring and administrative discipline. A system of hidden evictions appears to be aimed at Roma. Hidden evictions are performed through a system that makes the yearly renewal of the rental contracts dependent on being up-to-date with all related payments, including utilities and the like. There are also ongoing cycles of renovation, which require people to temporarily leave their apartments. Town hall thus manages to generate the perception that Baia Mare has a well-maintained social housing stock accessible to new applicants. However, there is no investment in new units, and the social sector has been stable since 2011 at a number of 806 units. The 98 apartments constructed from public funds in this period, 50 in 2008 and 48 in 2011, were built through the public housing construction program called ANL (National Housing Agency) housing, and not through the social housing program of the central or local government, and are not accessible to households on low and fluctuating incomes.

The marginalized settings of Baia Mare

In 2013, the Baia Mare townhall, declared the territories presented in Table 1 as marginalized (Hojda 2015).

Together with Map 1 presented in the introduction, Table 1 shows that our interviews were conducted in marginalized neighborhoods with a high percentage of Roma. I conducted these interviews in 2021 together with my colleague George Zamfir. We met Roma communities scattered across the town in areas which we could identify as spatially marginal and suffering from different degrees of infrastructural deprivations. In section three of the article, I discuss the interviews conducted in the following territories.

The social bloc on Luminişului, the buildings of the former Phoenix/Cuprom factory

TABLE 1. Inhabitants of the areas where PRECWORK interviews were conducted.

District	Address	Estimated no of people	Percentage of Roma
Oraşul Vechi	Horea 46B, social bloc	268	98
(Eastern industrial part)	Luminişului 13, 13A, social bloc, 363 apartments	670	52
	Electrolizei 15, 15A, 15B, Cuprom, 134 emergency dwellings	513	90
Vasile Alecsandri	Melodiei 4, social bloc	199	80
	Craica, 128 makeshift dwellings	650	90
	Grănicerilor 116, social bloc, 96 apartments	186	10
Ferneziu	Ferneziu, 79 family houses	351	80
Depozitului	Pirita, 36 improvised dwellings	131	90
Valea Borcutului	Valea Borcutului, 11 improvised dwellings	40	90
Gării	Gării, 16 improvised barracks	37	100

with emergency housing units, and the social blocs on Horea (in the Eastern industrial area of Baia Mare, administratively part of Oraşul Vechi district). These are placed in the vicinity of the sulfuric acid factory, Phoenix/Cuprom, which entered insolvency in 2009 when it fired its last 190 employees. The emergency housing units provided by the townhall host the people evicted from Craica in 2010. They sit right on the still-toxic soil.

The Craica informal settlement, the (former) social bloc on Melodiei, and the current social bloc on Grănicerilor (in the southwestern extreme of Vasile Alecsandri district). Nowadays, this is a heterogeneous neighborhood. Besides the areas under our scrutiny, it includes the old socialist blocs (whose apartments were sold to their tenants), some new complexes recently built by the real estate development company

Revolution Residence, a private clinic, and other private companies, as well as blocs constructed by the National Housing Agency.

The blocs with private apartments near the 1 Mai/Romplumb factory, the collective house in the woods belonging to the privatized Herja mine, and the informal settlement on the hill above the Romplumb factory (in Ferneziu district). Ferneziu village became part of Baia Mare in the 1960s. The lead factory there (1Mai/Romplumb) was established at the end of the nineteenth century. It had an intense development during state socialism (1,500 workers) and entered insolvency in 2012. Declared bankrupt in 2016, it was sold in 2020.

The Pirita informal settlement on Iazului (in Depozitului district, the western industrial area, nearby the town's water treatment plant and a former pyrite depository). The town hall refuses

to recognize this settlement based on the assumption that its inhabitants are squatters who came only recently to Baia Mare and should leave. However, stories say that two kinship groups were already established here at the end of the 1980s. In addition, in the 2000s, the former mayor brought 10 families evicted from the former social bloc on *Melodieii* and told them that they could construct houses for themselves here. Today there are 67 households with no electricity and water. From time to time, the police raids them and demolishes whatever is newly built, which is then rebuilt by the inhabitants; they have nowhere else to go. Most of these people work at the waste dump.

A family houses area, and an old state-owned collective house on Valea Borcutului (in the lush woods of the Northern extreme of Valea Borcutului district, including the Borzaș mine). Nowadays, Valea Borcutului is an expanding city neighborhood, providing expensive land (former agricultural, lately included in the urban perimeter) for new family villas or luxurious complexes built by developers. It became an attractive area for the nouveaux riches, but it still hosts old family houses.

The informal settlement at the intersection of Gării and Brâncoveanu streets, and the low-comfort blocs with private apartments on Neptun and Jupiter (in Gării district). Named after the train station, the neighborhood is quite diverse but does not have architecturally impressive blocs such as in the better-off districts of Baia Mare. Neptun and Jupiter host low-comfort blocs, with small apartments, no terraces, and without thermal insulation, some in an advanced state of degradation. A food market, a Lidl supermarket, and a small shopping center serve the area. The district also includes several villas, which function as guesthouses, and a larger new real estate project.

The low-comfort blocs with private apartments on Ghiocelilor (in the Săsar district, near the former flotation and close to the entrance to the mine). The old Săsar district was a family houses area where the municipality started to build blocs in the 1950s, intensifying its social-

ist development in the 1960s with several four and ten-story buildings, schools, commercial premises, parks, and a hospital. The distance between the residential area and the entrance to the Săsar mine from Nucului street is about one kilometer. The nearby processing plant, which extracted gold and silver via a cyanide-based procedure (established in 1939, nationalized in 1948, and privatized after 1990), created a big ecological catastrophe in 2000 that poisoned rivers in Romania and downstream from the Tisza and Danube rivers. Nevertheless, SC Aurul company continued to function in the same location under different ownerships (Transgold SA, SC Romaltyn Mining SRL) until 2013, when the Local Council decided that the firm must close its premises in favor of mixed residential development, services, and a commercial zone.

In our interviews we asked people to elaborate on their experiences around the following questions: How long had they been living in their current home, and where did they live before? How did they receive their homes? Where did they work before 1990, and what occupational trajectories did they go through afterward until today? Many of our interviewees moved to the locations where we found them after 1990. The majority were born in the 1960s or 1970s, the generation that was hardest hit by the collapse of socialism. All of them self-identified as Roma. I give fragments of the interviews in five clusters, each displaying specific housing-related deprivations. Before detailing people's lived experiences in their own words, at the beginning of the next section, I will offer an overarching narrative about their changing labor and housing conditions constructed from the interviews.

Housing- and labor-related experiences across political economy regimes

The income that workers gain from their waged and informal labor and the accessibility of homes are mutually interconnected. Workers have no other choice than selling their labor power in

order to survive, but their housing options are similarly constrained by markets and policies. Those who cannot afford a secure home due to the systemic gap between their income and the price of housing become a surplus population from the point of view of real estate capital. In addition, the neoliberal state views the same people as similarly redundant and refuses to provide for them when and where market conditions dispossess people from secure housing. The state considers them worthless and a drag on public resources.

Most of the Roma we interviewed in Baia Mare had always lived in less adequate and secure conditions than many other workers. During state socialism, they did the hardest and lowest-paying jobs in mines and heavily polluting industries, which damaged their health. Alternatively, they worked in sanitation companies or precariously on the informal market. They carried the stigma of inferior laborers, and belonged to an ethnic group defined by the state as a social problem. Only a few went through vocational training at the secondary school level. Most perpetuated their disadvantages until they became unemployed or retired, even if they gained some further qualification at their workplaces. They received housing after many years of waiting at the end of a long queue. Long waiting times for housing were a general problem in the town up to the 1980s as the construction of new blocs of flats did not keep pace with the development of industry. For some, at least for a while, commuting from villages to the town was the solution to the lack of housing in the town where they worked. Others were allocated some living spaces in workers' dormitories or low-comfort blocs of flats, mostly by the late 1980s. Besides being of low quality, these buildings were built close to peoples' workplaces, located mostly nearby polluting industries such as today's social blocs on Horea and Luminișului near the Phoenix/Cuprom factory, the bloc at the entrance to the 1 Mai/Romplumb factory, and the blocs or other types of apartment buildings near the Săsar, Herja, Borșa mines as well as near the mining waste dump in Pirita.

The systemic changes since 1990 have aggravated Roma people's previous housing problems, but they were surely not created from scratch. After 1990, the state sold some of the workers' dormitories and low-comfort blocs to former tenants, or, as workers left after the closure of the industries, these buildings were converted into social housing owned by the local public administration. In addition, people without secure incomes who cannot afford to emigrate for work often take refuge in informal settlements. Those on minimum incomes reproduce their insecure housing situation over time and have little chance of moving up. All of our interviewees tell us that whoever does not go abroad for work is condemned to stay in the same poor and stigmatizing housing situation, whether or not they have a job in Baia Mare.

Roma also experienced evictions before 1990, as they were moved between Melodieii, Arieșului, and Uranus Street. These eviction routes continued after 1990, not from apartments to apartments but toward the empty urban outskirts where the evictees formed or extended informal settlements providing housing at low costs.

The administrative technique most often used by City Hall these days for evicting the poorest Roma tenants from social homes is the procedure of "renoviction": due to planned renovation, old tenants are (temporarily) moved out. After renovation, however, the renewed apartments are not made accessible to the former tenants who are now classified by the public administration as problematic. Such evictions via renovation happen without any administrative or judicial decisions. As a result, there are hardly any former Roma tenants today in the renovated blocs with state-owned apartments on Melodieii and Uranus streets. However, Roma continue to live alongside Romanian tenants in the social bloc on Luminișului (which nowadays undergoes a new renovation) and in the one on Grănicerilor, where many people evicted from restituted homes were offered an alternative. One of the renovated social blocs from Horea, which entered renovation in 2017,

was still empty in 2021 though. The other one was inhabited exclusively by Roma, as are the buildings on the toxic premises of the former Phoenix/Cuprom company. In other words, Roma are being further segregated and concentrated in the worst spaces.

Today, the situation of Roma in the studied areas is continuously degrading, with an increasing number of people living in substandard conditions. As their living conditions deteriorate alongside intensified experiences of discrimination, people tend to beautify the pre-1990 past. Today they are more likely to be targets of racialized stigma, “Gypsiness” becoming the symbol of deep poverty and inability to cope with capitalist advances, which are publicly celebrated as progress. I will present some interview fragments, grouped into five clusters according to the type of deprivations they are facing.

(1) The Roma who are nowadays the renters of the dilapidated houses at the Herja mine in Ferneziu, the state-owned building on Valea Borcutului, or those who live in the makeshift shacks at the end of the Gării district, are or were all active as workers in the local economy:

Only Roma miners received an apartment from the mine in this old building. This house is far from the town, but we didn't want to be in the town. If we knew this was free, we asked for this, we went to the director's office and asked. We don't like the town, especially nowadays. It's expensive—gas, electricity—you pay a lot for everything. Here I pay for garbage, water, electricity, and sewerage, but it depends on how much you consume. I also raised animals here, which was good for the family, we had something to eat. And the air was better here than in the town. In Romania salaries are miserable. I used to work in a small factory in Tăuții Măgheruș, but after a year of work, they fired me. This was about six years ago. People are leaving for Austria because it doesn't pay them here. Even at Aramis there are no salaries

from which you can live and save to buy a house. How much can one put aside if you earn only the minimum income and everything is so expensive?

(Roma woman, 50 years old, a social renter in former state-owned housing in the woods of Valea Borcutului district)

(2) The Roma apartment owners in the low-comfort blocs in Neptun and Jupiter streets in the Gării district, or Ghiocelilor street in the Săsar district, face massive increases in utility costs and do not benefit from the town's investment in neighborhood infrastructure or from the renovation and refurbishing of their blocs. On sick leave or retirement, older generations have all worked in the former industries of Baia Mare, while their children may continue to live with them in the absence of homes of their own. As a result, the tiny homes are becoming increasingly overcrowded:

These blocs were dormitories for miners, they were built during the floods in the 1970s. This is how my father, who worked in Săsar mine, got an apartment for us. I was 14 years old then. After I married, my former husband, who worked at another state company, received an apartment in the same bloc. There were a lot of Roma in these blocs at that time. When I was 25 years old, in 1984, I was hired at Săsar Flotation, which is nearby. I worked as a cleaning woman for nine years, however, for a short time I also worked in the production process. God forbid, how I came home from work. Right after 1990, I became ill with cancer, could no longer work, and retired. Today I am still living in our old wagon-type apartment, which has three extremely small rooms, with my sick son whom I must take care of, and with three grandchildren whom I raise. I could buy this apartment after 1990, and I am happy with this because many Roma families who used to live here could not afford to buy and could not afford even to

pay the rent to the City Hall and the utilities, so they were evicted and moved to Craica, to Cuprom or nearby Romplumb in Ferneziu, where they got something for free or cheaper. Today there is only one more Roma and me, the rest are all Romanians. Today everything is so expensive. For example, for my children, only my daughter managed to buy something because she worked in England. I heard that many people took credit from the bank to buy an apartment and lost both their money and the apartment because they could not continue paying it back.

(Roma woman, 62 years, apartment owner in a bloc of flats from Ghioceilor str., Săsar district)

(3) Roma homeowners in the blocs near the 1 Mai/Romplumb factory or in the self-constructed houses on the hill above the plant without access to gas and sewerage, have always been severely affected by environmental lead pollution, which means they have a reduced life expectancy. Buying cheap land, houses, or flats in this part of the Ferneziu district has been part of the daily strategies of survival among the poor:

During Ceaușescu, I worked in a small garment factory in Baia Mare, my husband was an electrician there. The factory gave us a small second comfort apartment. After 1990, when we realized that our daughters could not receive an apartment from the state, we looked for a solution to cope with the changes. We bought the apartment on Cuza Vodă Street but sold it right away, and in 1995 bought this apartment in Ferneziu, near the Romplumb factory, so that we could also help our children with some money. This was cheaper, even though more spacious than in Cuza Vodă because it was devastated, had no water, no gas, and was near the factory, still polluting for years. Before 1990, people did not have water inside

the bloc. They had a water pump outside, and there was no gas, the heating came through some big pipes from Romplumb. The workers who used to work in Romplumb sold their apartments when they were fired and the factory closed. We also had years of great pollution here. Many children were born here malformed, you know, and many died. In a way, I'm not sorry that the factory closed because since then, we have had clean air, our own vegetables, and we raised chickens or a pig. Otherwise, I'm sorry that it closed, they should have done something else not to leave people without jobs.

(Roma woman, 65 years old, apartment owner in a bloc in Ferneziu district, near the former Romplumb factory)

My parents didn't come to Ferneziu for work, they came here in the early 1980s because of cheap houses and land. Let me tell you something, you know that the Roma are marginalized wherever they are, so here it is a refuge for us. It was so in the past, and it is the same nowadays. After 1990, more Roma from Baia Mare started to come to this settlement, from the blocs, from Cuprom, from Hatvan or Craica, but also Târgu Lăpuș, and other localities. So many houses were built here on the hill in the 1990s, but all without authorization. There are now about two hundred houses in the community. I worked for 42 years in the 1 Mai plant, now called Romplumb, of which 12 years were in the foundry. I retired in 2007, shortly before its full closure, when the last workers were laid off. I receive a low pension, two thousand lei (four hundred euro). There were not so many Roma working at Romplumb, there was strong discipline there, and a racist director kicked them out of their jobs. But in those days this was not such a big problem, they went elsewhere, mostly to the mines. Very many Roma worked in the mines, and there they had better salaries,

but it is also true that they died early from silicosis. The conditions were not much better for us in the lead plant. You can imagine how it was, we didn't have any birds in the forest in those days. This gas poisoned everything, including us. The gases in the air exceeded the allowed limits about three to four times. Blisters came out on our skin; look, I still have them, and some swellings under the skin. This is saturnism or lead poisoning. However, it's good that it came out because if it remained in the blood, I could get leukemia. There were people, also children, who had leukemia and died. So, the air was dangerous not only for those who worked in the lead factory but also for those who were living in the surroundings.

(Roma male, 65 years old, a homeowner in the informal settlement on the hill above Romplumb, Ferneziu district)

(4) The Roma living in the informal settlement in Craica are faced with a permanent risk of eviction and no access to utilities. Many have experienced several eviction waves elsewhere, so they have "chosen" to settle in Craica. When they grow up, their children and grandchildren, having no alternatives, construct their barracks in the same area. The settlement is increasingly overcrowding. Seeking to clean up the area, after long-standing threats, City Hall evicted some of the Craica tenants in 2012 and demolished their shacks. Relocating them to the former Phoenix/Cuprom factory's office and laboratory buildings did not help to solve their housing problems. On the contrary, this created new issues for them, so many wished they could move back to Craica, even though they now had water and sewage in their Cuprom homes:

I have 19 years of work registered on my labor card and 12 births. In the 1970s, I had a small house in Hatvan, which the communists demolished. They gave us seven hundred lei and allowed us to enter an apartment on Melodiei street, devas-

tated, with no windows, doors, or utilities. The Gypsies whose houses were demolished received a place in those two blocs on Melodiei, but the Hungarians and the Romanians received apartments in better blocs in town. Later, when my husband and I both worked at the sanitation company, we received something better in the Depozitelor district. But afterward we moved back to Melodiei to be closer to our children's school. After 1990 we bought that apartment from the state, but very soon we had to sell it since we needed money for our son's surgery. We moved here to Craica, which nowadays is full of Roma homes without registration and utilities. It was nice here before 1990 when I was a child. My father made bricks here, apart from his factory job. Now Craica has become the Valley of Sighs. In the last few years, I worked at the Aramis furniture factory, where many Roma are employed, but I could not cope physically anymore and lift those heavy pieces. Some of my children are also hired there, but you cannot buy or rent a home in Baia Mare from the minimum income you get from them.

(Roma woman, 64 years old, Craica, homeowner in an informal settlement, Vasile Alecsandri district)

(5) The most vulnerable, both in terms of housing and labor, are the Roma in the social blocs on Horea Street and the nearby emergency housing units on the former Phoenix/Cuprom factory, as well as those in the squatter settlement of Pirita (created on the territory of a former pyrite depository). They not only suffer from material deprivation, housing insecurity, and a toxic environment but also from various physical and mental illnesses and often from drug addiction. Many of them have been incarcerated for shorter or longer periods:

There used to be Roma houses in Hatvan. When my parents' home was demolished,

they were moved to a new bloc. My father worked at a mining equipment factory and, after, at a sanitation company. They stayed on Păltinișului street, then on Melodieii; they stayed where they got something. When they were moved, they found some devastated apartments. They didn't give them anything better. Then my parents built a house in Craica. I also went with them. We had a good house it was a shame the mayor demolished it. He moved us here to Cuprom. Here we had electricity and shared toilets and bathrooms on the corridors, so it could have been better than in Craica, but it wasn't. There were some laboratories and some offices in these Cuprom buildings. A few people got poisoned at the beginning. And, in time, many dangerous persons gathered here. Waste is dumped everywhere, thrown from the top of the stairs, the whole staircase is filled with garbage, from the basement up to the first floor, and everything is destroyed. Here they put us with drug dealers, thieves, and criminals. Not everyone is from Craica; they came from elsewhere. Everything gets stolen. And the tragedy of my life happened here. My little girl, who was five, was murdered here, tortured, and killed. We do not feel secure. I wish to move back to Craica, but they do not allow us.

(Roma woman, 51 years old, tenant of emergency housing, Cuprom factory building)

From the age of 22, I worked in the flotation in Băiuș, for about seven years, extracting gold from the minerals and carrying kilos of pyrite. At that time in Băiuș, I lived in my parents' house. Then they transferred me to Baia Mare, to the Phoenix plant, where sulfuric acid was manufactured. This was already at the end of the 1980s when they no longer gave good apartments to the workers. My husband was hired at the sanitation com-

pany. After 1990, both of us got jobs at a privatized construction company. From that company, we received a two-room apartment with a kitchen, where all of us, we two and our six children, lived. Fortunately, the children have grown up in the meantime, and each went where they could. The apartment was next to the concrete factory, it was a workers' dormitory, a one-story building used before as an office place. When I had an accident and lost my job, I also lost this apartment. I didn't wait to be kicked out of the house, I left voluntarily. At about the same time, I separated from my husband. After he died in 2017, my daughter called me to her place in this social housing bloc. My son found me a job at a pizzeria. When the COVID pandemic began, my legs started to swell. I had to go to the hospital. I stayed there for a long time. All my organs were full of water, including my lungs. I couldn't sleep; I was drowning. I also went to the TBC hospital with infusions. Now I am waiting to get a pension.

(Roma woman, 62 years old, a renter in a social housing bloc, Horea str.)

The Roma we find today in the deprived settings of Baia Mare are part of a class of workers with fewer occupational and housing resources both during state socialism and after. As Roma, they were treated differently than the Romanians and Hungarians, with more suspicion and prejudice, officially not recognized as a national minority with cultural rights but targeted as a "social problem." In short, they were racialized. However, compared to their recent experiences of discrimination, memories emphasize that former ethnic cohabitation was far better, and there are good reasons to believe so. Before 1990, the system of course also sacrificed Roma as working machines on the altar of extractivism and intense industrial production. They worked multiple shifts to ensure the non-stop operation of mines and mineral processing that endangered their health and lives. Nevertheless,

at least the state as an employer took care of its labor force by providing them with housing, even if the home they received differed in quality and spatial position from what the higher valued workers received. After 1990, in parallel with the transformation of the old industries into scrap metal, Roma workers were downgraded to a racialized surplus population. The latter is devalued through the expropriation and exploitation of their formal and informal labor, as in the waste industries, the mines, or the Aramis furniture factory. Meanwhile, as competition among workers for an insufficient number of jobs increases, no employer is concerned about the housing condition of their employees, which is considered private. In parallel, the liberal Romanian state has defined housing as a personal matter commensurate with one's private market position. Housing is transformed not only into a commodity on the market but also into a financial asset. The appreciation of the ground rent/price dominates over any type of social value and silences any claims for housing rights. In addition, those who live in the informal settlements without registered addresses cannot acquire official identity documents (which, in the Romanian system, affirms one's citizenship status), only so-called temporary IDs without domicile. This implies they cannot receive any social transfers and are basically treated as less human.

Conclusion: The racialized status of surplus-as-laborer and surplus-as-tenant

By connecting the urban political economy and the lived experience of the labor-housing nexus, and highlighting the marginalized settings where many Roma reside, the article described the racialized entanglement between ethnicity, labor, and housing in the city of Baia Mare. The post-socialist transformation of impoverished Roma into surplus-as-laborer and surplus-as-tenant resulted, on the one hand, from the loss of work opportunities and, on the other hand,

from the conversion of housing into a site of capital accumulation. As shown, the post-socialist local state further reinforces their surplus position by drastically reducing public investments in the social housing stock and targeting the Roma with "renovictions".

Nowadays, impoverished Roma, as a surplus population are tolerated in the town's informal settlements or insecure social housing, and their cheap labor force is exploited or expropriated (Fraser 2017). In the Romanian context, ghettoization is a spatial process of enforced disconnection from the rest of the city, and a flip side of the precarization and pauperization of the Roma working-class (Vincze 2018). Material conditions and state policies force the latter to retreat into territories where land values and the cost of living are as low as possible and allow their social reproduction. Because the new housing ideology maintains that providing a home is a person's private responsibility, nor the capital or the state is interested in how the workers are actually making a living, even though they share an interest in having a permanently available source of cheap labor. Ghettoization of the Roma in Romanian cities that are now slowly recovering from the post-socialist economic crises continues, despite their integration into the local and global economy. What makes their situation specific as compared to low-income Romanians and Hungarians is their racial stigma and the absence of property.

The creation of a surplus population in the sphere of production, the first circuit of capital, and the sphere of housing, the second circuit of capital, are interconnected and mutually reinforcing processes. The accumulation of capital from housing depends on the exploitation of waged labor in industries. Those who are most severely expropriated and exploited, whose labor is most deeply devalued as surplus, cannot participate in the second circuit, either as renters or as owners. The surplus labor force, therefore, is also a surplus from the perspective of housing-centered capital accumulation. In the case of impoverished Roma, as the article

claims, the overlapping status of surplus-as-laborer and surplus-as-tenant is facilitated and magnified by racialization.

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Notes

1. I describe lived experiences of housing and labor captured by semi-structured interviews of the research project "Precarious labor and peripheral housing. The socio-economic practices of Romanian Roma in the context of changing industrial relations and uneven territorial development" (PRECWORK). Our project deals with industrialization, deindustrialization, and reindustrialization processes, which shaped la-

bor, housing, and migration in Romania, particularly in Maramureş county.

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