



## **„They took personal data and some pictures, yet they found nothing for us” – misunderstanding and suspicion in a marginal Roma neighborhood from Romania**

Plainer Zsuzsa<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

*This paper claimed to reveal, that mistrust during fieldwork is more than an unpleasant individual experience: it is a telling ethnographic data. Repudiation of Gallilei Street ghetto residents was equally due to a wrong research question and some external factors. Post-socialist industrial restructuring and residential policies brought – likewise everywhere in Eastern Europe - insecurity to the one-time privileged working-class. To go further, unemployment entailed changes in residential patterns and echoed new forms of exclusion. The better-off workers, Roman and non-Roma, could – at least partly – maintain their previous conditions, but many were pushed to the fringes of the social structure. In lack of capital they cannot stand in the process of privatization, lost their rented apartments and become evicted. Others, coming as a second wave to an old block, were facing uncertain situation with property rights; decaying conditions – initially a cause of avoided privatization later an effect of it – turned the green building into a “Gypsy ghetto”. And ghettoization did not only entail impoverishment, but created dependency to local institution, claiming to do good to the locals. Mismatch with school and NGO, being used by many, promising to help the Roma, green block inhabitants look suspiciously to anyone resembling with such helpers.*

### **Keywords**

*Roma, suspicion, fieldwork, post-socialist impoverishment, urban ghettoes*

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<sup>1</sup>Romanian Institute for Researching National Minorities in Cluj-Napoca (ISPMN), Romania,  
[plainerzsuzsa@gmail.com](mailto:plainerzsuzsa@gmail.com)

Difficulties in doing fieldwork, in contacting informants is a familiar issue in anthropology: “We were intruders [in the eyes of locals]” - recalls Clifford Geertz (1973:p.412) his less successful entering the Balinese field – “people not part of their life”. Subsequently, fragility in building up connections between researcher and the community is common for Romany studies, too. Two famous monographs on Roma relay difficulties in starting fieldwork. In his Hungarian version of *The Time of the Gypsies*, Michael Stewart (1994:p.32)<sup>2</sup>. recalls the perseverance necessary for being accepted by the local Roma: in order to show how serious he was about his plans for moving in, Stewart proceeded to build his house in the settlement, raising understanding, admiration, and later acceptance of the locals Similarly, Judith Okely points out how difficult the entering of a Traveller-Gypsy group was in the UK:

“Soon I was offered my own caravan on various sites by the local officer, also sympathetic to my interests. Eventually I needed only to appear as a student, without any duties of a rent collector etc. This role first as a student helper or warden was the only possible opening, and viable only during the short life of the temporary sites. Months if not years of day visits could have been spent in the vain hope that the Travellers might spontaneously invite me to join them. Attempts to divert me to other localities failed partly because the opportunity to live alongside Gypsies after such a brief acquaintance existed nowhere else.” (Okely 1983:p.40)

My following story of doing difficult fieldwork in a marginalized Roma community from a Romanian city claims to be more than a self-reflexive narrative. It is an analysis of misunderstanding between a researcher and his/her informants, where mismatch is regarded as telling ethnographic data instead of mistake. Thus, ways of understanding suspicion is expected here to reveal structural facts that create and reinforce socio-cultural exclusion.

### **Beginnings - the research history**

Neither the “green block of flats” nor its surroundings – a “Gypsy neighborhood” in a Romanian city - had initially been chosen as focus for my future research. It was the local school that – due to its bad fame and an overwhelming presence of Roma students - was in April 2007 sorted out as a proper site to investigate school inequalities in the years to come. Therefore, when joining the “Inclusion 2007” PHARE project a couple of months later, I had immediately proposed the school’s surroundings, the district, as my fieldwork-to-be for the nation-wide investigation on Roma social inclusion. Of course, I expected the three week PHARE fieldwork to help me become familiar with the local communities, school clients, and understand local stories that lay beneath school attendance or abandon.

Internal heterogeneity of the site had been become obvious soon after entering the field. Instead of a geographically and culturally (more or less) homogeneous group,

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<sup>2</sup> I referred to the Hungarian version of the book, different from its second, English translation.

the place known as “Roma district” everywhere in the city, was populated by various types of people. Beside local Romanians and Hungarians, there were the sub-ethnically divided and socio-culturally different Gypsies (from Gabors to assimilated Roma, from Pentecostals to non-believers, from better-off people to economically marginal, unemployed ones), living in different areas of the quarter, preserving no, or little connection among them.

The assimilated Roma living in Newton Street, or as they prefer to call themselves, “Hungarian Gypsies” were the first to be mentioned from this colorful picture. Dwelling separately in illegally built houses quite close to the district center, these people used Romany as their second or third language, Hungarian being their first or second tongue but “Hungarian” also referred to their willingness to marry Hungarian people and live in Hungarian settlements from Transylvania. Gabors, dwelling in the neighborhood of local institutions (school, church, medical center) recognize themselves as “true Gypsies”, keen to preserve – as they say - traditional Romany ways of live: childhood marriages, transmission of Gabor jobs like confectioning copper drain-pipes. Members of the third group, living in the ill-famed Gallilei Street<sup>3</sup>, named themselves as “Romanian Gypsies” (in order to point out their inclination of living amongst Romanians and speaking their language as their first one). These latter were called “settled down Gypsies” (házigányok-vătrași) by the Gabors and “Beash” (băieși) by some members of the educational staff. Many of them were temporary unemployed, living out of social allowances.

The extended Gabor family moved in the district during the 1960ies from a neighboring quarter, where they were allocated a house under the climate – as the oldest among them remembers – of a national policy encouraging geographically mobile Roma to settle down, also recalled by Achim (1998:p.220). The income necessary for buying their old home and changing it for a larger one was earned from spout fabrication and cauldron making, all these on legal bases as the Gabors had had trading licenses even during state-communism. Extra earnings had been made from trading with goods on the (black and street) market, preoccupation lasting after 1989, when drain-pipe business has been begun to decline. As techniques of manufacturing were transmitted through informal institutions (apprenticeship at family members or other persons), and position on the labor market was – at least partly – legalized, the Gabors were not seriously affected by post socialist restructuring. Being members of the Adventist Church, preserving their Romany dialect, traditional clothing, the custom of child marriage, rejection of exogamy, the Gabors seem to be – economically and socio-culturally - the most self-standing group among the all three.

Despite a variety in life styles and coping strategies, state socialist modernization and post-socialist transition seemed to influence trajectories of either the Newton- or the Gallilei Street inhabitants. Newton Street dwellers where migrating from a Transylvanian village in order to work as unskilled or half-skilled workers at constructions in the city. As the core-couple of the extended family (husband and wife) proudly told, they were

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<sup>3</sup> All names all fictional.

involved in the building of many city blocks during the state-communist urbanization of the 1970ies and 1980ies (when houses were demolished and replaced by new block of flat districts that served as homes for newcoming rural migrants). Similarly to many fellow-workers, an apartment was allocated for the couple by their workplace, but, in the enthusiasm of Caritas game, it was sold, its price invested in the pilot game and lost in the early 1990ies. In order to survive, the husband started to work in Hungary as private entrepreneur in construction, the wife was selling goods on the markets. As he got seriously ill and became unable to work, the couple had to return home and build (illegally) a wooden house attached to the legally built one of her mother's in Newton Street. Later other family members joined all remaining unemployed due to the closure of state-communist factories. All leave in self-made, illegally raised houses, earn their livings on temporary jobs usually in constructions (mostly on the black market). They have no running water and electricity, a stove serves for heating and cooking.

Gallilei Street history is even deeply linked to socialism and post-socialist transition. Many important factories (as shoe-factory, tan-yard, pharmaceutical factory producing wall tile and flagstone floor, brick-works, chemical works, factories of heavy industry and a china-factory), were opened nearby the Gallilei Street blocks of flats during the 1970ies and 1980ies. According to migration and housing policies of Ceaușescu's Romania, the factory workers, encouraged to migrate from rural areas, were allocated apartments in the industrial area. Plant closure in the 1990ies entailed uncertainly in property relations, moving ins and moving outs of many one-time workers, deterioration in living conditions, loosing of secure jobs, impoverishment.

An important link between these three - socio-culturally (more or less) distinctive - groups have been the local institutions, especially the local school and NGO. But these letters were not just creating a common shield of experiences for the locals, they, too, sorted them into different categories and attached distinct labels to them. The Gabors, who proudly stated, they do not leave out on allowances, have been invisible for the NGO workers, but are well-known among the school staff.

“The Gabors cooperate with us. They are better off than others and travelled. True, the money earned is spent on coffee and cigarettes; they like going to bars and have fun. Girls are allowed to sleep till late, they think resting preserves beauty. They keep their traditional customs and are very clean.”  
(form-teacher)

Newton Street dwellers are regarded poor and helpless by the staff-members:

“Newton Street people are working in constructions. Their biggest problem is with clothes, as they have no place to wash and lay them. So they usually ask relatives or neighbors for clothes. The school mediator and I were turning to an NGO to help them with dresses.” (School teacher)

Newton Street people are regarded “the best” for the school mediator. When asking her to recommend me families to visit, she immediately names Maria and their children, whom she considers “good people” and “willing to send kids to school”.

Gallilei Street inhabitants are considered “evil” and “non-cooperative” by the form-teacher. “Many are unemployed and does community work for allowances. Sometimes they have no income at all” She recalls stories with parents, who threatened her. The school mediator simply forbids me to enter Gallilei Street and make contacts with the locals. “They are dangerous” – she argues.

When describing the communities, the ex NGO worker speaks about Gallilei Street in a controversial manner. Only after becoming familiar with local relations, I came to understand that she instinctively associates the whole area with the ghetto-like block of flats on its end, and refers to its inhabitants as a collective entity (“Gallilei Street people are united”). It is so even she admits later, the street is not so homogeneous:

“Gallilei Street people are rather united, only the administrator in the block is not a Roma. They’re like a big family but full of conflicts. There are some Roma families elsewhere in the street but they leave nearby Hungarians and Romanians and there is no connection between them. Some of Gallilei Street people sometimes had to do with the police. One finds there many non-cooperative families, some threatened our colleagues.” (Ex-NGO worker)

Having in mind the internal differentiation of the local Roma, and labels the local staff assigned to them, two research types seemed to be relevant at the beginning. In summer of 2007 I wondered to do what Marcus (1995) and Falzon (2009) called multi-sited ethnography: analyzing different ways of using the district and its institutions by Gabors and Newton and Gallilei Street inhabitants, or focus only one group? I decided to choose Gallilei Street and especially its most marginalized, and disadvantaged place, „the green block of flats” for two reasons. Firstly, as I observed, institutions linking the three Roma entities deserve many clients outside the district, so their views „on the Gypsies” equally refer to locals and other Roma living in different parts of the city.

„We work with families, so I cannot generalize, I cannot speak about areas but about families. My clients live in different places: near the railways, and elsewhere outside the area.” (NGO worker)

Secondly, it was my training and previous experiences that inclined me towards the second option. Having my background in Sociology, I was always encouraged to deal with socially problematic issues; moreover, my previous fieldwork „on” Roma was for policy making purposes, so all these influenced me when reading and interpreting the „Inclusion” research guide. Out of what Fleck-Florea -Rughiniş (2007:p.6.) pointed out, “the mechanisms of social exclusion on local level and inequalities on different fields” – they guide enlisted a series of phenomena to be observed during fieldwork: “the relations between Roma and non-Roma, and between institutions and inhabitants, the level of access to different services and to economic opportunities, spatial and social

segregation of Roma communities, the coping strategies amongst Roma and non-Roma people, and communication channels inside the community, the usage of language (parole) and other cultural issues, aspirations and future plans". (2007:p.6.). Still, in the quest for „problems" I focused on issues of marginality highlighted in the guide:

„The research will include quantitative and qualitative methods, both at locality and household levels. Using the outputs of the research, there will be written two kinds of papers:

**Methodology Report:** a report establishing a methodology for solving problems due to the lack of ID cards, civil status or dwelling papers

**Final research report** which will include different chapters concentrating on various aspects and mechanism of social exclusion, numerical estimates, need assessment, risk analysis, map of communities at risk, main factors of social exclusion, mechanism of social exclusion on local and national level, ideas and recommendations to policy makers." (2007:p.4)

In order to answer my research question (mechanism of exclusion), I had evidently chosen the Gallilei Street block ("the lowest of the low") as my research unit.

Entering the ill-famed site was full of unpredicted events. Firstly, it was rather a two-faced place not just a mere site of urban marginalization and inequalities. The street had its "good part" with blocks of flats in a relatively acceptable condition, with people sitting outside and talking; cars with Italian and Spanish numbers were parking everywhere alongside. And there was the "bad side", "the green block" at the street's end, contrasting this peaceful image. It could have been a typical image for the Western mass-media portrayal of Romanian poverty: garbage at each step, bad smell, dirt, falling plaster, lousy people gathering on the courtyard and listening *manele* (typical Balkan shantytown music) at maximum volume all day long. Moreover, the blocks of flats' inhabitants – in accordance with their label – were unfriendly and non-cooperative, when I tried to set up connections to them. According to my field notes from August 2007:

"Being frightened by its fame, I asked A. to join me for my first entering Gallilei Street. People were sitting in the dirty courtyard, everyone turning their backs to us. We followed an older Gypsy woman, who rejected all our questions and ignored us. Two men were sitting in front of their apartments, talking. One invited A. in front of him and started to ask. 'What do you want, why did you come?' When A. said we are undertaking a research here, he immediately stated, he has nothing to say. His father worked at the public sanitation, so does he, and this is all that he wants to share as the son of a sanitation man remains a sanitation man, too'. We should come back when his own kid would finish school, unlike his father and grandfather. That would be a piece of news, he said, but he has nothing to add till then. So we left the courtyard."

My second attempt to enter the block was seconded by people from "the good side". They were a downwardly mobile Roma family, who – unemployed and living on sick leave - became unable to pay overhead expansions for their bigger and better

apartment in a far-away working-class district. Being familiar with the area, as it was the area where they worked, they sold the old apartment and buy a new, smaller and cheaper one in Gallilei Street. To stay close to family members (son and daughter in law) the couple helps them to buy a new flat but the only apartment for sale is in the “green block”. So the parents took me there, and ask their daughter in law to talk to me. She, likewise those few, who did not reject me, had somehow same narratives: they were downwardly mobile people, with jobs in constructions or in the neighbouring factories, moving out from other working-class districts after becoming unable to pay the expenses. They all regarded living in the “green block” as a temporary solution, an unpleasant event. Although many of them declared him/herself Roma, they despised the place and its surroundings.

“I don’t really like the local school, as it is full of Gypsies. I don’t have friends among the neighbours. The women are evil, the children lousy. It could be that I’m living here only for a couple of years; they’ve been here for 20. That’s why – maybe – they don’t regard me as equal. (Roma woman from the block)

Clear from the beginning, the block was inhabited by different types of families, as many geographically isolated, marginalized places are in Hannertz’s (2004) view. “The Gypsies” were referred to economically and socially disadvantaged, repulsive in their attitude; being a Gypsy was a stigma, partly independent of ethno-racial self-categorization, as usually Roma people attached it to other Roma. Moreover, In accordance with their label as “non-cooperative”, these “Gypsies” were hostile not just to their neighbors but also to me. Taking pictures (i.e. to register the local misery) could result in being kicked out of from neighbourhood; local blokes were teasing me, while women kept repeating they had no information to share about their lives. Fieldwork in 2007, likewise the other two short attempts to re-enter in 2008 and 2009 were about sitting in the dirty courtyard trying to carry on discussions with the “Gypsy” locals. Except discussions with better off people, who moved out in the following years, few interviews were done, in fact no properly conducted interviews at all. Only pieces of information had been collected, carefully put together like knobs of an intellectual puzzle. This was the outcome of the three summers’ work; scarce enough to carry out a fieldwork suitable for academic standards but sufficient to sketch a picture on local stories.

### **Overcoming suspicion**

My overcoming of suspicion took place in 2010, after reshaping the initial research question and summing up previous experiences. Mismatching between my respondents and me could be summarized by the following quotation:

“Fine if you’d like to talk but what can you give in return?”  
*Well, I’m about to write a study.*  
 And do you think it helps us?”(Fragment of a discussion between me and one Roma resident, part of my field notes).

In quest for a framework that treats knowledge and action inseparably, “giving something in return” was the first question to deal with, and various forms of applied anthropology and academic feminism seemed to be possible answers. Out of its demand to reshape notions on validity and data-collection, academic feminism implicitly rejects the power relations between researcher and informant. “The researched” are no longer treated as passive providers of knowledge and the researcher is no longer soaking up the information. Feminists, therefore, seek for genuine, non-exploitative relation between the researcher and his/her “interlocutor”. As Mary Marnard – June Purvis (1995:16) state: “Research becomes a means of sharing information and [...] the person of the interviewer is an important element in establishing trust and thus obtaining good quality of information”. Though reciprocity and reflexivity is essential for academic feminism, “being there” was too slight for my informants’ expectations. They were asking for more serious things than my presence: money or access to workplaces through my help. Thus, as Okely and Callaway (1992) and Mauther (2000) states, the theoretical goals of feminism, the non-influencing of the informants with pre-coined intellectual expectations on their lives, and putting aside positivist detachment when conducting interviews were too abstract for my work. My research had more practical and simple goals: to reward the informants.

I figured out various incentives during the fieldwork. Some scholars, like Martiners-Ebers (1997) consider material inducement as being successful in encouraging a hard-to-reach population to answer, while others argue against its benefits. Berstein (2003) claims that paying subjects make them less conscious on future effects of the experiment, while Slomka et al. (2007) underpins its negative effect on motivation: incentives influence opinions. Lemmens T. (1999, 2001) cited by Berstein (2003) advocate for a clearly and meticulously worked-out system of iving payments in order to avoid inequalities in reward. My previous experiences with the community echoed the insights of Ladányi and Szelényi (2006) about helping a group of Roma people. Far to plead for a special “Roma culture”, the two scholars observed the existence of an egalitarian attitude within the community: let all community members be allocated equally, or, if resources are limited, no one be rewarded. As I had insufficient money to equally pay each informant, material incentives were dropped from my list. Giving gifts posed the same threat: what to give, and to whom? Although later, when family relations became clearer, a gift was given to those who were much more eager to help me; at the end, however, I realized that many belonged to the same extended family. Therefore, being influenced by its successes in applied anthropology, enlisted by van Willigen (1993) I chose a rather impersonal solution: reward in my research was embodied into non-personal community-accessible resource-offering: help green block dwellers in their businesses with local institutions. In the same time I thought to encourage my informants to echo their opinions about local school and NGO.

Outcomes of such techniques turned out to be different than expected; offering assistance (purchasing and explaining laws) was required by only two or three people. Still, it was a successful attempt inasmuch changed interpersonal relations and made the informants talk. Nevertheless further discussions clearly revealed their reasons for



repudiating, objections for rejecting me were regarded thereafter as telling ethnographic data instead of unpleasant fieldwork-events.

Discussing the “witch’s brew” of data collection, revealing circumstances of shaping and re-shaping empirical material is perceived here as sign of scientific awareness. Relating all information on data collection is not just a matter of reflexivity, so familiar for the anthropological tradition but – according to Okely and Callaway (1992) a *necessary* condition to convey objectivity to my research. Therefore, bringing research history into the light, another task is to be completed in the following sections: to stock-take those local and broader, sometimes institutional mechanisms that produce mistrust in this disadvantaged community.

### **Broader context - a story of urban marginality**

Although – as Wacquant (2008) points out – there are various and particular factors responsible for urban inequalities, I still dare to call the green block a ghetto as it still bears some of its features: it is labelled by a territorial stigma, it is ethnically almost homogeneous as high majority of inhabitants are Roma, and its deprivation resulted from upward mobility of non-Roma workers, who moved out and let the poor Roma behind (Wacquant, *ibidem*). So, the following sections tries to unfold how stigmatization was produced and the overpopulation of Roma occurred.

According to Wacquant, territorial stigma is a negative public image that associates locals with delinquency, insecurity, moral dissolution and cultural depravity. The outward world labels the zone as no-go area, associated with poverty, crime and moral degradation (Wacquant, *ibidem*). As mentioned before, local teaching staff and NGO workers, but similarly old non-Roma and even Roma inhabitants all name the block as a „Gypsy one”, its inhabitants „violent” and „not cooperative”, distinct and different from other Roma groups from the district:

“I was brought up there, living there, my parents living there, too. So I can tell you, local Roma are different. When I was a kid we used to play together with Newton Street Roma, and we were not afraid of them. I remember a tall, bold-headed guy staying there, always thought he must be their leader. But Gallilei Street is different. When somebody had to move there, everybody was mourning him”. (Non-Roma woman)

### **Broader context industrial and residential restructuring**

Making of the territorial stigma, as Szelényi and Ladányi reveals (1998) is connected to state-communist industrialization and they way it structured occupational stratification and also residential patterns. Being a major target for forced, national-level industrialization in the 1970ies and 80ies, a number of factories were established in the area, turning it into an important industrial district for the city. In a shortage of unskilled, skilled or semi-skilled work force, the communist leaders – in accordance with a national strategy - encouraged rural people (among them many Roma) to settle down in the

district and become factory workers. Beside a promise of upward mobility (from landless peasants to urban factory workers), party bureaucrats – similarly to their comrades in other cities - also allocated apartments for the newcomers in the neighbouring blocks of flats, some in Gallilei Street. Many of my interlocutors recall heyday of the district in their narratives:

“In the ‘70s and 80s this area was full of young workers, having the same working hours, as each of us finished work at two p.m. Then, instead of going home we hung around together in the city, in cinemas, cafés, some of us in discos. As I remember it was a happy life as everybody had a workplace and an apartment, though it was just a workers’ home, a one-room apartment shared with three, divided by a thin wall from the neighbouring one, where another four girls or boys lived. Singles were living in a separate building, family men and women in the other, true, sometimes there were mixed hostels. We were going out for trips in Saturdays, and – to have a free Saturday – we usually took on a 16-hour-shift. Factories organized the trips for us or else we organized them ourselves. (Non-Roma woman)

**“Man:** We have no workplaces nowadays, the MPs are careless and all the factories were closed. I was a decorator before 1989, worked 24 years in one of the big factories, 13 years on the other but I had to leave as I have become ill. I’m on sick relief with insufficient years for a normal pension. It was a fine world then with richness and workplaces.

**Woman:** I was working in one of neighbouring factories. Those were good times as my kids had kindergarten [i.e. for free] and we were close to our houses. We were allocated this apartment from the factory when my first child was born. She was only six months and we had no furniture, so when the apartment was allocated we had to sleep on the floor. We could borrow some money from the House of Mutual Help (CAR), which they took of our salaries. That’s how we bought the furniture.” (Roma couple)

As narratives reveal, forced industrialization offered many benefits to the newly recruited workers but it had its flip sides, too: working before 1989 in physically hard conditions, usually in polluted environments could seriously damage health of the locals, and thus prevent them from taking other jobs. Then, the neoliberal economic policies accompanied the post-socialist changes and hindered the availability of decent work, bringing insecure business environment for entrepreneurs, bankrupt companies, unpredictable employment policies and low salaries. These all were reinforcing post-socialist marginality of many Romanian citizens, including the local ghetto residents.

“From 1986 I was a road sweeper, and then I was the one with filling refuse collection cars. Afterwards I became ill, very ill. I had many siblings and had to work as I was the oldest. I quit school and started to work with permission from the Ministry as I was not of age. I was qualified as an overlay and mosaic maker. [...] It was difficult to work with concrete, very difficult, and this is how I started with water and cleaning. First I started as filler, later as a cleaner of

green [outdoor] spaces. [...] The total number of my working years was 25. I also worked in a village for a mill; it was difficult as everything was full of dust. I worked as unskilled worker from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. It was my workplace after 1989, after finishing military service. I didn't want to return to the refuse collectors as it was hard to work in the rain. Can't say it was difficult to work at the mill but there was dust everywhere, so I went back to sweeping. I got ill in 2004, become unemployed, and later went on sick relief. My boss didn't want to let me, as I was qualified. I was on allowance for 9 months, and later I came back. I left for a private company, where, as I was told, salaries are better there. But they just kept us hanging on. This was in 2004. We were promised 150 million (ca 400 Euros) but got 5 millions (ca 150 Euros). I didn't quarrel as I had no one to complain to." (Roma man from the green block)

Factory closure<sup>4</sup> (necessary for post-socialist industrial restructuring) resulted in large-scale unemployment and a diversification of living conditions. And, too, split the street into two distinct places. In the early 1990ies better off workers moved out, and their emptied apartments were (according to many) illegally occupied by poor, unemployed Roma families. Later some blocks, mainly those on the street entrance, were bought by a company, a re-sold to the dwellers. The economically better off bought their apartments, meanwhile the poor, mainly Roma were swapped out:

"Man: In the early 1990ies our block was sold to a company. Can you imagine, how corruption worked in those times, if the ICRA, responsible for allocations until 1989 had not directly sold us the apartments but to a company. Those who had money bought it, so we did. Those, who had no IDs for this address, where forced to leave.

**Me: You mean the Roma?**

Man: Yes. Many Roma families were evicted." (Gallilei Street, Roma man)

For reasons unknown to local people, the green blocks of flats remained untouched. The Roma families stayed, and – as becoming unable to pay their overhead expenses – kept living in decaying conditions: electricity, running water and gas were cut off. Around 2005 the local council backed by Roma organizations tried to legalize the squatters' situation, providing them property certificates and paying off their debts. In the same period an entrepreneur showed up, promising money for all Gallilei Street inhabitants as price for the attic of the houses, a price that included a refurbishment of the estate and taking the garbage away. Refurbishment had been started on the exterior of the blocks, and entailed a moving out of many other Roma, as they were said to have no money to buy the houses. "The green block" seems to be the last in renovation: either because it is the furthest from the main road or because it's overpopulated by Gypsies, who, were said to be less keen to cooperate with authorities.

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<sup>4</sup> Similarly to the factories, public sanitation was, too, a national company before 1989, and – as it was for factories – underwent thorough a restructuring after the political changes.

I worked in one of the factories and this is how I was allocated the apartment. In those times there were no Roma but later the Romanians left as each got a new apartment after 1990. They had children, so they left [i.e. having many children meant a higher ranking on the list of the allocated]. We had to work in a small factory and had only one daughter, so we were not allocated a better apartment. The majority [of the Roma] moved in abusively in 1992. [...] . In 1990 almost everything was deserted. Only 2-3 families were staying here but we did not know each other. In those times there were only four Roma families here but many of them left. There is but one who stayed. We bought the apartments later, in 2005, as we had no right to do that previously (i.e. as problems of ownership were not clarified). We paid rent till 2005, and then we bought the apartments. Before (i.e. between 1992 and 2005) the local council made contracts for all. Later (i.e. after 2005) the man (i.e. a local entrepreneur) came and bought the attic from each so we all could buy the apartments. Then we all tried to disconnect our apartments from the common network of electricity and pipe lines for natural gas.” (Roma woman from the green block)

### ***Local context - mismatch with the local school***

Post-socialist urban marginality does not necessarily entail a negative labelling of a community. Newton Street Roma, who live in economically similar conditions are not regarded as dangerous by the most important local institution, the school. What makes then teachers, form-teachers, Roma school mediator call ghetto dwellers “evil” and “non-cooperative”? It is, I guess, the misunderstanding between the two, different expectations about education, role of educational institutions. School teachers consider “good” students those with good school performance and behaviour; meanwhile, for locals the school is a good place to be, where children are treated decently:

“Two of my three children were in the local school. No, I was not contented at all. There were some travellers who beat my children; once they poured ink on my son. Then I went to school to ask what had happened. The form-teacher told me she can’t do anything as these kids are dangerous. Well, I said, if you don’t know how to handle this, how should I? And I transferred my child to the school for children with special educational needs. The same happened to my second child, so the third one was automatically enrolled in the special school to be taken there and brought back by the siblings. I had to work I could not see them at the school.” (Gallilei Street woman)

“I very much, very much liked to go to school but I was thinking differently then. [...] I was in the local school and regret not going further. I had problems with my eyesight and didn’t know it even my mother did not know it. I could not see so I could not learn. But I didn’t tell my mum as she would have made glasses for me, glasses I would have been ashamed to wear. What would other people say [if they see me with glasses]? So I went to school just to be there, just to be there. I was caring it’s not about that. Later my mother had a pair of glasses made but in the third grade I was told I’m not too sharp minded, that I

have to go to the school for children with special educational needs. [...] And I left but went on in the same way. I learned, but then was absent for one or two weeks; it shouldn't have been like that. Sometimes I was quitting [i.e. being absent], walked out with the boys. I think I could have made it with some care [graduating] but I walked in the street well dressed, with makeup, smoking. We were out and had fun.” (Gallilei Street Roma girl, 18 years with 8 classes graduated)

Misunderstanding with the school becomes much more salient, when reading the official position. According to its leaders, the school was the first in the city to be enrolled in joining-up programmes for Roma; they implemented special programmes, hired a school mediator, and fold up – as the headmistress said – segregation within the class. Mirrored by local expectations, such initiatives look like an attempt - named by Judith Okely (1983) – civilizing the Roma, rather than act of charity and doing good.

### **Mistrust - connectivity and structural reasons**

Together with some structural reasons – partly enlisted above and detailed in this section, misunderstanding and mistrust was, too, a result of my initial research question. It was the matter of connectivity, understood here, following D. Faubion (2009), as techniques of doing ethnography embedded in the relation between researcher and his/her informant. In the name of “objectivity” and neutrality, I tried to ask open-ended questions at my first entering. In doing so, I invited Gallilei Street people in 2007 “to speak about their lives”, which – as I later came to understand – was a mistake. Due to their marginal position on labour market, these Roma were sometimes involved in half-legal activities: working on the black market, selling gold etc. Besides, their lives, as it comes out from above-cited interview fragments, sometimes were not easy. Out of illegalities, it was sickness and impoverishment that they tried to avoid in discussions. Speaking about institutions was a more neutral topic and easier to access; besides, it was an occasion to many to echo dissatisfaction and revolt against the school and local NGO.

Economical deprivation also procured misunderstanding with the press. Although these were just rumours, nobody offered me details, it was said outside the ghetto, that media was questioning conditions of Gallilei Street people: how can they be poor if many have satellites on the block? A person coming from the outer world and taking pictures, like I did, could easily remind the ghetto dwellers of suspicious journalists. “Do not dare to register our misery!” as one of them warned me when I photographed children in front the garbage.

Locals had, too, ambiguous relation with NGOs. According to rumours and some half-told stories, mentioned usually by children, director of the neighbouring orphanage registered data and pictured local people in order to apply for funds. The locals though, money was received, but they had no advantage of it. A more concrete mismatch with the local NGO was understood and revealed during fieldwork. The NGO had many programs for disadvantaged people their main selection criterion for clients was family income (below 600 lei, about 150 Euros) per person. Additionally, families with truant

children are selected, followed by those with family conflicts and other potential problems: mono-parental families, domestic violence, low health conditions, dwelling place-size (usually between 3 and 5 per persons per room). The “centre” as locals and employees call it, has been offering a variety of services: assistance with homework, psychological consultancy for children, games developing social and mental abilities, possibilities of spending spare time, daily food, etc. Misunderstanding arose when the yearly allowance was cut. For many it was the main reason for feeling upset with the NGO:

“It was fine, there was no problem at the beginning. But when the allowance was cut it’s not like it was before. (Roma woman from the block)

I was there; my daughter had a sponsor, too. We got one million [old Romanian lei, about 25 Euros] a year. But it was cut off. Sometimes they help me, sometimes they don’t. Yes, my daughter is there, gets a file, just to play there. Or sometimes she gets an apple or a banana, things I myself can buy for them. What opinion should I have?” (Roma woman from the block)

Stories of the cut-offs sound differently from the NGO employee’s viewpoint:

“Till this summer we had some emergency allowances as we called them, from money coming through the English affiliation [the NGO being partly allocated from British funds]. It was for emergent cases like when running water was to be cut off, or for a kid go to school or if the parents have no money to buy shoes. You can imagine, the last allowance was 100 new Romanian lei [under 25 Euros] per year and it was allocated in final situations and decided individually in each case. They get accustomed with this sum, however it wasn’t big money; each kid got it, as in those times we were sponsored by English money. Last year was the last when British money was allocated. Because of the crisis the English lost hundred thousands of pounds and asked us to cut 25% out of the budget. Subsequently we forsook of the emergency allowances, thinking we could raise donations for school equipment, clothes; however – I think – it was the worst move in relation with the parents. On the other hand it was clear to cut this sum off as people or companies could much easier be responsive if we say clothes and school equipment is needed [than money]. We did not cut off the budget for daily food but forsook of the emergency allowances. Because it was clear, it created a dependency: people did love us for the money and did not care too much about us to stay with their children. It was clearly a dependency. And social assistants, too, used this method to blackmail the beneficiaries: you won’t get the money unless you send your kid to school. [...] And then there was a scandal with many families, as they refused to sign any document, not even a thank-you letter for the sponsors. They had threatened us with not sending kids to the centre.” (local NGO leader)

As NGOs are culturally embedded entities, as F. Fisher declares (1997) misunderstanding may consists of different expectations in assistance and allocations.

The local NGO thinks of a long-term assistance in children socialization, improvement of school performance by daily work, while the local parents prefer a concrete, direct help that visibly improves their lives over a short period of time.

Suspicion and bad experiences with institutions influenced my relations to informants. A person with similar preoccupations (recording interviews, taking pictures) to NGO workers, was treated with suspicion and mistrust by the community.

“There were here many others, including an NGO saying they’d help us to send the kids to school. Well, they’d said we can help you with a PC. We gave them the personal data and they promised to call us. And two years have passed and nothing. It’s better to tell from beginning you cannot help. One day some students came, saying they’re from the local council to help us in getting a job. They took personal data and took some pictures, yet they found nothing for us. They had a laptop, put [uploaded] our pictures there and left. If, so, I think...yes, help if you can. Enter and say, we can help you with this and this, but cannot help with and this. It makes us easier to understand. But if you cannot help, better frankly say so.” (Roma man from the block)

“Before you, many people were interested in the Roma. It was with workplaces, it was a research on workplaces for Roma. They came for the unemployed to help find them workplaces. The unemployed here gave interviews. There were many such people [who conducted interviews], took their papers and [the locals] hoped something was going to be found, but they have never returned. They never returned. It was a couple of days before. There were many of them, like you. With laptops, with ... They took personal data and also took some pictures. There were some young ones saying they’ll help the Roma. But nothing happened; people are still staying at home.” (Roma man from the block)

## Conclusions

As previous sections claimed to reveal, mistrust during fieldwork is more than an unpleasant individual experience: it is a telling ethnographic data. Repudiation of Gallilei Street ghetto residents was equally due to a wrong research question and some external factors. Post-socialist industrial restructuring and residential policies brought – likewise everywhere in Eastern Europe - insecurity to the one-time privileged working-class. To go further, unemployment entailed changes in residential patterns and echoed new forms of exclusion. The better-off workers, Roman and non-Roma, could – at least partly – maintain their previous conditions, but many were pushed to the fringes of the social structure. In lack of capital they cannot stand in the process of privatization, lost their rented apartments and become evicted. Others, coming as a second wave to an old block, were facing a chaotic privatization, and were left in uncertain situation with property rights. Decaying conditions – initially a cause of avoided privatization later an effect of it – turned the green building into a “Gypsy ghetto”. And ghettoization did not

only entail impoverishment, but created dependency to local institution, claiming to do good to the locals. Mismatch with school and NGO, being used by many, promising to help the Roma, green block inhabitants look suspiciously to anyone resembling with such helpers.

Focusing the research on suspicion, was initially a forlorn attempt to collect information, but later gained a new meaning. It drew attention to the analytical categories like “exclusion” or “marginalization”, which sometimes seem too broad to encompass empirical realities. Initially coined as a term to replace “underclass” as Byrne (2005) reminds us, the notion of exclusion is equally a scientific term and an outcome of implemented policies. No wonder, it was overwhelmingly present on policy papers, reports, grey paper dealing with “the Roma problem” in Eastern Europe, such as in the UNICEF Report (2007) and the one by Social Watch (2012). Unfolding origins of our analytical tools, relation of anthropology with politics of ethnography, is one of the tasks assigned to new fieldwork practices by George E. Marcus and James D. Faubion (2009).

Due to the social-culturally constructed and mediated differences between me and my informants: besides some “hard” events like post-socialist industrial restructuring and residential policy, “soft” encounters – mismatch with local schools and NGOs interested in helping the local Roma – deepened the suspicion of ghetto residents toward local institutions.

When – after an involuntarily wrong research question – I, as a researcher became associated with the people from the hostile outer world. As asking about their lives reminded each informant on how were they “used” by local institutions, their reaction could be nothing but rejection.

Tools available for handling suspicion have been limited. When asked to help the informants to obtain jobs or access medical services, a researcher’s resources seem to be inadequate. Having in mind the limited connections of the Romanian anthropology with a world outside to the academy, this seems to be a difficult task, though, I would add, not impossible to fulfil. But then, changing the research framework still brought some success, as it detached the focus from “their lives” and gave them a new territory of discussion: complaining about local institutions.

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**Plainer Zsuzsa** works as a researcher at the Romanian Institute for Researching National Minorities in Cluj-Napoca (ISPMN). PHD thesis: Controlling High Culture in Ceaușescu's Romania – General Description and Minority Aspects, defended in 2011. Main interests: anthropology of ethnicity, anthropology of the Roma, controlling high-culture during Eastern European state socialism.