

## **The Aesthetic Post-communist Subject and the *Differend* of Rosia Montana**

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*ABSTRACT* By challenging the state and corporate prerogatives to distinguish between “good” and “bad” development, social movements by and in support of inhabitants of Rosia Montana (Transylvania) are subverting prevailing perceptions about Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)’s liberal path of development illustrating its injustice in several ways that will be detailed in this article under the heading “inhibitions of political economy” or Balkanism. The significance of the “Save Rosia Montana” movement for post-communism is that it invites post-communist subjects to reflect and revise their perception about issues such as communism, capitalism and development and to raise questions of global significance about the fragile edifice of justice within the neo-liberal capitalist economy. However, resistance to injustice (and implicitly affirmations of other senses of justice) is an ambiguous discursive practice through which Rosieni make sense as well as partake their sense of Rosia Montana. The movement brings about a public dispute which may be compared with a differend: (in Lyotard’s words), a conflict that cannot be confined to the rules of “cognitive phrases,” of truth and falsehood. This article argues that while post-communist events of “subjectification” are unstable and thus, are to be viewed aesthetically, this same ambiguous multiplication of political subjectivity may facilitate the creation of social spaces for imagining alternative possibilities of development.

### **Introduction to Rosia Montana: Context and Brief History**

The following conversation took place between two inhabitants of Rosia Montana, Transylvania.

B: To me, those who have sold their houses, taken away their dead because they have received money, cannot be considered human. For someone to sell their dead, now that’s an odious, unacceptable thing! Don’t you think that one day

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there will be no more gold left? And don't you think that you may die before reaching my age?! Look how sick the mine has made me!

E: It isn't in my power to decide what the future will be like. For this there are other people, who have the knowledge to do this. Anyway, what future? You simply don't have an alternative to mining. Alburnus Maior told us to pick berries, but that's a one-month job! Then there was the idea of a milk processing plant and a sawmill, but with whose cows and what wood?! Alburnus has only been giving me words for five years. With words I can't feed my family. *GOLD gives me something real* (Szombati, 2007, p. 20).

This conversation is not peculiar to the small semi-urban village called Rosia Montana in Transylvania (Romania). In the last twelve years there has been an increasing perception of anxiety regarding the possibilities for development within post-communist societies: business elites with the support of the state are being perceived as having the power to define the conditions of possibility for Romania to exist as a space of valued raw resources and cheap human capital. In the case of Rosia Montana, the years after the anti-communist revolution brought the verdict of a future of mono-industrial mining to be realized by foreign companies which own the resources and the know-how to valorise what the state can only sell.

In the 1990s, the gold temptation incited a Canadian corporation to propose the project for one of the largest mines in Europe. Ever since, Rosieni (the population of Rosia) are torn between the choice of selling their land and the struggle to preserve it. In 1997, the Romanian government granted the right of exploration and exploitation to Euro-Gold Resources (later on named Rosia Montana Gold Corporation, RMGC, and referred to by Rosieni as the "Gold") while the terms of this contract were classified as secret information. Declaring the area "mono-industrial" and allowing RMGC's land exploration brought the village to a deadlock: from the outset, alternative possibilities of development were nullified.

The history of gold exploitation in Romania has generally been described as a history of hardship for the miners, be they ancient slaves (prisoners of wars), feudal *iobagi* (servants) or later on in modern times, workers and private entrepreneurs. The resource of gold has been among the main reasons for Romans' domination and other ruling powers. Mining has, therefore, been the main activity of Rosieni and it has both made them rich and alienated them. However, for the first time in its history, the place seems condemned to annihilation. The new corporate mining project is not only suspected of bringing elusive and unsustainable wealth but also the community's death because of the new technology, i.e., cyanide open cast mining. In a press conference organized on August 22, 2008 in Bucharest, Nadia Mezincescu, Coordinator at the Romanian Academy in Bucharest spoke about the paradox of Rosia Montana: despite being the oldest village of Romania, with historical and cultural heritages to be valued, the Romanian government preferred to let it "die" and sell it, "How could a community exist for two-thousand years and then gradually die in tenyears? Something extremely wrong is happening in Rosia, a malefic synergy, a programmed and systematic crime to impoverish

and kill a community!”

Rosieni have become aware of this danger since 2000, when over 300 subsistence farming families from Rosia Montana and 100 families from the neighbouring area of Bucium decided to form the Alburnus Maior organization to oppose the RMGC. For Alburnus Maior and its supporters, the project would mean relocation of 910 households, displacement of about 2,000 persons from 740 houses and 138 flats, demolition of four mountains, a lake of cyanide and toxic waste covering over 1800 hectares of land, demolished houses and buildings (many of them being of cultural patrimony such as the famous Roman Galleries) and, last but not least, the exhumation of ancestors through the destruction of nine cemeteries and eight churches. Developing one of the largest movements with the support of national and international NGOs as well as other institutions, Rosieni’s protests echoed the “not for sale” discourse of the global justice movement, criticizing corporate conduct, the social and environmental costs of economic development and the corrupt complicity between the state and the corporation.

However, despite strong opposition and its capacity to block the corporation for more than ten years, the majority of Rosieni have gradually accepted to sell their land and properties to the corporation for various reasons: lack of jobs or profit (by declaring the area mono-industrial, different economic investments or activities were banned), desires for a different lifestyle away from the perpetually stressed situation, children’s needs to attend different schools etc. Depopulation is now haunting the area, with political pressures for project implementation being resuscitated in the context of the economic crisis. Currently, after the strong advocacy of the Basescu’s administration in support of the corporation, the new social-democrat government is proposing a new approach to the evaluation of the mining project, as to fulfil respect for laws, environmental protection, social care, and also to offer relevant benefits for the state-budget.

Travelling to Rosia, I often overheard: “we will sell our country . . . we will be the new slaves.” Although former communist countries do not share the (anti)colonial discourse, I started to think of what prompts these comparisons. I visited Rosia Montana four times during the summers of 2007 and 2008; firstly, I participated in a few public events such as the Hay Festival and other protests. My later work as a volunteer/project coordinator with a few NGOs helped me access a network of environmental activists and supported my research within the tension-ridden community. After meeting some of the most outspoken leaders of the movement both from the village and from other cities, I conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews while having informal discussions with around ten more Rosieni. I also informally talked with six Rosieni who had sold their land. The selection of interviewees was random—while walking on the streets of Rosia I met people who were curious and/or suspicious about my presence and started conversations—and through the snowball sampling technique—few of the known activists I contacted directly led me to other people. Interviews were taken at the person’s household or in the plaza of the village. They usually lasted from thirty minutes to two hours

depending on the individual case. I used a semi-structured interview protocol that was marginally adjusted according to circumstances.

My own presence in Rosia emerged from a commitment to a larger struggle for social justice for marginalized peoples in the developing world. Despite my recognized sympathy for the opponents of the project, some of the leaders insisted on remaining anonymous. Others agreed to give their names and signed my university protocol for the PhD dissertation, being proud to be supporting the cause by any means possible and encouraging me to “tell the world” about them. They also offered me poems and gifts of spiritually symbolic meaning. In my fieldwork I often realised that it is close to impossible to make an accurate distinction between “my story” (i.e. my interpretation of the situation) and the stories of Rosieni—the interactive transformations were inevitable while our language reproduces a social pattern and a pre-established set of possibilities (Terdiman, 1985). There is no naive primary understanding of field data that one can conceptualize only afterwards (Barthes, 1974). We always operate with a narrative in the mind even before the data gathering process. I chose to talk about the social harm made by the current neo-liberal trend in post-communist societies through the reification of market relations; that “something real” which the corporation, and not the state, is supposed to be able to offer, being promoted as the “success” story despite opposition and ambivalence towards it. Interviewing key protagonists in this globally relevant struggle concerning freedom of choice, property rights, indigenous rights and environmental rights, I argue that “Save Rosia Montana” has transformed the invisible into a visible centre of democratic struggle bringing together people of all ages, genders, professions, and ethnicities to denounce injustice in its various forms.

The “Save Rosia Montana” movement is one of the most enduring and largest movements in Romania which managed to place on the political agenda the importance of critique and ambivalence with regard to the liberal developmental path. The movement that expanded beyond the local has been an opportunity for the post-communist Romania to address and debate its ethical dilemmas and critically examine the spread of the market and foreign capital, the role of the state and the transformation of social interests, ideas and feelings.

The following sections of this article will show how, in a context of what I call Balkanism or the new inhibitions of political economy, Rosieni supported by NGO activists from Romania and other countries have made their voice heard with regard to the intrusive and destructive effect of corporate economic monopolies promoted as state policy. Talking about justice is, first of all, talking about what Ranciere (2004) calls the “partitioning of the sensible world” (p. 65). For the last twenty years Rosieni and Romanians were told how to feel about the present, the new political economy and communism; they were often denied the right to remember the past other than by denying it. Through this movement, Rosieni discovered they can tell others about the other feelings and sensibilities they have. Peasants and/or miners, Rosieni broke their habitual sense of self and life, reinventing themselves in multiple

ways as entrepreneurs, NGO activists, tourist guides, marketing persons, poets, or actors. The 2010 Hay Festival mirrored these desired alternatives: entitled “Rosia Montana, as a Big Stage,” it gathered people from all over Romania as well as other countries for workshops, debates, eco-entertainment activities, tour-visits etc. These acts of subjectification constitute illustrations of an aesthetic post-communist subject, whose political subjectivity is hereby multiplied and pluralized.

This article also argues that post-communist events of “subjectification” are unstable and thus, are to be viewed aesthetically. The significance of the “Save Rosia Montana” movement for post-communism is not just that it invites post-communist subjects to reflect and revise their perception about issues such as communism, capitalism, and development as well as to raise questions of global significance about the fragile edifice of justice within the neo-liberal capitalist economy of our world. Resistance to injustice (and implicitly affirmations of other senses of justice) is an ambiguous discursive practice through which Rosieni make sense as well as partake their sense of Rosia Montana. The movement has also furthered the idea that the pursuit of social justice is not a matter of simplistic dualism—good or bad development, profitable or not, positive or negative—but rather that it has to become a process of negotiation (open and on-going). We are not speaking here of justice as if we know exactly what it means (for any of the parties); surely activism has secured a (limited) sense of justice for some just as the corporation has done for others. More importantly here is the unsettledness of any of these senses of justice and resistance to injustices, which sets the alarm for a differend about social justice. As the second section of this article will show, the movement brings about a public dispute which may be compared with a differend: (in Lyotard’s words), a conflict that cannot be confined to the rules of “cognitive phrases,” of truth and falsehood.

### **Inhibitions of Political Economy: Post-communism, Balkanism and Developmentalism**

After 1989, economic, social or environmental problems in Eastern Europe have mainly been attributed to a lack of capitalism, other critical alternatives being inhibited by communism’s institutionalized narratives about the misdeeds of capitalism (Tamas, 2009). The “inevitability” and desirability of the capitalist market and liberal democracy has not generally been questioned. Even the shocks of privatization, the social and economic insecurities, and the new forms of poverty have been presented as inevitable and conducive to a better life. Rosia Montana is an illustration in this sense: it was meant to become a globalized place, dependent on extra-local centres of power, integrated into a network of investments and information.

This has been the liberal vision shared by international financial institutions which shaped Romanian industrial policy after 1990. The liberal reforms in the mining industry took place under the auspices of the European Union,

the IMF and the common “wisdom” (among elites) was that mining, like other industries, had to be fundamentally restructured, which, in most cases, involved closures and privatizations. The World Bank was to provide the expertise and the financial means for alleviating the social effects of mine closures (Larionescu, 1999). In this context, Romania, like other Eastern European countries, has been one of the many bargains to be exploited for cheap labour, soft environmental and social/labour standards, where the corrupt bureaucracies could function as a facilitator. Much of the literature on post-communism has, therefore, focused on the region’s need to transition to a liberal democracy and capitalism. The process of transition was often seen as “corrupt” which merely meant, insufficiently capitalist: venture capitalists were supposedly contaminated through dubious deals with the former communist elite (*nomenklatura*) which would explain the tainted nature of the “new capitalism.” The “real” capitalism has been “yet to come” after an extensive hunt for (and cleansing of) communists, scapegoats for most problems.

It is no surprise that shortly after the arrival of RMGC in Rosia, its representation as a unique “saviour” has been perpetuated through institutional settings (state, media and corporate) creating a feeling that without this project the region can slip into the new periphery, excluded from investment and development. However, the tendency to label opposition to corporate globalization in Romania as anti-modern or extremist could be seen as a perpetuation of the Balkanist or Balkanization legacy. By “Balkanist” we refer here to the historical tradition of describing Central and Eastern Europe as never quite developed, never quite civilized, semi-oriental, quasi-colonial, and a periphery of Europe. The East has historically been portrayed as such, destabilizing yet reinforcing the identity of the West. It is identified as industrially backward, lacking the advanced social relations and institutions of the developed capitalist world, irrational and superstitious, basically unenlightened, “ignorant, poor and sick people, over whom already Europe is planning ‘spheres of influence’” (Du Bois, 1945, p. 58).

Broadly, one can argue that there is no difference between Orientalism—as colonial cognitive techniques of governance—and these Balkanist discursive practices applied to Central and Eastern Europe, with the exception of scale: Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is not quite down in the abyss of barbarism but rather, in between civilization and barbarism (Wolff 1994, p. 13). However, it is still a “striking resemblance to this ethos of colonial discovery” (Borocz 2000, p. 870). Balkanism is used in the media and in literary studies to indicate not only fragmentation and eternal strife but also dehumanization and lack of civilization, the status of being not quite ready for the blessings of democracy and liberal development. This state of ambiguous in-betweenness, at the gates, on the bridge, never quite inside either West or East, never quite free from “the vices of the East, nor acquired any of the virtues of the West” (Ehrenpreis, 1928, pp. 11-13) is perceived as a dangerous road—its vacillation and ambivalence cannot be relied upon to authentically praise the new capitalist regime. In other words, it (CEE)

should prove its commitment to Western values, “Not because ‘they’ are totally different, but rather because “they” have fallen into difference over time . . . The categorical Orientalist holds out the possibility of redemption for the fallen through capitalism, democracy, civil society, privatization and the like (Kideckel 1996, p. 30).

This form of Balkanism has been internalized and perpetuated by Rosieni also, who are ready to internalize this visitor’s (imagined) normative gaze assuming that perceptive (mainly Western) travellers can see through their thin veils of self-pride to their darkest secret, i.e., ethnic stigma: “We are the last, the worst, the most hopeless; . . . unable to create an endogenous model they voluntarily ‘colonize’ themselves with an exogenous model” (Antohi, 2005). While not focusing here on the development of a critical concept of Balkanism (opposed to Balkanization), the implication of the above ideas is that there is a tendency to oversimplify the representation/discourse and identification/subjectivity of an entire region as well as of a movement in an attempt to freeze/fix or arrest their ambiguities, uncertainties, and contradictions. This aspect of ambiguity and uncertainty, contradiction and disagreement is of special relevance for an aesthetic post-communist subject and the discourse on social justice. As Igor Kyotoff was arguing, this is the type of society in which “a person’s social identities are not only numerous but often conflicting,” where one is likely to encounter a “drama of identities,—of their clashes, of the impossibility of choosing between them . . . the drama, in brief, lies in the uncertainty of identity . . .” (Kyotoff, 1986, p. 89). It is with these ambiguities, that one may start thinking critically and re-imagining alternative futures.

In this sense, neo-liberal globalization and its developmental projects operate within this framework of Balkanism. Its imposition of truth and power has been a violent act, exercised by the ruling elites as well, and pushed as *the* ideal thought especially in periods of crisis: “an increasing volume of information that is continually coded and recoded to meet the interests of corporate capitalism” (White, 1991, p. 120). Moreover, popularizing the idea of modernization as upgrading, these forms of rationalization will supposedly “treat” the illness that caused the region’s backwardness and help the miserable people. Balkanism/Balkanization has become a neo-liberal tool in the attempt to inhibit differences that might, otherwise, inform alternative critical discourses meant to adjudicate issues of social justice.

Balkanist (and implicitly developmentalist) overtones have haunted the Rosia Montana movement, being used and abused to perpetuate the image of an illiberal society whose desire to protect cultural values signifies a perilous historical tradition of anti-modernism. The corporation has instrumentally used the concept of Balkanism to trivialize and lock the movement into dichotomies: traditional versus modern, nationalist versus liberal, communist versus capitalist: “In Romania and Hungary, groups opposed to the Rosia Montana project play on old resentments of foreign companies and of capitalism in general” (RMGC, 2007). Any form of opposition to the liberal capitalist economy is inhibited and accused of complicity with old dangerous

forces while eventually manipulating these inhibitions to manufacture and capture consent for “the only alternative.” As the corporation argues, “Our project is the only viable development for the Rosia Montana valley. By opposing our project, the NGO Alburnus Maior is preventing any opportunity, and any choice, for the development of the community in Rosia Montana” (RMGC, 2007).

Moreover, the leitmotif of “facts” has been used by RMGC as a means to discredit the opposition. Whether it was about the “true story” and the “facts” about the situation of the area or about the nature of the arguments or the ethnicity of the opponents, the corporation has been articulating the narrative of modernity to discredit not only a certain target group but also the mindset of centuries inscribed in the culture of the area, a culture whose baggage of emotional attachments (to nature and mountains) and archaic superstitions have been devalued and stigmatized. While the “real” story of the corporate project has been many times articulated in the modern language of scientific and technological discourse, one that is obviously the *appanage* of a few, the choice to take a stance out of other beliefs and emotional attachments has been considered anachronistic, hilarious, and dangerous. However, the current nationalisms of the Balkans are reactions that serve the beautification of capitalism and democracy (Zizek, 1993). When talking of resistance in Balkanist terms, the spectrum for the examination of resistance is limited to bolstering the mainstream liberal discourse.

Rosieni do understand what the newly anti-communist capitalists wish to hide, “that what they are denouncing as perverted pseudo-capitalism simply is capitalism.” (Zizek, 2009). In other words, the stories of the Rosieni remind us of Zizek’s invitation: “Perhaps the disappointment at capitalism in the post-Communist countries should not be dismissed as a simple sign of the “immature” expectations of the people who didn’t possess a realistic image of capitalism” (Zizek, 2009).

The, differend, as a conflict over justice, is evident in Rosia/Romania in the pondering between resistance and acceptance of the market logic of expansion that portrays itself as uniquely superior: those who preferred the corporate project (supposedly in line with Western liberal values of development) do not form a homogeneous group of corporate supporters just as the oppositional group has never been a unitary one but complexly gathering environmentalist or liberal-rights claims as well as more nationalist or socialist ones. The conflict of Rosia is a conflict over the existence of particular spheres of experiences, which makes it (and its protagonists) political in Ranciere’s understanding of aesthetic politics: “politics is first the conflict about the very existence of that sphere of experience, the reality of those common objects and the capacity of those subjects” (Ranciere, 2004, p. 65). When talking about “aesthetics” one can think about the way in which the sensible world can be partitioned and re-partitioned. What are the feelings one “should” or “should not” feel? What is the “normalcy” of certain feelings or beliefs?

### **Responding to Legal Illegalities in Post-communist Transitions**

One of the most frequent phrases in the controversy is a strong belief of the Rosieni's 'home is not for sale' and particularly, their parents' home and their ancestral inheriting is not to be commercialized. For many corporate supporters this belief sounds archaic and hilarious mirroring incapacity to adapt to the mobility of capital economy. But "home" has a special meaning for the Moti, the inhabitants of the Apuseni Mountains of Transylvania. Petru is a 61 year-old retired person who decided to live away from his family (living in a village close to Rosia) and come back to his old parents' home in Rosia Montana. For him, this return symbolized a return to a meaningful life after decades of work. However, his surprise was that he could not enjoy a peaceful life because of the corporation's presence. He has opposed the corporate project from the beginning and considers himself to be an active citizen in the village, participating in all the events of the local opposition. Petru told me his feelings about the situation and explained to me his motivation for not selling his land; as in other testimonies, we find out that the selling of a home and of a community with ancestral spiritual bonds is "inappropriate":

It is not appropriate to sell the parent's home; then it is not appropriate to sell and destroy churches and cemeteries because these are fundamental for life; then comes our nature . . . It is a psychological war . . . we are stressed all day by this company . . . it is hard to watch them around here every morning. It was better before the revolution, more peaceful. We have been stressed in the last 13 years . . . our whole life is all too nerve-racking ever since the company has come here.

What is conveyed is a special perspective on the nature of the distribution of social goods, the rules/norms/mental models of socially acceptable behaviour in the specific role of "Rosian" (inhabitant of Rosia Montana). Discursive practices involve *ways of being in the world* that signify specific and recognizable social identities: Rosieni throughout centuries have learned to "be" miners, Rosieni, Romanians, Moti, Christians; now they are learning to become activists and tour-guides.

My host in Rosia, Lucretia, talks with great love about her family and does not feel poor just because they do not have enough money; she rather seemed frustrated because of the present societal neglect of their possessions as being outside of what "wealth" is. She used to say that "she has all she needs in Rosia" and could not understand why the value of her life-style is shamed as "poor" and "backward." Similarly, one of my interlocutors is questioning development as promoted by the corporate supporters and generally by actors such as the World Bank, the European Union or the corporations as marginalizing the power of local poorer people who do not have access to the resources needed to meet the standards of these global actors. He, thus, thinks that all politicians are puppets in the hands of people with money. He openly talks about his preference for alternative development that comes from common decision-making and consultations at the local level:

A long time ago people were making a living with two cows; I now have fifteen cows and they say my farm is not large enough for European standards. Why the hell do you tell me that I'm poor? Why do I need to consider your standards? So I'll be under your control?

I don't want any type of development . . . don't want just anyone to come here to change the area. I tell people openly "you have to grow up, you cannot be dependent on the Gold (*corporation*) or whoever comes, dependent on others just as drug addicts.

We can read the above as the thought that, in order for the "new poor"—destitute by globalization's processes—to become agents of their own destinies they need to regain a policy space where they can articulate and make visible their own narrative. This is what the movement in Rosia tried to do. It revealed, facilitated the expression of and encouraged the Rosieni way of thinking about their future developments as having to do with quality of life and people's choice to live productive and creative lives according to their needs and interests. The arrogance of corporate conduct, however, fuels the inability to listen to the poor as equals not only in dignity as humans but in imagination (of the world to live in).

With the money from a house with seven rooms some just managed to buy an apartment with two rooms in the city . . . and the corporation replies: well, you are a peasant, why are you so demanding? As if we are mentally retarded because we are from the mountains here and we do not know life and we do not think: "We will tell you what to do, we know better," the corporation was saying to them.

The consent of the Rosieni to individual negotiations as initiated by the corporate representatives has been fragile; as one local man confessed to me, "what 'negotiation'?" They tell us what the terms and the money offer is and we can only accept or not." In addition, financial packages were only offered periodically and secretly (offers were strictly confidential and made from time to time when the political situation seems more favourable to the project), which made the corporate tools of normalizing behaviour even more efficient: people sometimes sold their properties for lower prices just because they were afraid the corporation might stop buying land and they will be left alone and isolated.

The Gold's agents started to say: 'be careful because it is something international! You will have to leave!' Others said: 'you must sell while you still have an offer because after a while money will be finished and you will be left without land and money'.

Unable to avoid the individualized negotiation process (most Rosieni, even if they refuse negotiation, had been periodically visited, if not harassed, by corporate representatives presenting their offer), the Rosieni had no choice but to let the corporation set the rules; it has, thus, had the power to fragment and tear not only the opposition movement but also families themselves.

In Rosieni words, *divide et impera* (divide and conquer) was the corporate strategy:

They started to break up families, buying the younger ones, convincing the older, the parents . . . through intimidation, blackmail, trying to oblige them to withdraw from Alburnus. They closed RosiaMin, the state factory, so that people become unemployed, another form of intimidation.

Instead of our cultural centre they made their own information point (or better I should say disinformation). They even wanted to take the school building so that we send our kids away. Even the town doctor left. They do everything in their power to make us leave and give up.

The stories of Rosia remind us that the enlightenment model persists through Balkanism and liberal developmentalism: in post-communist Romania, within the context of globalization, the tendency to homogenize lifestyles can be observed and along with it, the tendency to devalue and marginalize as inefficiently old and poor, traditional means of being. Stripped of non-monetary values, it is no surprise the Rosia becomes, in the corporate story, a desert land that must be interfered with and exploited to extract material value for commercial purposes.

### **The Differend of Rosia Montana and the Aesthetic Post-Communist Subject**

On the one hand, for many Rosieni as well as Romanians, what is at stake in Rosia's conflict is life itself as existence within a historical aboriginal territory: the corporate mining project means the removal of a village, a community with homes and values: "The village will be removed together with all its history and its churches, to leave room for a place that could not be inhabited" (Turcanu, 2002). On the other hand, the "bread and butter" arguments are widespread as well, because of the lingering scarcity of (financial) resources; these indeed, make resistance to economic development projects unpalatable. Hence, the majority of the inhabitants in Rosia eventually agreed to sell their possessions.

Sharing the corporation's discourse, some of the former Rosieni believe in the possibility that the corporate project can bring progress and better their lifestyle. Should the corporation carry out the project as they say, both the people and the environment would benefit. Therefore, there are people in Rosia who present their self-displacement as a new happy beginning regarding their former home as a devalued land; as one displaced person declared, "Things have changed for me ever since the corporation came here. My sons are both working for it now. They graduated in IT and accounting studies respectively."

Selling one's land in Rosia Montana has often been presented as a "smart move," an intelligent choice to negotiate a good price and access a different opportunity for a life outside the deadlock of a periphery village. According

to the corporate propaganda, those who sold are to be seen as “normal” people looking for modern lives, moving on to a different lifestyle instead of being incapable of adjusting to the new realities. The “seller” is, hence, a citizen who understands the global economy, who upgraded himself from the old, and does not fall into the trap of old-fashioned ideological activism.

However, buying land for utopias may be the new “enslavement” I first heard about when travelling to Rosia—the dependence of the majority on the “wage” in the context of resource alienation. Rosieni feel uncomfortable with the perception that they are just commodities, and they will end up with selling only their own labour in order to make a living. This market seems beyond their control and thus they internalize it as natural and inescapable while also criticizing and revolting against such a narrow-minded ideology. This subjective uneasiness is however, pushed to the margins and hidden though corporate ads in an attempt to simplify representations: “people from Rosia Montana just want to work” (RMGC, 2011-2012). But talking with few of the people who sold their land one would notice that contentment goes hand in hand with disappointment. Memories of “home” and of the past are a daily companion of an anguished present and displacement appears as a non-authentic choice; moving from Rosia was something one “had to do” for the sake of a future that sounds different, a future where Rosia and its lifestyle become a thing for an anachronistic past:

If there is no Gold (corporation), no other company would come here anyway. Peace and recreation in Rosia are long gone. In time, Rosia will become just a legend.

We all had jobs during communism. It was safer. Now, with investors, one day you work the next day you are unemployed.

While the ideological and political propaganda of the corporation has found the right soil to grow the seeds of co-option into the fantasy of capitalist liberation and prosperity, the prevailing feeling in Rosia is that nothing/no one can offer solutions to ease the pains of these disruptions (“the state is silent and corrupt,” “capitalists only want money in their pocket”). Neither the market nor the state is trusted to address grievances.

One can read a permanent vacillation between acceptance, seduction, and internalization as well as critique and opposition to the market ideology and developmentalism, which offers us the framework to think about the case in terms of a differend: Who are the “victims”? Who is the “common enemy”? As my host Lucretia was saying, “One morning I say “to hell with them”; the next day I think of selling”; her sadness about potential abandonment/displacement was mixed with joy about showing a visitor her home, cattle and garden, accompanied by the request to tell the world about them. There are scenes and images I witnessed that undermine the verbalized self-understanding, the stories Rosieni express and the stories they think they are in, making any judgment about facts and feelings unstable. Although the various “isms” may be invoked, they can also be easily ridiculed without

the fear of looking contradictory, in private conversations or over a glass of wine. By telling and discovering various and often conflicting “truths” about themselves, Rosieni are resisting the fixity of power regimes. This subjective ambivalence brings contradiction into a discursive space (that of post-communism) which desired no contradiction.

In other words, community’s tensions as well as personal inner conflicts may be seen as a differend in Lyotard’s words, namely, a conflict that cannot be confined to the rules of “cognitive phrases,” of truth and falsehood (Lyotard, 2007, p. xii). From this perspective, both parties seem stuck in “playing the victim’s game.” Rosieni that wish to preserve their land accuse the corporate supporters of being “materialistic” and interested in short-term financial gains. Supporters of the mining project accuse the opponents of being hostile to job-creation and modern development. Convincing evidence for both the “victims” can always be provided within the borders of their respective genre of discourse. But either selling or preserving land, one cannot appraise the probity of these choices because there is no universal “moral” framework to adjudicate them.

Many people ask: So, what now? The corporation has been blocked for more than ten years but what about “us” and the village? Displaced Rosieni often appear in the media lamenting their loss. There is overwhelming uncertainty about what “success” or “change” means, and widespread frustration that Romania has no leadership that can produce “responsible” development in support of the people. Therefore, awareness about the impossibility of naming a “real” victim/traitor/enemy/community has been growing. Dichotomies have gradually been loosened and blurred. The complex legal and environmental problems associated with the mine and the opposition emerging has postponed any political/legal decision while other economic activities were banned. This may be seen as a disruption, a “break,” a silence following a search for answers not yet found by humanity about what development/prosperity could be all about and the alternatives to industrialism. The situation mirrors the hole in the national flag that the “revolutionaries” in 1989 were happily waving as a symbol for another order that has not yet been “homogenized by any positive ideological project” (Zizek, 1993, p. 1).

Personal stories show that representations are blurred by the ambiguities of everyday life. Reluctant to be called “activists,” their everyday struggle is both reinforcing and subverting the “truths” of this controversy by introducing the variable of ambiguity. Personal stories and perception show that both national feelings of rootedness and the support for corporate mining are not forms of closed ideological engagement (of nationalism or neo-liberalism) manipulated towards some programmatic ends. The narratives of people do not simply reveal anti-modern/anti-industrial sentiments just as they do not reveal some blind credulity in the mantra of the market; they do not simply display allegiance to one ideology or another. Therefore, self-identification is volatile and unstable. As the interviews show, there is a strong sense of living the “drama of uncertainty” both at the macro- and micro-level which

makes their feelings unstable and difficult to understand or label. Here, both cognitive and emotional “attachments” are blurred by the uncertainty of structural changes.

When the current director of RMGC, Dragos Tanase, was asked what will happen to those residents of Rosia Montana who refuse to sell their properties. Tanase’s answer was illustrative: “We will discuss with the local community to find solutions to convince everybody” to sell their properties (Hotnews, 2010). His answer first contains a presupposition of a (homogeneous) community; to establish the “reality” of Rosia on either side has meant to extend a certain protocol to the whole of Rosia and imply that there is some sort of generally accepted “national ego” or *sensus communis*.

Second, it also presupposes that (or ignores the fact that) “convincing everybody,” i.e. achieving (near)-consensus on selling properties could be possible without repression of differences. In other words, inventing a “real” community and purging it of all ambiguity assumes the role of a single, unique option rather than constitute only one possible road satisfying one regime of truth and power and the sense of justice of some while inevitably alienating others. Suppressing the ambiguity and the elements of disharmony implicit in it by demonizing what is constructed as “abnormal” mirrors the rationalist project of the Enlightenment which constructed its own social “ontology of concord” in order to give an appearance of natural predominance to fabricated concepts such as rationality, justice and self-fulfilment (Connolly, 1988).

The story of Rosia is, therefore, multiple, contradictory, fractured and complex, an illustration of counteraction to the violence of a monopoly of discourse of truth about selves, justice and development. Portraying the corporate version of the “truth” about Rosia as the only one would otherwise become a totalizing practice, produced and reproduced continuously in language and action—as opposed to one practice among other possibilities. As Shapiro argued, “no representation is innocent of practice” (Shapiro, 1988, p. 97) and there is violence in the conviction that one possesses the truth.

The differend reveals Rosia as both an object of cognition (to be observed) and the object of an idea (to be imagined). In the former case, Rosia is an object of commodification, marketization, exploitation, that is, subject to a protocol established by a power-authority (be it the state, the corporation or the NGOs); in the latter case, Rosia is an idea/concept imagined by a heterogeneous group of people living and contesting the objects of cognition; here, no protocol of judgment could be established without committing wrongs to some parties and without appeal to a sort of totalitarian adjudicating. Ideas such as community, prosperity/poverty, labour, rights, proletarian, peasant, are in themselves discursively represented and hence contested. Despite attempts to transform the differend into a multitude of litigations over objects of cognition subjected to the protocol of economics and law, “truths” about Rosia are still to be imagined. Finding a new idiom to settle this differend would require imagining/creating an “alternative” predicated on the multiplicity of disordered subjects and spaces.

Ambiguity and unsettled internalization is here relevant for an aesthetic resistance and sense of justice predicated on disagreement (discord), multiplicity and heterogeneity. The aesthetic reveals this situation of fractured interpretations of what is meaningful and valuable. These attitudes are to be seen aesthetically because they deny certainty. Without a sense of certainty, individuals such as the Rosieni can be political in an open and critical sense of subjecthood (Ranciere, 2006) and not merely ideological, in any programmatic sense, thus remaining open rather than producing closure. We, therefore, argue that an important insight for ethics and politics is to see that “subjects are best understood not as static entities . . . but as beings with multiple possibilities for becoming” (Shapiro, 2008, p. 8).

### **Conclusions: On Aesthetic Justice Movements**

This article is an invitation to the possibility of seeing the Rosieni as ‘aesthetic post-communist subjects’ given the fact that there is no single fixed intelligible (ideological) discourse to their feelings. Challenging (fixed) representations, Rosia’s campaign has eventually stimulated a different kind of thinking about subjectivity. The encounter between the moral and market economy has been such that it prompted Rosieni to substitute recognition of self as a proletarian-miner into multiple imagined possibilities for reinvention of self (including the migrant self). This rupture (often difficult and unpleasant) has created the conditions of possibility for multiple affirmations.

Rosieni are both considering and resisting multiple discursive positions in the construction of their own reality and identity, collectively and individually. Rosia Montana is, thus, investigated here as an “object of discourse”: how it becomes spoken of, and under what conditions this is made possible. Discursive formation is “a space of multiple dissensions” (Foucault, 1972): resistance to injustice (and implicitly affirmations of other senses of justice) is an ambiguous discursive practice through which Rosieni make sense as well as partake their sense of Rosia Montana.

This aesthetic space of uncertain subjectivity is, by its nature, incompatible with domination as it often stands outside the realm of the “politically relevant.” It is in this space of culture that hybridization becomes relevant as a micro-practice: Neither one thing nor the other, neither communist nor capitalist both before and after the Fall of the Wall. The unreliable commitment of the East of Europe to prevailing regimes of power/truth/justice can be seen as a drifting sand of any hegemonic platform. This ambiguity, seen as merely a “dangerous incompleteness” on the drawbridge towards the ideal capitalist society, may offer other venues for political and ethical understandings.

As the Rosia Montana case also reveals, human consciousness may be the host of multiple ideologies interacting and competing for meaning-making and practice-development: the aesthetic ambivalence of the everyday subject. Subjectivities reproduce social orders of the present, the past and the imagined future while no homogeneous knitting of these is absolute or definitive. The

“seduction” of various ideologies is often the object of consciousness for the individual agent while the capturing of his or her consent is an on-going struggle not only for the programmatic elites themselves but for the self’s own consciousness. The ideological seduction of our consciousness is often transitory, temporary, and contextual rather than absolute.

A crucial element for ethical reflection here is not the subject or his or her consciousness but the conditions of possibility for such ideological seduction or under which speech becomes meaningful and prevailing, which are in themselves historically contingent. The economic mode of production may be an aspect of the power relations, but it is not the only one. Power is a particular hierarchy of classifications through which the social world order becomes constituted. Change of, and resistance to injustices is made possible through the very nature of the social dimension as complex, indeterminate, incomplete and open to chance. An aesthetic approach to resistance and justice movements requires a suspension of judgment and accusations that can consume us, an awareness of partialities of truths, the making of choices out of distinctions and reflective detachments or strategic disengagements.

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