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NGOs AS POSTSOCIALIST SOCIAL SERVICES PROVIDERS AND THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF OTHERING

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Abstract

In the process of neoliberal state restructuring, NGOs gained a prominent role in the production of social services. By using a case study focused on NGO relations in Ferentari, a Bucharest neighborhood, I claim that NGO work of gaining legitimacy as social services providers relies on the production of otherness. The effort of producing expertise by presenting areas affected by advanced marginality as having internal explanations and solutions can be viewed as the professionalization of othering.

Keywords: non-governmental organizations, social services, postsocialism, identity politics, professionalization

In 2013, the Romanian government proposed the establishment of the state-led Project Ferentari Foundation as a means of tackling poverty among the Roma of Ferentari neighborhood in Bucharest, as well as among other Roma communities from all over the country, in a conjoint effort with NGOs. Through this measure adopted by the Parliament in 2014, state institutions reiterated the exceptional character of poverty in the case of Roma, a situation presumably requiring special measures. Ferentari's image as the locus of marginalization and the epitome of Roma plight in Romania was reinforced. Moreover, the initiative cements the role of NGOs as instruments of providing social services.

Wacquant [1] argues that advanced marginality, a deeper, more entrenched version of the process, is an effect of neoliberal politics. While

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[1] Loïc Wacquant, "Urban Marginality in the Coming Millennium", *Urban Studies,* no. 10, 1999.

states are rolled back though budget cuts aiming at minimal social intervention, NGOs increasingly become key elements in the production of social welfare. They act by producing a social distance which renders people who end up marginalized because of structural processes into needy subjects who have to be educated into self responsibilization.

My claim is that even though they are presented as alternatives to state social services, NGOs do not intrinsically represent a non-statist alternative. Instead, in some instances, they are an essential part of the process of neoliberal state restructuring.

The paper departs with a literature review on neoliberal changes, on how NGOs raised to prominence in global development and on the relevant transformations in postsocialist Romania. I am using a case study based on the interaction of NGOs in Ferentari, a Bucharest neighborhood, to describe how these organizations actively participate in the process of social services reconstruction in a postsocialist country. Ferentari's portrayal is pervaded by a consistent work of contrasting. The paper looks at how those contrasts are instrumentalized through NGO work.

I claim that by using various technologies of othering, NGOs can be seen as both locus and agents of neoliberal state restructuring. I conclude that some types of NGO activity can contribute to the reinforcement of advanced marginality by inherently obscuring background structural processes. I assert that an effect of these processes is the professionalization of othering.

Contexts

The act of contextualizing is often embedded in geographical approaches, but avoiding to treat spaces as bounded containers can lead to richer understanding of how 'contexts animate action', Clarke[2] claims. Even though this is the foundation for most comparative works, he adds, the container approach poses the risks of obscuring the influence of border's permeability and the flows of people, capital or ideas. Clarke[3] favors a 'relational view of place' after Massey, "in which places are produced by their location in fields of relationships (economic, social, political, cultural

[2] John Clarke, "Contexts: Forms of Agency and Action" in Christopher Pollitt (ed.), *Context In Public Policy And Management,* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013, pp. 22-35.
[3] *Ibidem,* pp. 22-35.

and more)" and suggests that looking at contexts, not context leads to more insightful analyses, as it can unravel more complex relations of determination.

Bounding Ferentari geographically seems to be a challenging project for most people involved in the Ferentari debates and projects. The team coordinated by Roma Welfare Organization, one of the main NGOs working in the area, to write a research report on Ferentari, met the same challenge as well. Thus, Ferentari is not, first of all, a geographical place, but an idea, a playground where various forces, interests, relations and reflexivities are displayed and performed by different social actors. The Ferentari debate can be placed in connection to relevant unfolding processes.

Changes in welfare policies and governance

An underlying debate regarding the production and distribution of welfare services is the one between what is public and what is private. Clarke and Newman dismiss the 'hybridity' approach, which encompasses a previously clear distinction between sectors. Instead, they propose the idea of 'assemblage' because it "points to the multiple sources, resources and combinations that appear to be at stake in these organizational innovations"[4]. One reasoning behind this proposal is that the idea of public is constantly changing[5].

In 1991, the European Communities forged the creation of an internal market in welfare, bringing state and private welfare providers on the same line[6]. Implicitly, new modes of governance imposed market principles, bringing the politics of social services to a 'services-consumers' approach[7], while stigmatizing the publicly provided welfare[8]. Romanian organizations contracted almost 80 per cent of the allocated EU structural

[4] Janet Newman, John Clarke, *Publics*, *Politics and Power. Remaking the Public in Public Services*, London: Sage Publications, 2009, p. 95.

[5] *Ibidem*.

[6] Mary Langan, "Social Services: Managing the Third Way" in John Clarke *et al.* (eds.), *New Managerialism, New Welfare?*, London: Sage Publications, 2000.

[7] Amparo S. Pascual, Eduardo C. Suãrez, "The Government of Activation Policies by EU Institutions" in *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, no. 9-10, 2007, pp. 376-386.

[8] John Clarke, Sharon Gewirtz, Eugene McLaughlin, "Reinventing the Welfare State" in John Clarke, *op. cit*.

funds for the development of human resources as of February 2011[9,10]. It indicates that Romania's accession to the EU changed the funding landscape for governmental and nongovernmental organizations, enlarging the amount of funds available for welfare services for NGOs.

Ferguson and Gupta[11] describe the shift in Western democracies from the Keynesian to the free-market policies, suggesting that this does not imply a matter of less government, but a new governmentality that acts toward individual responsibilization. Albeit governmentality differentiates the state from the civil society, seeing the first as a specific contributor to regulation[12], describing the NGOs as distinct from the state and the market implies a separation from politics[13]. State and civil society rely on each other for the production of legitimacy[14], and subsequently, in numerous circumstances, nongovernmental organizations and their home governments share intimate connections[15]. While the proponents of governance perspective emphasize the raised authority of non-state entities in politics, there is a risk of neglecting their dependency on state support for legitimate and effective functioning[16].

[9] Iulian V. Brasoveanu et al., "Structural and Cohesion Funds: Theoretical and Statistical Aspects in Romania and EU" in *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, no. 33E, 2011, p. 40.

[10] However, effective payments in projects approved represent just 2.2 percent

[11] James Ferguson, Akhil Gupta, "Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality" in *American Ethnologist*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2002, pp. 981-1002.

[12] Hans-Martin Jaeger, "'Global Civil Society' and the Political Depoliticization of Global Governance" in *International Political Sociology*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2007, pp. 257-277.

[13] William F. Fisher, "DOING GOOD? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices". *Annual Review Anthropology*, no. 26, 1997, pp. 439-464.

[14] Ronnie Lipschutz; Cathleen Fogel, "'Regulation for the Rest of Us?' Global Civil Society and the Privatization of Transnational Regulations" in Rodney B. Hall, Thomas J. Biersteker (eds.), *The Emergence of Private Authority in Global Governance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

[15] Fisher, *op. cit, passim.*

[16] Philipp Genschel, Bernhard Zangl, "Transformations of the State: From Monopolist to Manager of Political Authority", University of Bremen, Collaborative Research Center: Transformations of the State, no. 76, 2008.

Civil society and NGOs as social movements

There are two competing views on the role and ontology of NGOs[17], one from a Hegelian side where civil society and the state are linked and imply economic interests, and another from a Toquevillian side where the two are separate and civil society is a space where people associate freely. Fisher and Mohan argue that in the international aid arena, donor discourses are fueled by the Tocquevillian approach.

Sampson[18] describes the 'project society' he observed in the Balkans. This type of society works according to the rules imposed by donors; it is a world where the wooden discourse of concepts such as 'capacity building' and 'good governance' is embedded in everyday social practices. This is a world, Sampson continues, where the most valued type of knowledge is the abstract one. Consequently, who possesses it can have a say in the distribution of resources.

While NGOs are sometimes portrayed as being a part of the 'Third Sector' or 'Civil Society', implying a stable role in a functionalist view of society, some theorists such as Stubbs [19] describe NGOs as a social movement. NGO-ization refers to a process of restructuration of the social contract while referring to the values behind the production and distribution of goods and services. Stubbs discusses the process in relation to globalization and neoliberalization.

Development discourse and the rise of the NGOs

A major concept in the development discourse is that of 'community', which Murray Li[20] tackles by appealing to Rose's criticism of government through community. This approach is constructed on an underlying paradox, "[c]ommunity is assumed to be natural, yet it needs to

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[17] Giles Mohan, "The Disappointments of Civil Society: The Politics of NGO Intervention in Northern Ghana" in *Political Geography*, no. 21, 2002, pp. 125-154.

[18] Steve Sampson, "From Kanun to Capacity-Building: The 'Internationals', Civil Society Development and Security in the Balkans" in P. Siani-Davies (ed.), *International Intervention in the Balkans After 1995,* London: Routledge, 2003.

[19] Paul Stubbs, "Community Development in Contemporary Croatia: Globalisation, Neoliberalisation and NGO-isation" in Lena Dominelli (ed.), *Revitalising Communities in a Globalizing World*, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2007.

[20] Tania Murray Li, *The Will to Improve. Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007.

be improved"[21]. As such, Murray Li continues, the work to engage with is that of optimizing the already present according to an ideal, and when community is found to be natural and authentic, it has to be protected, as it is vulnerable[22]. Although the international development field as a postcolonial emergence has been dominated by large institutions such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, geographers Bebbington, Hickey, and Mitlin propose a timeline of the emergence of NGOs as alternative in development[23].

They view a first phase as one that took place until the late 1960's. There were only a few small agencies, most of them based in the north-western countries, that were concerned rather on solving one issue by philanthropy and engaging in advocacy.

A second phase takes place until around 1980-1985. A growing number of NGOs appear in a structural move by Northern states "to institutionalize NGO projects within their national aid portfolios"[24]. Increased expectations accompanied by easier access to funding from European sources.

The authors describe the next period until the early 1990s as a third phase, when the number of NGOs dramatically increased, while their role in the development project crystallized. The neoliberal discourse managed to encompass the NGOs through the provision of funding while global processes of economic instability were taking place, political democratization in a liberal democratic sense was occurring, and new concepts such as 'civil society', 'participation', and 'empowerment' were gaining prominence. A fourth phase is placed after the early 1990s proclaimed the 'end of history', when the NGOs behavior resembles the one of mainstream Development and thus begins to blur its attribute of alternative. NGOs gain higher access to the policy process, their role in poverty reduction substantially increases and standardizes and, in some instances, they act as contractors of public services.

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[21] *Ibidem*, p. 232.

[22] *Ibidem*, p. 233.

[23] Anthony Bebbington, Samuel Hickey, Diana Mitlin, "Introduction: Can NGOs Make a Difference? The Challenge of Development Alternatives" in Anthony Bebbington, Samuel Hickey, Diana Mitlin (eds.), *"Can NGOs Make a Difference? The Challenge of Development Alternatives"*, New York: Zed Books, 2008.

[24] *Ibidem*, p.12.

Fisher[25] underlines the ambivalence of the idea of NGO by pointing its attractiveness both to the critics and to the proponents of development. Still, one result of these processes was that the NGOs were getting 'too close for comfort' [26] with other actors, risking to lose their praised characteristics. Nevertheless, 'too close for comfort' translates a presumed ontological separation and autonomy between various actors.

NGOs and the politics of development

To unveil the possible role of NGOs in development, Fisher [27] follows Ferguson[28] in distinguishing between two types of critics of the hitherto development project: one that believes in the righteousness of the process and another that does not, even though both of them are dissatisfied with the implementation. The first type has "an instrumental view of NGOs, regarding them as apolitical tools that can be wielded to further a variety of slightly modified development goals"[29], seeing some characteristics (less bureaucratic, more flexible) as standing in opposition to those of the state. The second type of critics lauds the NGOs for their potential to challenge power relations and politicize issues, despite the fact that they run a risk of becoming a part of the "antipolitics" machine of development[30], which obscures political relationships.

Mosse[31] supports a similar vision, according to which "'[s]uccess' and 'failure' are policy-oriented judgments that obscure project effects", although he underscores that going beyond the approaches based on the development machine's automaticity and looking at "complex agency of actors in development at every level" [32] can shed more light on the complexity of the policy process. The question of how development

[25] Fisher, *op. cit, passim.*

[26] M. Edwards, D. Hulme, "Too Close for Comfort: NGOs, the State and Donors" in *World Development*, no. 6, 1996, *apud* Bebbington et al., *op. cit.*.

[27] Fisher, *op. cit, passim.*

[28] James, Ferguson, "The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development,' Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho", Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990

[29] Fisher, *op. cit, p.* 444.

[30] Ferguson, *op. cit, passim.*

[31] David Mosse, *Cultivating Development. An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice,* London: Pluto Press, 2005, p. 19.

[32] *Ibidem*, p. 6.

politics are produced is further enlarged by Boltanski, who asserts that "[t]he re-legitimation of humanitarian action and its representation are going through a process of re-politicization[33].

Fisher[34] lists 16 acronyms to illustrate that "[t]he term 'NGO' is shorthand for a wide range of formal and informal associations" and argues that by seeing them as an area of scientific investigation, the development discourse can lead to their colonization by powerful actors. He proposes an analysis of the processes and relationships unfolding in various fields and involving numerous actors, instead of a scrutiny of a set of organizations, with a focus on the micropolitics of these organizations "as fragmented sites that have multiple connections nationally and transnationally" [35]. In this analytical sense, the state shares similar characteristics and an analysis of the relation between the NGO field and the state should take into account similar precautions, Fisher continues. So why is the study of micropolitics and micropractices important in Fisher's account? Because, he states, larger change can occur through their transformation and the adjustment of their originating discourse.

Atlani-Duault [36] provides an edifying account of how Transcaucasian post-soviet states ended up being categorized as developing after the status of confederate state disappeared. She describes the efforts and stages through which the International Development Organization - a pseudonym - forged the construction of a civil society through its focus on supporting small NGOs. In the USSR, the state institutions were the only legal form of association between people and IDO's emphasis on 'good governance' is explained as an opposition the soviet 'monolithic model' of governance. Any failure of projects developed by NGOs could thus be explained by blaming "the forced social uniformity of pre-democratic days"[37], a specific characteristic of this part of the world.

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[33] Luc Boltanski,"The Legitimacy of Humanitarian Actions and their Media Representation: The Case of France" in *Ethical Perspectives*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2000, p. 15.

[34] Fisher, *op. cit,* p. 447.

[35] George E. Marcus, "Ethnography In/Out of the World System: The Emergence of Multisided Ethnography" in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol 24. pp. 95-117 *apud* Fisher, *op. cit.*

[36] Laetitia Atlani-Duault, H*umanitarian aid in Post-Soviet Countries: An Anthropological Perspective,* New York: Routledge, 2008.

[37] *Ibidem*, p. 111.

NGOs and civil society in Romania. From markers of democracy to social services providers

The post 1989 Romania has witnessed the emergence of a field of organizations called 'the civil society'. Romania's accession in the European Union in 2007 produced a strong impact upon the understanding of what 'civil society' is. In the previous period, various organizations focused on human rights, cultural and other issues associated with a liberal discourse represented the long awaited 'civil society'.

Due to the newly large amounts of available funding for non-state actors, especially in the social services area, the post European Union accession period is marked by organizations that began to adapt to the new model, while others have been specifically founded with this in mind. Many organizations portray the European Union as a 'donor', and adopt the available role slots, among which the one of social services provider appears as an adequate and sustainable one. The idea of civil society as a distinctive part of society from the state gradually gained prominence and support from the governments, culminating under the right wing governments after the second half of the 2000s. These governments produced a discourse that conveniently captured and redelivered the European Union's principles on the production and distribution of social services.

In 2010, the Romanian meta-NGO Foundation for Civil Society Development (FCSD), counted over 62 000 organizations, among which 21 000 are financially active[38]. According to the same report, after 1998 the NGOs started delivering more social services and contracting government funding according to new regulations[39].

The Romanian civil society after 1989 was born in a clear demarcation from politics, as intellectuals, trade unions and NGOs claimed in 1990 that "we are not parties and we are not engaged in politics"[40], move

[38] Mihaela Lambru, Ancuța Vameșu, *România 2010. Sectorul neguvernamental – profil, tendințe, provocări* (Romania 2010. The nongovernmental Sector: profiles, tendencies, challenges), p. 7. [http://www.fdsc.ro/library/conferinta%20vio%207%20oct/Romania%202010_Sectorul%20neguvernamental1.pdf]

[39] *Ibidem*, p. 8.

[40] Laura Grünberg, "Women's NGO's in Romania" in Susan Gal, Gail Kligman (eds.), *Reproducing Gender. Politics, Publics and Everyday Life after Socialism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 310.

which aimed at conveying good intentions in opposition to how politics were perceived in the previous period.

An increased number of women NGOs, NGOs for disabled people, children with special needs are often categorized as having a 'social' character. Corporate social responsibility campaigns and the emergence of a trendy social economy field imagined for disabled people or other groups convey as well an understanding of the 'social' as an area of problems which the state or the market cannot solve; thus the necessity for this type of organization of action as a compensation for those people's inability to actively pursue income generation in market terms. The construction of identity politics, which are inherently based on the production of differentiation end up in calling for policies which must take into account the group characteristics and create specific subjects of policies, whether they might be Roma, women, disabled, poor or any combination of those. The policies in a society categorized as such require specialized knowledge on the specific characteristics of the target groups and specialists who can produce it.

Case study – Construction of Ferentari through NGO practices

Ferentari is a Bucharest neighborhood located in the administrative Sector 5. The neighborhood, nicknamed Ferentexas, is perceived as Bucharest's most feared area, according to a 2012 mental map[41]. It is also commonly identified as a Roma neighborhood, especially through mass-media coverage, although the size of the Roma population and that of the whole population, for that matter, is unknown. Official census data covers administrative regions, whereas neighborhoods are fluid geographical entities. As it is constructed in the public imagery, the neighborhood can be viewed as Bucharest's "internal Orient"[42].

Ferentari is an appealing area of research because it represents a fertile field due to its characteristic of being a thick and active organizational areal. It is a field where identities, legitimacies and

[41] Cristian Ciobanu, "Bucharest Fear Map", 2012. Available at: [http://mentalgeo.wordpress.com/2012/01/07/harta-fricii-in-bucuresti/].

[42] Gergő Pulay, "La Crâșma din Ferentari: ghetto-ul care dă strălucire centrului", *Blogul de Urbana. România Urbana*, 2009. [http://socasis.ubbcluj.ro/urbanblog/?p=251], 25 November 2014.

conceptions of social justice are being established and institutions are being shaped. Moreover, structural forces and agency pervading various political layers interact and animate action. Hence, the debate on Ferentari is not one about an area in Bucharest, but one on larger issues such as the neoliberal restructuring of the production of welfare.

The paper is based both on active research, as well as on my experience as an NGO worker. I will further use fictional names, instead of the organizations' real names. My initial research goal was based on the idea of finding out how NGOs interact in a competitive environment. After interviewing workers at NGOs focused on Ferentari, I decided to narrow my research focus on the interaction between four main actors.

My first contact with Ferentari occurred while I was working as a project assistant for Roma Welfare Organization (RWO). During that time, I got in contact with a Romani teacher at the Ferentari School, as well as marginally with Community Health Association (CHA) and Grassroots Initiatives Association (GIA). These three NGOs have been founded less than ten years ago.

Roma Welfare Organization was founded as a result of an international debate on Roma issues. The RWO director initially oriented it towards policy work, but later on he decided to engage in practical projects aimed at promoting edifying solutions to Roma poverty. Consequently, the NGO decided to open a Day Care Center in a Ferentari school. Grassroots Initiatives Association appeared several years before RWO. After several attempts of developing projects in neighboring areas, GIA decided to work with children in the Ferentari School. Activities started more than two years before RWO decided to open the Day Care Center in the school.

Community Health Organization was a semi-autonomous branch of a larger Roma NGO. Focused on health issues, CHO offered medical services which included changing used needles and syringes with new ones to local drug addicts. CHO workers are widely regarded as local people.

The Ferentari School has a large population of Roma students. Consequently, the school decided to hire a Romani teacher, who turned into a local gatekeeper over time. NGOs developing projects in the school saw her as a pivotal character in the projects' success.

NGOs working in Ferentari specifically attempt to solve what they envision as problems by spatially bounding the intervention areas. Space becomes a pervading characteristic of NGO work struggling to tackle social problems belonging to what Wacquant dubs advanced marginality[43]. While previous processes of marginalization were connected to macroeconomic cycles, its advanced version is decoupled from larger economic processes. Spatial concentration of enduring poverty coupled with area stigmatization can serve as indicators of advanced marginality in urban areas. Thus, if there is one aspect dominating the neighborhood's current social position, that is social class, however combined with ethnic characteristics.

The current state of Ferentari, as that of other areas, can be described as a result of government policies of urban abandonment[44]. The Bucharest municipality heavily invested in the refurbishment of the city's historical center to develop a rich nightlife scene which brings funds to the local municipality, while marginal neighborhoods received less attention. As such, Ferentari can be seen as a neighborhood of relegation, in Wacquant's terms.

In Ferentari's case, what is regarded by NGOs as social marginality ends up devoid of structural economic explanations by recasting the problems in terms of cultural identity. In Anthias's terms, the process can be seen as the culturalization of social relations in projects based on the uses of diversity and integration ideas. "The cultural is divorced from the structural and material, and 'othered' populations are endowed with culture seen as a thing which people carry with them"[45].

A prevalent practice of NGOs developing projects in Ferentari is that of spatially bounding the area of intervention. Using empirical data, I will next examine how NGOs can became vehicles which reenact marginality through some of their practices in Ferentari.

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[43] Loïc Wacquant, "Urban Marginality in the Coming Millennium" in *Urban Studies,* no. 10, 1999.

[44] Idem, "Class, Ethnicity and State in the Making of Marginality: Revisiting Urban Outcasts", 2013 [http://loicwacquant.net/assets/Papers/REVISITINGURBANOUTCASTS-Danish-article-version.pdf].

[45] Floya Anthias, "Moving Beyond the Janus Face of Integration and Diversity Discourses: Towards an Intersectional Framing" in *The Sociological Review*, vol. 61, 2013, p. 324.

I argue that NGOs attempt to gain legitimacy through persistent spatialization practices. An effect of these practices is the professionalization of othering, which occurs while people and organizations engage in legitimization practices. I will further analyze how NGO activities take shape by looking at the circumstances in which key people started working in Ferentari and how they interacted. Moreover, I will analyze how a research report on Ferentari released by Roma Welfare Organization is used as a legitimization vehicle.

Personal and institutional quests for legitimacy

Legitimacy for intervention is gained through personal and institutional channels. In Ferentari, outsiders and locals depend on each other if they plan on developing successful projects. However, the relation between them is mediated by a structural pressure of proving a personal ability to provide viable solutions.

Neoliberal governmentality relies not on less government, but on different approaches focused on individual responsibilization. NGO beneficiaries are often portrayed as people eligible to overcome their condition, but NGO workers have to go through similar stages before passing education further on through projects.

As a Roma woman, the Romani teacher working in the Ferentari school is often considered a local, although she does not originate from Ferentari. Structural conditions combined with personal ambition pushed her into becoming a successful Roma woman, regarded as a positive example.

However, the road was quite difficult. In less than 10 years, she managed to obtain her undergraduate degree, a master degree and she was on the road to a PhD diploma. In the meantime, she was involved in innumerable national and international projects. Since she started working in Ferentari, she gathered piles of diplomas from short term courses and workshops on education and inclusion. Most of the projects have been focused on using Roma identity as an instrument in the fight against ethnic poverty.

The Romani teacher's position was repeatedly questioned by a part of her colleagues in what could be understood as institutionalized racism. Her constant quest for improvement and certification entails a defense

mechanism based on a strong need to reach a higher level of legitimization and recognition and, consequently, to secure her position. She was co-opted in at least one RWO project aimed at young Roma and worked closely with GIA as well.

Grassroots Initiatives Association was established after a team of young social scientists decided to develop educational projects, as well as experimental projects aimed at fostering social transformation. GIA's leader had been involved in social research projects on squats around Europe and poor marginal communities in Romania.

After a couple of attempts to develop adult oriented activities, the team realized they are not experienced enough for that step. A first attempt of developing a conjoint project in a neighborhood close to Ferentari ended up with GIA' retreat, as the other partners had a pitiful attitude towards the beneficiaries. Next, GIA got geographically closer to Ferentari School after its members tried to develop long term projects in a similar close-by area.

They did not manage to wholly 'enter' this second neighborhood, as their main contact and community leader moved out. The need for experience in mediating between worlds – neighborhood and outside world, as conveyed by a story of failure in this respect, was also a main reason to abandon the area. GIA leader considers the episode to be a useful experience in adjusting the preconceived ideas about the neighborhoods she has not visited before to their reality. An educational experience to be further used in Ferentari, which is a more 'hard-core' area.

When RWO started working in Ferentari, the organization was at its beginnings. Thus, organizational practices were constantly in the making. Routine was not a very a prominent characteristic for the staff and collaborators – a sign that attempts of discovering an organizational path and profile predominated.

Mentoring and exposure to role models were key aspects of most projects, whether the target was represented by children or young adults. Gradually, after the day care center had been launched, most of the funds were directed toward starting new activities with children: sports, dances, games, social and financial education, doing homework, photo-video projects and excursions.

Roma Welfare Organization's director emphasizes his high social mobility. He presents himself as someone who came from the slums, but managed to attain higher education. He easily revolves in high circles, travels to conferences and talks around Europe on racism, discrimination and antidiscrimination policies.

In the same time, he recounts how he goes 'in the ghetto' and sees disturbing images such as minors taking drugs surrounded by piles of garbage on the road to prostitution. As he tries to solve these problems on his own by going grass roots, he also aims to raise awareness at the higher political level. This is where he claims to fill the gap by connecting a profoundly disconnected political-bureaucratic set of rulers to the reality, while in the same time working directly to solve as many problems as he can on his own.

By looking at how the director and architect of RWO presents himself and how RWO is designed, a high degree of consistency between his personal discourse and action can be noticed, as RWO seems to be an institutional emulation of the director's personal trajectory. The director constructs himself as a person – institution, who presupposes that he, as a successful individual, is an example that personal struggle is socially rewarding.

RWO sees a trip from the central office to the Ferentari School as more than mere physical movement; it is an exploration of a land far away, especially for visitors. It entails that physical distance translates accurately into social distance. This trip is closely connected with the personal trajectory and wide social mobility of RWO's director.

As a human rights NGO, RWO stays closer to power sources, because spatial proximity can produce greater impact, Gordon[46] claims, adding that the debates on spatial proximity and social space render the border line between government and civil society as more blurry than it is usually portrayed.

Taking high-level European politicians to Ferentari was regarded as a core activity for RWO. When a high European official was visiting RWO's day care center in Ferentari, the office staff and resources would mainly be

[46] Neve Gordon, "Human Rights, Social Space and Power: Why Do Some NGOs Exert More Influence Than Others?" in *The International Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2008, pp. 23-39.

directed, as much as possible, toward planning the event in minor detail. For a couple of days, the organization was turning into an event planning and implementation committee, following all the details from providing water supplies to following how the event was portrayed by the media. Consequently, an internal detailed document titled "Procedure regarding the unfolding of meetings with external participants" has been established.

Visits of high-level Western European politicians are used to portray RWO as link between two disconnected worlds, upper-level politics and reality. However, in order to secure the desired status, RWO has to prove that reality is consistent with their description. Thus, visits require extensive planning and frame making, including the conversion of an initially uncooperative school principal to accept the RWO presence in the institution she ran.

Enter the hood

"Enter the hood" is a phrase used by both Grassroots Initiatives Organization and Roma Welfare Organization. It aims at conveying the image of a bounded area with its own internal logic and rules, a place in a sense disconnected from the ones around it. It is a place of mystery and unknown, which requires exploration to be discovered and acted knowledgeably upon it.

Because Ferentari appears so distinct, distant, poorly understood and feared, it is considered a challenge for NGOs, it becomes a rite of passage to maturity for them. GIA, as well as RWO, intended to develop pilot projects in Ferentari's School that could be further replicated in other areas, as it has subsequently happened. Results obtained through projects in Ferentari School are considered benchmarks of NGO work.

Although GIA has, allegedly, implemented projects with similar design, RWO publicly claims that their initiative is, to their knowledge, a premiere. Claims on innovative solutions to old, well known problems can thus be assured. Implicitly and explicitly, innovation is the solution where the state institutions' uniform policies proved unsuccessful, due to inherent characteristics such as rigidity or corruption.

The vision of GIA's leader of what should be done with the children is similar to that of RWO's director. She "always considered that children can change parents, you know? […] That is the parents' minds are too

corrupted and they are lost, many of them, you know as well! And there's nothing you can change with adults… I mean you have what to, but there's a need for integrated work!" Her solutions are based on the development of specifically targeted NGOs, but in the same time, she reflects that a more professional action would be that of collaborating with local administration, as opposed to her previous approach.

Children are deemed adequate NGO beneficiaries because they are not yet bestowed with responsibility for their current condition. Mentoring and activating school children living in a very poor area are the solutions to improve livelihoods because success can be attained through struggle and demand for improved livelihoods. Inherently, structural problems such as unemployment are rendered less determinant for the future of these children. These are all well-known and often stated, but the hope is that the properly guided children will 'get out of there'. This is undertaken by discursively separating the children from their background. Areas of action towards solving the problems are compartmentalized and followed by fragmented, independent interventions. If there are problems such as unemployment, improper housing, poor school performances, drug abuses, they are treated by different experts.

This trajectory is not only suitable to children, because parents have opportunities to prove their worth as well, according to RWOs plans of hiring ex-convict volunteers to work in the day care center, as they might follow a path toward improvement of their lives by hard work and active learning.

Professionalization of othering through knowledge production

The research report on Ferentari issued by RWO was part of a larger project, which included the development of a day care center inside the Ferentari School designed to serve as model of good practices for other schools in the ghetto. As the condition of ghetto and its lack of good governance were already stated, the social research was designed to describe precisely how dire the situation was in reality, because a single visit in such communities as such will prove the failure of all the previous projects, the report stated.

Debated in RWO's office, as well as in the report, is the idea of a public policy focused on ghettos. Reasons supporting an introduction of

the term in official public policy language are implied and appeals to European funding to solve such issues are stated. The uneasiness in providing a definition of the research area pervaded most of the research design and it is stated in the report as well. Although the report claims to be dealing with Ferentari, its content clarifies that it deals mainly with one specific street and most chapters focus on this area.

Nearly all chapters rely on an academic style through references to social sciences literature and appeals to rigor and scientificity. The RWO director's chapter uses a different approach. Descriptions of criminality, which takes various faces, are narrative and devoid of academic pretentions. What comes out of it is the image of a grass-roots activist who witnessed the hell-hole where, following the text's structure, drugs, thefts, prostitution, violence, and incarceration – the latter being unavoidable - are part of the quotidian.

The conclusions of the report warn that due to the recent economic downturn, poor people from other areas are expected to end up in Ferentari, along with other indications of Ferentari's involvement in structural processes. The concept of ghetto receives increased attention in many of the chapters and its usage is backed by the fact that it is already used and present in public conscience. It further explains that 'ghetto' is a term with a meaning looser than in the urban American cases. However, preceding descriptions of cases of extreme spatial isolation outside territorial administrative units through displacement of Roma populations that happened in other European countries, along with cases from Romania, build up an image of an area with special characteristics.

Overall, while parts of the report clearly state that structural processes have a large impact on how Ferentari became a 'ghetto', the provided solutions strongly supported publicly by the Roma Welfare Organization through its projects are aimed at empowering individuals, without emphasizing structural problems.

What it comes out of the report is an image of a bounded, isolated area with a different logic than other poor areas, hence requiring innovative approaches (such as justice management in ghetto communities). The report implies a necessity for expertise in dealing with such cases. The solutions appear to be the appeal to European Commission

policies, which can be better implemented by those NGOs involved in the process, translating in a call for governance changes.

The repeated appeal to EU institutions seems to convey the fact that Romanian public institutions turned into competitors in the market of social services.

Grass-roots politics and relations between NGOs

In order to produce a sense of legitimacy, NGOs portray public institutions as monolithic entities that cannot provide the adequate services needed by populations with specific problems. Legitimacy of intervention is produced by making the population legible to outsiders through various types of reports. Thus, after NGOs learn the local problems, they can claim to be capable actors of developing projects aimed at solving them.

However, NGOs act as conveyers of local problems to the outside world, meaning that social problems are translated. Learning the local language becomes an imperative. The local is a key actor in the process of translation. Consequently, gaining the support of local people turns into a core task.

Community Health Organization (CHO) was regarded as a local NGO. Established a couple of years before Roma Welfare Organization and Grassroots Initiatives Association started working in Ferentari, CHA operated an on-the-spot medical facility. People from the neighborhood allegedly visited the medical doctor appointed by the association. Most importantly, the facility distributed free syringes to drug addicts living in the vicinity.

Both RWA and GIA saw CHA as a type of local initiative that could stand as project partner. As a local, the association was not seen as a capable competitor. Rather, CHA was regarded as a community gatekeeper and a potential capital of legitimacy. To achieve the status of grassroots organizations, RWA and GIA needed CHA's support.

Roma Welfare Organization organized a meeting with CHA to propose a potential partnership on community development projects. However, the CHA leader was reluctant towards the proposals. One of his employee ended up working with RWA later on as a sports instructor for school children. Grassroots Initiatives Association attempted to co-opt the health center in their projects as well. Before RWA arrived in the area, GIA

repeatedly advised CHA to apply for funding without any success. After insisting that their own project would help them attain legitimacy in the eyes of the local population, GIA decided to write a project application on their own, portraying CHA as lazy.

After GIA received funding for a project where they inscribed CHA as partners, the relation inversed. The health center told GIA they will not sign the partnership because there are many people posing similar propositions and they need to test GIA by assessing how the project will turn out and sign the partnership afterword. The GIA leader was furious because they dared proposing that, saying it should have been backwards.

The story shows how the two organizations ran on different rationalities. For GIA, developing projects is a crucial NGO activity and sees NGO development as a means of achieving social change. Seeing that CHA has not internalized this vision is disappointing because it translates into a failure to engage with locals who were expected to be receptive to empowerment ideas.

At least one health center member collaborated with both RWA and GIA. One day, when GIA was renovating a football field behind the Ferentari School, RWA had a Western European ambassador visiting the day care center. According to the GIA leader, the CHA member went to the meeting with the foreign ambassador instead of helping them renovate the field. After the meeting inside the school ended, the CHA employee arrived and kept his promise of helping GIA with the renovation work.

Although RWA and GIA had one attempt of communication when RWA arrived in the area, they had not communicated ever since. Incidentally, CHA managed to clarify the gap between RWA and GIA while attempting to swim in the muddy organizational field. For GIA, it became clear that RWA plays in a different league, meaning that it could not withstand competition any longer. Shortly after, GIA decided to move its activities in other neighborhoods.

The episodes describe how interaction between various NGO actors focused on working at different levels takes place in the field. To survive and, moreover, to thrive, NGOs engage in competitive practices that do not take place on leveled ground. Grass-roots micro-politics in Ferentari – searching for the local while relating to organizations with similar interests – convey the image of an institutional field in the making.

Concluding remarks

By providing another layer of understanding of the policy process intricacies, this paper provides an answer to Mosse's call to take into account the complex agency of actors involved in the development process[47]. The paper presented a case study to suggest that while NGOs produce development projects they take part in what I call the professionalization of othering.

The slot of othering professional is created as an effect of the interaction between public and private institutions that offer courses and certifications for highly specialized professionals. In the case study I presented, an othering professional gains expertise by presenting the effects of marginalization in localist terms that combine ethnic and cultural characteristics. Under the neoliberal regime that stresses competition between NGOs for financial resources, NGOs have to rely on the work of accurately delimiting the problems and solutions from a spatial perspective through a persistent work of contrasting in order to produce particular welfare subjects.

Some NGOs strive to answer with solutions that place the responsibility of overcoming advanced marginality on the populations themselves. Changing mentalities is thus seen as a key solution to social problems. However, this line of thought is inherent to the financing lines for which NGOs have to compete.

While continuously presenting the current condition of the Ferentari neighborhood population as disconnected from larger structural processes, NGOs act as agents and locus of neoliberal state restructuring. For NGOs attempting to gain legitimacy as social services providers, Ferentari is a means of proving capacity to provide localized, yet replicable, solutions to structural processes of marginalization.

Postsocialist states undergo processes of repoliticization of welfare services. The case of NGOs working in Ferentari suggests that the effects of advanced marginality are seen through institutional assemblages which can reinforce marginality by emphasizing otherness. The result can be interpreted as the effect of a development project based on the

[47] David Mosse, *Cultivating Development. An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practic,* London: Pluto Press, 2005.

depoliticization of marginality by recasting social problems in terms of ethnic identity politics.

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