

STRUGGLING FOR WELFARE: NGO INTERACTION IN FERENTARI AND THE EMERGENCE OF CRITIQUE

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Abstract

While taking into account the evolution of NGOs as important actors in development projects and their emergence in the European Union welfare politics, I am looking at how these processes are visible by examining how a marginal Bucharest neighborhood is portrayed by NGOs as they develop school children oriented activities. My question is how NGO agency can be discussed in development projects. I answer this questions by employing my experience as an employee of Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, one active NGO in this respect, scrutinizing the director's discourse on Roma issues and European Union institutions, analyzing a social research report produced by the same organization, and interviews with a member of another NGO and one teacher in the neighborhood's school where the two NGOs developed projects. As the main NGO actors I looked at in my research are critical towards what happened so far in Ferentari, I assessed how the interaction between them has influenced this critique. While exerting a very vocal critique aimed at the EU institutions for failing to properly address Roma issues and support Roma oriented NGO, PCRM's director's discourse obscures the effects of PCRM's projects in Ferentari, which produce a competitive NGO environment.

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1. Introduction

After 1989, the issues of ethnic discrimination, human rights breach, social inclusion and governmental transparency gained prominence in the Romanian public discourse, especially through the voices of newly established NGOs. Romani Criss, the now largest Roma NGO, was founded in 1993. Around sixty NGOs were founded among the Roma until 1996 for a population of around 400.000 Roma ethnics, according to the National Commission for Statistics (Grunberg 2000:312). Nevertheless, Roma issues have transcended various topics, such as poverty, discrimination and labor market policies.

Antigypsism has a long history in Romania. After 1989 it seems to have been increasing, with racist remarks against the Roma being part of the quotidian. The majority of the Roma population in Romania lives in considerably lower quality living conditions than other ethnic groups. Numerous governmental politics of sometimes titled ‘minority integration’ and other times ‘social inclusion’ have targeted Roma populations. But even according to the projects criteria themselves, most of them have failed and an unofficial overarching blame is directed on the Roma population itself and its lack of will to grab the helping hands.

Neighborhoods are not administrative units in Bucharest, although in everyday life people refer to them as places more often than the official administrative ones, the sectors. Ferentari neighborhood is placed in Sector 5, which is widely regarded as the city’s poorest sector. Also, according to a Phd research on mental mapping (Ciobanu 2012), Ferentari is perceived as Bucharest’s most feared neighborhood. It is also commonly perceived as being a Roma neighborhood, especially through mass-media coverage, although the size of the Roma population and of the whole population, for that matter, is not known.

Ferentari is nicknamed Ferentexas. Pulay, a Hungarian Phd student in anthropology at the Central European University doing fieldwork in 2009-2010 in Ferentari steered much more attention than expected, including interviews for a curious national newspaper regarding his motives for choosing this research field (Evenimentul Zilei, 2011). NGOs providing social services claim to ‘enter in the hood’, implying an act of bravery for going into a confined dangerous area. Stories as such convey a general lack of hope that things can be improved there because it is a lost cause. As Pulay (2009) puts it, Ferentari seems to be the Bucharest’s ‘internal Orient’.

My academic interest in NGOs working in Ferentari started while I worked as project assistant in the second half of 2010 for Policy Center for Roma and Minorities (from now on PCRM), a Bucharest based NGO founded in 2008. During the time I was an employee there, PCRM founded a Club for Alternative Education in the School 136 in Ferentari and I had the chance to take my first walks there, although mostly just around the school. School 136 appeared to be a central institution in the area. Not only that it is located in the vicinity of what is the essence of Ferentari’s bad name – Livezilor Alley, it is also the core and intersection of many nongovernmental projects.

At least two NGOs, Komunitas and PCRM, developed long-term projects there. Near the school a large shipping container is located where the Association for Community Development was housed along with its medical office and now houses Carusel, an NGO focused on drug and prostitution issues and generally on harm reduction. Across one road from the school is a public kindergarten which houses the Phillip House Foundation, an NGO which acts as a day and health center for kindergarten children coming from disadvantaged families. The Valentina Asociation, providing humanitarian aid and a day center for children, even though it is located a bit farther

away from the school, it states that its main beneficiaries come from Ferentari. In the same area resides The Family and Child Protection Foundation, which deals with drug addiction issues and projects focused on children. World Vision, a U.S.A. founded religious welfare organization with branches in more than 50 countries, manages a Multifunctional Center for disabled children closer to the school. The list can go on.

Around a dozen very low comfort 4 storey apartment blocks behind School 136 are in an advanced state of degradation and piles of garbage throne the area, along with used syringes, according to many witnesses, especially from NGOs, as I will later recount. This is Livezilor Alley, one of the most feared places in Bucharest. Although it is a small geographical area, it is often represented as a generalization of the whole neighborhood. While there are a couple of relatively comparable areas to Livezilor Alley, where similar low comfort blocks are located, most of the neighborhood's housing is constituted by houses which tend to offer a rural aspect of relative poverty, although the road infrastructure was greatly improved in the last couple of years. A picture often displayed by the media and the NGOs is that of Ferentari as a ghetto, sometimes a Roma ghetto, as the understandings of what a ghetto is vary and are often implied, rather than stated. "Keeping the children off the streets" is one of the guiding principles of many NGOs, and the danger is greater as the two main faces of purity and danger, the school and Livezilor Alley, are geographically placed back to back. A constant work of contrasting pervades many aspects of how Ferentari is portrayed. In the end, one of my intentions is to look at how those contrasts are instrumentalized by people from NGOs.

2. Contexts

The act of contextualizing is often embedded in geographical approaches, but avoiding to treat spaces as bounded containers can lead to richer understandings of how 'contexts animate action', Clarke claims (2013, forthcoming). Even though this is the foundation for most comparative works, he adds, the container approach risks to obscure the influence of border's permeability and the flows of people, capital or ideas. Clarke favors a 'relational view of place' after Massey (2005), "in which places are produced by their location in fields of relationships (economic, social, political, cultural and more)" (Clarke 2013, forthcoming) 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 research team coordinated by PCRM to write the research report "Hidden Communities - Ferentari" in 2011 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. I believe that for providing a clearer image of what the Ferentari debate means, it is necessary to lie out some relevant unfolding processes.

2.1 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. The structural changes in the last couple of decades have produced new forms of interactions and new concepts are being launched. Clarke and Newman (2009) dismiss the 'hybridity' approach, which encompasses a previously clear

distinction between sectors, and 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” (Newman and Clarke, 2009:95). One reasoning behind this proposal is that the idea of public is constantly changing (Newman and Clarke 2009).

In 1991, the European Communities forged the creation of an internal market in welfare, bringing state and private welfare providers on the same line (Langan, 2000). Implicitly, new modes of governance imposed the market principles, bringing the politics of social services to a ‘services-consumers’ approach (Pascual and Suarez 2007), while stigmatizing the publicly provided welfare (Clarke et al. 2000). Romanian organizations contracted almost 80 per cent of the allocated EU structural funds for the development of human resources as of February 2011 (Brasoveanu et al. 2011). It indicates that Romania’s accession to the EU dramatically changed the funding landscape for governmental and nongovernmental organizations, enlarging the amount of funds available for welfare services for NGOs.

Ferguson and Gupta (2002) talk about 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 responsabilization. Albeit governmentality differentiates the state from the civil society, seeing the first as a specific contributor to regulation (Jaeger, 2007), describing the NGOs as distinct from the state and the market implies a separation from politics (Fisher 2007). The state and the civil society rely on each other for the production of legitimacy (Lipschutz and Fogel 2002), and subsequently, in numerous circumstances, the nongovernmental organizations and their home governments share intimate connections (Fisher 1997). Genschel and Zangl (2008) pointed a similar idea, that while the proponents of governance perspective emphasize the raised authority in politics of non-state

entities, there is a risk to neglect their dependency on state support for legitimate and effective functioning.

2.2 Civil society, NGOs, Third Sector and Social Movements

There are two competing views on the role and ontology of NGOs (Fisher 1997, Mohan 2002), one is 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 (1997) and Mohan (1997) argue that in the international aid arena, the donors' discourses are fueled by the Tocquevillian approach.

Sampson (2003) describes the 'project society' he observed in the Balkans. This type of society works according to the rules imposed by the 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 abstract knowledge is the most valued knowledge and 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 (2007) describe the NGOs as a social movement. The 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 (2007) discusses this process in relation to the processes of globalization and neoliberalization.

2.3 Development discourse and the rise of the NGOs

A major concept in the development discourse is that of 'community', which Murray Li (2007) 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 be improved” (Murray Li 2007:232). 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 (Murray Li, 2007:233).

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, the geographers Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin (2008) propose a framework of the emergence of NGOs as alternative in development. They view a first phase as one that took place until the late 1960’s. There were only few small agencies, most of them Northern based, 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” (Bebbington et al 2008:12). 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 NGO’s 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 ‘end of history’, when the NGOs behavior resembles much that of the mainstream Development and thus begins to blur its

attribute as alternative. The 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. Meanwhile, the competition for funding between private actors for foreign aid might lead to consider that “pro-market diversification of (NGO) relationships ... is an erosion of their potential as agents of systemic social and political change” (Fowler, 2005:1 cited in Bebbington et. al., 2008). How they position themselves toward involvement in conflict zones is what could constitute a differentiating criterion between NGOs in what the authors call the ‘new’ security agenda.

Fisher (1997:442) 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’ (Edwards and Hulme, 1996 in Bebbington et. al., 2008) with other actors, risking to lose their praised characteristics. Nevertheless, ‘too close for comfort’ translates a presumed ontological separation and independence between various actors.

2.4 NGOs in the politics of development

To unveil the possible role of the NGOs in development, Fisher (1997) follows Ferguson (1990) 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” (Fisher 1997:444), seeing some characteristics (less bureaucratic, more flexible) in opposition to those of the state. The second type of critics values the NGOs for their

potential to challenge power relations and politicize issues, although they pose the risk of becoming a part of the “antipolitics” machine of development (Ferguson 1990), that is obscuring political relationships.

Mosse (2005:19) supports a similar vision, that “[s]uccess’ and ‘failure’ are policy-oriented judgements 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” (Mosse 2005:6) can shed more light on the complexity of the policy process. The question of how development 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 (Boltanski 2000:15). The politics of pity, as borrowed by Boltanski (2000) from Arendt, are noticeable in the instrumentalized media representation of suffering at a distance.

Fisher (1997:447) 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 (Fisher 1997:450), with a focus on the micropolitics of these organizations “as fragmented sites that have multiple connections nationally and transnationally” (Marcus 1995 cited in Fisher 1997:450). 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 change and the change of their originating discourse.

Atlani-Duault (2008) 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 forms 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" (Atlani-Duault, 2008: 111), a specific characteristic of this part of the world.

2.5 NGOs & 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 which is 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'. The post European Union accession period is when due to the newly large amounts of available funding for non state actors, especially in the social services area, the organizations began to adapt and 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 (Lambru and Vamesu 2010:7). According to the same report, after 1998 the NGOs started delivering more social services and contracting government funding according to new regulations (Lambru and Vamesu 2010:8).

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” (Grunberg (2000: 310), move which aimed at conveying good intentions (Kligman 1990 in Grunberg 2000:310) in opposition to how politics were perceived in the previous period.

The NGOs have been continuously shadowed by suspicions of corruption after 1990s. A former presidential advisor describes three types civil society: Western –funded professional NGOs, local groups of enthusiasts and profiteers (Pralong 2004:233). This is coupled with a mostly negative mass media assessment of NGOs, especially women oriented, as Grunberg pointed in 2000. (Grunberg 2000:330). According to a FCSD research, in 1995, 56 percent of Romanian NGOs funding was provided by foreign governmental and nongovernmental sources (Constantinescu 1997 in Grunberg 2000). The Romani teacher in the school in Ferentari, describes her surprise and skepticism over the legality regarding the rapid rise of some NGO employees' material well being. Frequent hints or direct accusations of corruption among NGOs

have been deployed in the media as well. The FCSD report ‘Romania 2010. The Nongovernmental Sector’ (Lambru and Vamesu 2010:8) very briefly mentions a couple of precautions against corruption in the NGO sector, while greatly emphasizing the role of NGOs in combating corruption in the public sector.

Corruption is portrayed as a possibility only in the public sector. Although many visible NGOs have presented themselves as whistleblowers and transparency advocates, the rapid emergence of NGOs dealing increasingly with large European Union funds raises questions concerning the accountability of these private institutions specifically when dealing with public funds, along with questions regarding the coherency and unity of the sector. For example, according to mass-media (Protv 2011), a Romanian organization contracted European funds in order to train 170 unemployed persons, although contractually promising that only eight of them will be hired afterwards. Corruption implies an ideal model which is corrupted, but in the case of NGOs, the funding model implies a thin line between idealism and pragmatism, as vital funds have to be combined often from various projects to cover administrative costs or the pursue of a desired but not directly fundable project. This implies juggling with funders’ jargon, as Grunberg (2000:317) notes and as I have witnessed during my employment at PCRM.

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 ‘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 the those people’s inability to actively pursue income generation in market terms. The identity politics construction 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.

3. Methodology and research questions

Ferentari is an interesting area of research because it represents a fertile field due to its characteristic of being a thick and active organizational field. It is a field where identities, legitimacies and conceptions of social justice are being established and institutions are being shaped. It is a field where 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 attribution of responsibility for the production of welfare.

My research focus is concentrated on what happens in School 136 - Aleea Livezilor. This place attracts a number of organizations that are inevitably interacting. Although I interviewed NGO employees from other NGOs working in geographical proximity and displaying similar views on the problems of Ferentari, this is a field of power where interactions are more intense and prominent, thus easier to grasp. The assemblage of the research field is as follows. I am employing my experience as a Policy Center for Roma and Minority (further referred to as PCRM) employee in the second half of 2010 and an interview I took with Elena Radu, the Romani teacher at School 136; an interview donated by another researcher with Miruna Tîrcă from Komunitas Association; and the extensive blog posts of Valeriu Nicolae, the now allegedly former executive director of PCRM. This triangle is relevant because there have been direct

interactions between the three of them during their work in School 136 as Elena Radu collaborated with both of them as a school coordinator in NGO projects in the school facilities. Further I will present the reasoning and context of data production for each case.

The interview Miruna Tîrcă from Komunitas took place in 2012. It was taken by an anthropologist doing field research in the same area. As the main theme of the interview was the work produced by Miruna's Komunitas in Ferentari, where the NGO developed projects in other close by areas for a couple of years since 2006, it suits my research goals as much as possible. Tîrcă gradually reached the decision to work in other neighborhoods, as PCRM was establishing its domination as NGO in the school projects in the last couple of years.

Elena Radu is a Romani language teacher at the School 136 and she has been a close PCRM collaborator for a longer period than I worked there. Since her arrival at the school in 2005, she has been involved in a very large number of projects assembled in various institutional shapes, many of them designed for the inhabitants of Ferentari or generically for the Roma population. I had the chance to meet her during my first period as an employee and our meetings have been recurrent in 2010. The interview took place in April 2013.

Valeriu Nicolae is the former executive director of PCRM. He started posting on his personal blog in September 2012. At the end of May 2013, a total of 46 posts are present on the website. He posts an average of five articles a month on topics such as what is happening in or around the PCRM's 2010 funded Club for Alternative Education in School 136, racism and discrimination, criticism of present mechanisms for solving social problems, especially the European Union designed ones, and personal stories. Although criticism occurred in previous blog posts, after his alleged resignation in February 2013, the posts criticizing European Union strategies for social inclusion and the high level European political actions were more in depth.

As I was over viewing the data, my research focus adjusted gradually while I noticed a recurrent topic among my key informants. Each of them, because of different context and reasons, has declared that the type or degree of their involvement in Ferentari has changed. The overarching feeling shared by Radu, Tîrcă and Nicolae is one of discontent towards how things are going in Ferentari and the meaning of this is conveyed by their critique. Their critical attitudes are based on similar declared disappointment with whether how other actors or themselves conceived and implemented the work. An interview on the activities of an organization would usually be met with an expectation to provide critical assessments, but by criticism I also indicate a strong explicit discontent present in the interviews with Radu and Tîrcă, as well as in Valeriu Nicolae's blog posts.

Hence, my main research question is **what type of agency is conceived by actors in what they portray as actions to improve the welfare of the populations they mostly see as being impoverished by structural conditions?**

To answer that question, I will look at three issues. The first is how the problems of Ferentari and the responsibilities for those problems are portrayed. The second is what types of actions are deemed suitable and who should undertake them; what is success and failure. And the third is how critique is formed and what it reveals about their sense of agency.

To analyze the **first** issue, I will analyze their presented biographies, how they got to work in Ferentari and how they portray the neighborhood. Moreover, I will look at the social research report issued by PCRM in 2011 titled "Hidden Communities – Ferentari". I will present the context of its production as a PCRM employee at the time of its conception, what its styles and structure convey. I will engage in the analysis of reproducible texts as objectified forms of knowledge (De Vault, 1999).

The **second** issue will be explored by looking at how they describe the projects they undertook in Ferentari and the comments and evaluations of the actions taken by various actors, as well as the interactions the three informants describe with other organizations.

Regarding the **third** issue, because the change in their involvement in Ferentari has emerged recently, their discourse is placed temporally close to, or convey directly, as in the case of Nicolae, a *critical moment*. As Boltanski and Thevenot (1999) put it, a *critical moment*, is a moment when reflexivity is employed along with justifications and reassessments of past events while pursuing a transition to another state, when a person does “realize that something is going wrong” (Boltanski and Thevenot 1999: 359). The critique is based on the establishment of equivalence that is “to bring together different sets of people and objects and to make connections between them” (idem: 361). I will follow the critique of who and why, but also on who is not critiqued. To who is the critique directed and what kind of responsibilities are implied?

Before tackling the three issues, I will start with a description of the organization PCRM. Because my experience as PCRM employee will pervade the whole thesis, I will employ it in a more structured manner. I will describe a regular day at the office of PCRM and, to get to structure through event, I will describe how high level EU official visits to the PCRM’s Club of Alternative Education in School 136 were organized, based on emails circulated during such events among the team members when I was an employee. I am aiming at identifying organizational policies, information flows, and, as Ebrahim (2003) proposes in NGO analysis, ‘product data’ and ‘process data’ and relate them to Nicolae’s vision of Ferentari and criticisms as they show up on his blog posts.

Through my analysis I aim at discussing the conceptualization of politicization and repoliticization in development projects, how they might be connected to processes of production and reproduction of inequalities and, finally, how a relevant debate on agency in development projects can progress while taking into account the critique provided by people in the NGO movement.

4. Analysis

4.1 Policy Center for Roma and Minorities

According to its website, Policy Center for Roma and Minorities is a nongovernmental, non-profit think-tank organization. It works toward social inclusion, changing the negative attitudes regarding the minorities and promoting proactive civic attitudes. It is a member of transnational and national federations, such as European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network, European Network Against Racism, Football Against Racism in Europe and European Roma Policy Coalition. PCRM was founded by Valeriu Nicolae in 2008, as a follow up of the Roma Diplomacy program by Malta based Diplo Foundation. The permanent staff in 2010 was composed of five persons titled Executive Policy Officers, Policy Officers, Financial Officers and two part-time PR managers. I was working as a part-time Project Assistant. Several people who were part of the project 'Young Roma Professionals' were often attending the office activities as well. Among the funding sources of PCRM were the Romanian Dutch Embassy, Soros Foundation Romania, European Commission, Roma Education Fund. There is a long list of partners among which there are sports federations, Government departments, Bucharest's local municipality, and mass-media.

My experience with PCRM took place during the second half of 2010, when I started working as an intern and ended up as a part time project assistant. Back then, the office was located in the center of Bucharest in a three room apartment which was easily getting crowded as various persons would visit the office as well, in order to discuss with specific PCMR employees or attend larger meetings. The décor was improving progressively while I witnessed it, for instance by going from two a two rooms occupancy to a full one as the third room has been office like furnished and new laptops have been provided for most of the core staff. The director was very keen on the office library he personally founded and enlarged with social sciences books on ethnicity, minorities and discrimination, research reports, case studies and policy analyses on similar topics along with office management manuals. Business cards from various persons who interacted with the director or other PCRM members were kept separately in a drawer and the computerized contact list was supposed to be updated accordingly. White boards with project objectives and project related info were regularly being updated.

'Big Project', 'Small Project' and other nicknames for many projects seemed chaotic at first and while I wanted to personally figure out what is going on, a centralization of the projects' key information seemed an excellent idea for all the staff. Training on issues like project management and communication along with parliamentary debate exercises were recurrent. Reports on discrimination, such as the yearly country shadow report for the European Network against Racism and public responses to public hate speech were also key activities, along with searching for financing opportunities, writing the applications and looking for partnerships.

Mentoring and exposure to role models were key aspects of many projects, whether the target was represented by children or young adults. Gradually, as the Club for Alternative Education has been inaugurated in September 2010, most of the funds were directed toward

starting new activities with children, among which were sports, dances, games, social and financial education, doing homework, photo-video projects and excursions. The main beneficiaries living in Ferentari were presented as ‘high risk youth’ and ‘keeping the children off the streets’ was a main stated aim of the initiative, along with building children’s self-esteem, discipline and educational performances. Part of the staff, part-time collaborators, volunteers, partner’s staff and celebrities were among the people who tutored the children during their activities in this “new, safe, open, creative and challenging space” (PCRM’s website).

Routine was not a very a prominent characteristic for the staff and collaborators. The director was sometimes spending more time in the office, but often he was attending meetings, conferences, checking out the Club, among others, in Bucharest or travel outside Romania for meetings, seminars and conferences in places such as Brussels, Athens, Helsinki, Istanbul or Bahrain. According to individual schedules, some people were present in the office all day long, some were on the field, staying home to write in peace and silence, attending meetings, going to the Club of Alternative Education in School 136 to assist children activities or engage in administrative tasks for the club or the main office. The route between the main office in the center of Bucharest and the Club of Alternative Education was becoming regularity. Intellectual and manual works were often alternating: delivering donated used furniture from an embassy to the Club in the morning and writing funding proposals in the evening.

Besides informal and unscheduled discussions face to face or by phone, communication between employees was taking place through regular administrative meetings for the core staff and through an email group, sometimes even when the receiver was in the same room. A need for more organization, efficiency and more space was shared by each of us. Consequently, the

office has been moved at one point to a larger apartment close by and even more centrally located.

A trip from the central office to School 136 is not just a physical movement; it is an exploration of a land far away, especially for the visitors. It entails that physical distance translates accurately into social distance. This trip is closely connected with Nicolae's personal trajectory and wide social mobility.

As a human rights NGO, PCRM stays closer to power sources, as this spatial proximity can produce more impact, as Gordon (2008) claims, while 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.

According to PCRM's website section dedicated to the Club of Alternative Education, it is stated that *"In 2010 and 2011, important persons visited the ghetto from Ferentari and praised our educational initiative. Eleven Ambassadors, eight members of the European Parliament, numerous high rank diplomats from intergovernmental organizations have visited it, and they whether participated at round tables, whether they helped at different activities"*. These were perceived as very important events. When a high European official was visiting the Club of Alternative Education in Ferentari, the office staff and resources would be mainly directed as much as possible toward planning the event in minor details and the email group was basically transformed into a chat box. 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, at one point, an internal detailed document titled "Procedure regarding the unfolding of meetings with external participants" has been established.

4.2 "Hidden Communities - Ferentari" research report by PCRM

The research report "Hidden Communities - Ferentari" was published in 2011 in Bucharest after my collaboration with PCRM ended. Considering that copies of the report reached Budapest, I tend to believe it was widely distributed, as this intension was clearly laid out in the research's early stages. The research is a component of a larger project called "Piloting Active Citizenship through Empowerment (PACE) Youth development and good governance practices in Ferentari" that has been funded by the Dutch Embassy in Romania. While a part of the funding was designed for the research, another was designed to found what will later be called the Club for Alternative education in School 136, designed to serve as a model of good practice 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, as "a visit in such communities is enough to see the failure of all the approaches tried so far" (Botonogu 2011:14). Debated in the PCRM's office, as well as in the report, is the idea of a public policy focused on ghettos and reasons supporting an introduction of the term in official public 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 is titled "Hidden Communities – Ferentari", the content clarifies that it deals mainly with Livezilor Alley and most chapters focus on this area.

The research strategy aimed at being methodologically holistic by incorporating a survey, focus groups and in-depth interviews to analyze a case study. The designed sample was composed of community leaders, residents with long living experience in the neighborhood, as

well as residents from vicinities, public officials and NGO representatives dealing with Ferentari based projects. Although I do not intend to deal specifically with an evaluation of the research validity, I did have the chance to witness a debate between the research coordinator and a sociologist not involved as a report author. After his primary quantitative analysis, the sociologist warned the research coordinator that the data are unreliable, especially because there was no control of the questionnaire's application and the field operators were local people untrained in this respect.

The research team numbered eleven people, most of them active academic researchers, the research coordinator from PCRM and PCRM's director, Nicolae. The report style is almost entirely academic, containing references to social sciences literature and appeals to rigor and scientificity. In the case of Valeriu's chapter, "The Unseen Faces of Criminality", things change. The style is very personal and without any references to literature, while the strong claims are based on personal experiences stated in fugitive sentences. It is the shortest chapter and it appeals to a different persuasive style than the one used in his very well crafted blog posts criticizing the EU institutions. It clearly attempts to convey Nicolae's image of a grass-roots activist who witnessed the hell hole where, following his text's structure, 'Drugs', 'Prostitution', 'Thefts', '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 whose meaning is looser than the original (Berescu in Botonogu 2011:36). Ferentari does not have the best public

transportation coverage among Bucharest neighborhood, but getting to Aleea Livezilor is not in any sense a problem of transportation, as it is well linked with a metro station located as far as two kilometers away. 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, what I find strikingly puzzling is how parts of the report clearly state that structural processes have a large impact on how Ferentari became a ‘ghetto’, while the solutions strongly supported publicly by PCRM through its projects are aimed at empowering individuals without emphasizing structural problems.

What it comes out from the report is the 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”), as the state institutions have failed and cannot be entrusted with such a burdening issue. 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 the more involved and dedicated NGOs, translating in a call for governance changes.

4.3 "Enter in the hood"

“Enter in the hood” is a phrase used by both Komunitas and PCRM. It seems to convey 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 presupposes exploration to be discovered and acted knowledgeably upon it. Because Ferentari is so distinct, distant, poorly

understood and feared, it is considered a challenge for NGOs, it becomes a rite of passage to maturity for them. But a debate on how much agency a donor dependent organization has must be debated in relation to donor requests such as that of pointing the “[r]elevance to development in the targeted sector”, as a successful funding application form filled by PCRM contained.

Komunitas, as well as PCRM intended to develop pilot projects in Ferentari’s School 136, which could be replicated further in other areas, as it has subsequently happened. As Miruna from Komunitas put it, “[...] any of the projects we did at Komunitas were all the time going through School 136. It doesn’t matter what happens in other places and other dimensions, School 136 was a comparison standard! ‘Hey, whatever happens and whatever we’re going to do, we have to take action at School 136 too, because it is a huge need!’”. Although allegedly Komunitas has previously implemented projects with similar design, PCRM claims publicly 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 causes such as rigidity or corruption.

Community development is often based on assumptions of social disorganization, a sort of anarchy caused, in some cases, by prolonged deprivation of access to basic needs. Consequently, people lose their civic spirit while struggling to achieve a daily basic livelihood. They end up in a similar position to children who need to be taught how to walk, needing guidance step by step. To learn the values and knowledge that will help them reach their full potential, they have to follow routes which might sometimes not make sense for them at first, as they derive from a different world with a different logic. Organizing is an act that transcends simple interaction because it implies rules such as respecting the other’s individuality, opinions

and desires while working together toward a commonly established goal. That is why children themselves seem to very well fit the slot of NGO projects beneficiaries. Even though the state seems to have almost abandoned them and the society is resentful towards them, it does not mean that they totally lost their social abilities is just that it is a 'hidden community' waiting to be discovered. As PCRMs research report states, they are hidden because they are not on the public agenda, as well as because it is poses difficulties to attempts of accessing the area for research, thus their appeal to field surveyors who live there.

4.4 People and critique

Miruna, Valeriu and Elena seem to all three ended in different degrees and ways stages of working in Ferentari. Miruna decided to develop projects in other areas, Valeriu allegedly quit his position of PCRM executive director, although claims he still works in the neighborhood and Elena decided for a couple of reasons to focus more on her Phd. These decisions come after paying sustained efforts in projects aimed at the Ferentari people and discontent regarding a structural feed-back. Hence, this is a suitable moment to express critique.

4.4.1 Elena Radu – the Romani teacher and her projects in School 136

As the gate keeper to School 136 and Ferentari for NGOs, mass media – as she gets interviewed often – and state institutions, she can be considered as well a part of the 'proletariat of development' (Pulay, personal communication, 2013). Radu collaborated with many NGOs, including PCRM, but she is now critical towards their activities and behavior. By comparison, she is satisfied with the work of Komunitas, which she constantly referred to during the interview as a point of reference of good case versus PCRM as a bad case. The critique straightforwardly composed along the same criteria, as both organizations developed similarly

designed projects. She is very discontent of most of her teacher colleagues and most of the principals, from a total of 5 she encountered during her eight years of activity in the School 136. In her view Ferentari's problems are drug usage, prostitution and marriage at a very young age.

She tells the story of her fulminating professional career. Against a background of general racism, especially from the side of her colleagues and school principals, she studied to earn a BA, followed by an MA, now she is a PhD student. She obtained certificates for short term studies as well, while being involved in numerous projects. 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. As she mentions, though, her colleagues are also eager to obtain certifications on every possible occasion.

She started working in the educational sector due to health problems occurred during a work accident at her previous work place. Through her brother she met a professor of Romani language who sent her to start teaching Romani to a school right the next day as she is a native Romani speaker. She initially opposed the idea because of the lack of competences. After a while she was sent by the same professor to the School 136 in Ferentari to work as a school mediator for Roma children. She passed the unexpected admission test and settled there, where she started facing a racist new director shortly after. Remarks on racist colleagues are recurrent in her story too. She even called the support of a Roma NGO to back her up against persistent mobbing, and tells how she was obliged to study legislation in order to find ways to constantly defend herself.

Elena designed and implemented projects on her own in the school on the one side on increasing the children's performances, tutoring the pupil's mothers, promoting and designing education curricula and attracting donations for the poor neighborhood inhabitants. She also

acted as a rapporteur on Ferentari based law offenders to tribunals. On the other, she has been involved in the promotion of Roma identity and Roma rights at local, and national and international level as well, where she collaborated with governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

Elena Radu's first contact with Komunitas started in 2006, whose members have been directed toward her by a Roma politician. She is satisfied with how Komunitas projects were designed and implemented in School 136. Specifically, she appreciates how Komunitas' team was in contact with the teachers through frequent updates and discussions on the best methods to increase the children's educational performances.

As I met Elena during my employment at PCRM, she seemed enthusiastic about the idea of a Club of Alternative Education. Almost three years later, she is profoundly discontent on the management and implementation of activities. The change of the club's coordinator, as well as the departure of key adequate people from the team working in the club led, in her opinion, to worsened relations with the school employees, as PCRM has not maintained a proper flow of information regarding the children's activities. The critique is predominantly not on the nature of activities, but on implementation. Nevertheless, she points the employment of an educational method by PCRM designed for children from 4 to maximum 7 years. She accuses the lack of PCRM's supervisor's competences on working with children' (which was not a critique toward Komunitas), both of the core staff and especially the volunteers introduced by PCRM's director. For example, Elena decries the lack pedagogical competences of two ex convict women, as well as the unease of relating to them on the same topics on which she is experienced.

Finally, she sees NGOs as environments where one can "only learn how to legally steal". She repeatedly asserts that NGO people are merely opportunists, "people who always search

victims so they can earn money”, and that the most of the children involved in the Club of Alternative Education’s activities are complaining that they feel used. She adds that when PCRM’s director declared he steps down from his job, many parents understood that he stole enough money. Similar accusations of opportunisms are directed toward ADCF, although their activities were considered by Radu as being useful.

4.4.2 Miruna Tîrcă and Komunitas – grass-roots educational projects

Komunitas Association started as a project of several social sciences students. Tîrcă was studying anthropology in 2006, when the association was founded. She seems to be one of the most involved and persistent people from their team, as most of her team mates gradually left the association, while she continued applying for and implementing projects. Their project’s philosophy could be defined as being predominantly grass-roots oriented, as opposed to PCRM’s philosophy of connecting grass-roots projects with high level politics. Tîrcă had the idea of the association after a she did filed research on squats around Europe and as she was encountering activists who inspired her, she become interested in ‘alternative people and communities’.

As a member of a research team in a pre EU joining structural funded project on Roma inclusion, Tîrcă did a one month research in this second neighborhood, although she asserts she would not repeat something similar, as such nationwide case study research projects are merely replicating the same results, thus being a waste of funding.

Since the start, Komunitas was focused on working with children. 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 Komunitas’ retreat, as the other partners had a pitiful towards the

beneficiaries. Komunitas got geographically closer to School 136 while the members tried to develop long term projects in Ferentari in a similar housing area with Livezilor Alley.

They did not manage to wholly enter in 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. Tîrcă considers the episode to be a useful experience in adjusting the preconceived ideas about the neighborhoods she has not visited before to their reality.

Leaving aside the sense of failure, the community's enthusiasm for projects as the Mobile Cinema convinced them to work in School 136. Getting to work in School 136 was considered a first step in acquiring experience to be employed in subsequently direct community work. Calling a film produced by children enrolled at School 136 'The School from the ghetto' turned out to inflict offense among the children, as they told Tîrcă they do not want to be associated with the idea of ghetto, contrary to her initial assumption that they would be proud.

Komunitas involved high-school students as volunteers and started in 2007 to develop projects and 'install' in School 136. Small grants approved by EU's Youth in Action program helped them implement projects such as the School Cinema and numerous activities as visual education, dance and theatre lessons, and support for children on their homework. The next idea was to focus on urban education which involved city tours and exploration. In 2012 Komunitas released a high-school manual for urban education in collaboration with urban studies professionals.

Tîrcă's vision of what should be done with the children is similar to that of Nicolae. She "always considered that children can change parents, you know? [...] That is the parents' minds

are too corrupted and their lost, many of them, you know as well! And there nothing you can change with adults... I mean you have what, 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 will be that of collaborating with local administration, as opposed to her previous approach.

The expectations regarding Livezilor Alley for Tîrcă were that she would encounter a more 'hard-core area', as she has only learned the reality from a very close by area and realized afterwards the complex reality right next to School 136. She gladly encounter the surprise that people in Livezilor Alley "are more coagulated, more organized, there are signs of organization! They [t.n. the signs] primary, primitive and incipient, but they are, you know?!"; when people asked them for information, Tîrcă was glad they are taking initiative and show curiosity.

4.4.3 Valeriu Nicolae – PCRM's director's critique of civil society and EU institutions

The now former executive director of PCRM strongly emphasizes his high social mobility. He is a former IT manager, basketball player, Open Society Initiative senior consultant, member of Football Against Racism in Europe and member of the Aspen Institute. He presents himself as someone who came from the slums, but managed to attain higher education. Nicolae studied engineering and diplomacy and regularly reads social sciences literature. He easily revolves in high circles, travels to conferences and talks around Europe on racism, discrimination and anti discrimination policies, is a cosmopolitan *par excellence*.

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 and becoming prostitutes. As he tries to solve these problems on his own by going grass roots, he also aims to raise awareness to the high

political level. This is where he claims to fill the gap, on 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 solve on his own. As his blog posts convey, he is brutally critical toward how Roma inclusion is conceived as a strategy by the European Union's institutions.

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

Mentoring and activating school children living in a very poor area are the solutions to achieve improved livelihoods, because mostly through struggle and demand success can be attained. Inherently, structural problems are rendered less relevant/determinant for the future of these children, such as unemployment, housing, neighbors, drug abuse, general access to public services such as medical care and high quality public education services. Obviously, 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. There is a compartmentalization between areas of action toward solving the problems, 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 Nicolae proves by hiring two ex convict volunteers working in the club, as they might follow a path toward improvement of their lives by hard work and active learning.

The very well crafted analyses of structural problems originating in the design and implementation of the European Commission exposes many critical characteristics of mostly the NGO world, which is regularly free from such fierce critique, especially when from the same field. Mostly NGO world, although national, international and intergovernmental European organizations are pointed on as well.

What is interesting is how Nicolae uses the channels of communication for his discontent, as he uses an informal medium in the form of blog posts. It might imply that such a critique has not been deemed suitable for other channels, for instance PCRM's website.

A major topic of discontent explicated in depth in many posts is that of NGO funding. A closer look to that aspect reveals that he strongly believes the PCRM as a NGO is the most adequate organizational model which can successfully tackle what he describes as being the most pressing problems of Roma in Europe. These strategies do not take into account precise knowledge of the complexity of each case and the Roma complex and specific condition. Nicolae repeatedly backs this implication with how, through his extensive knowledge of reality transformed into expertise, his strong recommendations should be followed as the only viable alternative to recurrently failing strategies. His discontent regards the lack of the EU institutions to acknowledge the fact that NGOs in general and small grass-roots oriented NGOs in particular are fully entitled to more constant financial support and extended freedom to act upon specific problematic which EU high level bureaucrats cannot grasp from Brussels. The most access to reality they can have through the EU institutional logic is through short guided visits in the impoverished areas.

Other topics Nicolae engages with, such as the role of Roma leaders or the whole Roma civil society and its relation with donors will not be dealt with here, but they deserve attention as

well, as they convey a more complete image of what are the problems, the responsibilities and the solutions in the view of Nicolae, a very active and vocal actor.

4.5 Relations between NGOs

Association Community Development Ferentari (ACDF) is an organization which lived for a couple of years. Its main office was located in a metal three rooms mobile container placed between School 136 and Livezilor Alley. It was founded as an initiative of a Roma NGO focused on health issues, which financially supported it to develop projects related to drug addiction and community development. The same container is occupied since 2012 by another NGO focused on harm reduction, specifically on drug addiction and prostitution. Because FCDA was allegedly composed out of local people, it was interesting for both PCRM and Komunitas - 'the local' is appealing for the grass-roots approach potential. I took part in the summer of 2010 to a first meeting between a part of PCRM's team and the ACDF team in their office close to the school. It was a rather short meeting where Nicolae ended by proposing ACDF a future partnership translated in a common funding application.

Tîrcă, who used to work in school 136 for a couple of years before PCRM arrived there, repeatedly advised ACDF to apply for funding, which ADCF allegedly never done (one of the reasons why this organization might have vanished from the area). After insisting that their own project would help them attain legitimacy in the eyes of the local population, Tîrcă decided to write a project application on her own, accusing ADCF of laziness. After she wrote and won a project where she inscribed them as partners, they told her they won't sign the partnership because there are many people asking their partnership and they need to test Komunitas by

assessing how the project went and signing the partnership afterword. Miruna was enraged because they dared proposing that and it should have been backwards

As Miruna recounts, one day, Komunitas and neighborhood people they asked help from, along with a couple of children, were renovating a football field positioned between the school and Livezilor Alley. In the mean time, PCRM invited the British Ambassador to the Club of Alternative Education. She was reflecting “Look at the parallel worlds! They’re with the press and big fuss, whatever, and we’re painting the goal posts, you know? Also an association, also... you know? In this sense... the difference, you know?” In the mean time, a person from ADCF who was supposed to help her, just showed up for five minutes, after which “he was there with Roma Policy Center!”, to present his children football team, tells an indignant Miruna, adding that he did painted the rest of the football field during the next day. interests, as these two areas of NGO activities, children and drugs, must remain separate. This story shows how the field of organizations is fluent and interests for legitimacy are actively employed.

Radu and Tîrcă both state clearly that PCRM is developing projects very similar to the ones Komunitas initiated. There was one first trial of contacting Komunitas by PCRM, which proposed a meeting and maybe further develop projects together for the children in the school. Although Tîrcă says she replied to that invitation, that was the only polite attempt of communication from PCRM. The rest of the communication has been rather non-existent, apparently, although both NGOs developed projects in the school in the same time for at least one year.

Tîrcă says that PCRM practically installed immediately, and “*they came [...] much stronger, with a larger team, with much more experience, with some advantages for which we worked full years to build them! And you realize that when we have seen that, of course you are*

disappointed and it seems to not make sense anymore, I mean you don't just fight like that with the windmills!". Disappointment occurred as on top of that, the relations with the school were deteriorating. After three more projects, Komunitas decided to leave the neighborhood.

5. Conclusions

In this thesis I have looked at how NGOs interact and what effect the interaction entails. Ferentari, a marginal Bucharest neighborhood, is, as I have shown, a thick field of interaction between various organizations. It thus offered the opportunity for a closer grasp of the aspects of the interaction and how the three main actors who developed welfare projects targeting local population, Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, an organization I worked for half a year in 2010, Komunitas Association, and a Romani teacher from a school close to a very poor area. By looking at the interviews with Tîrcă from Komunitas and Radu, the Romani teacher, employing my experience as a PCRM employee, along with an overview of PCRM's former director blog posts, and a research report on Ferentari issued by PCRM, I laid out the three actors shared feeling of critique towards how things are going in Ferentari. I posed a question regarding the agency of actors in development projects, which I am now going to tackle.

A structuralist view on the field of welfare production would rely on the potential replacement of the actors based on the relatively stable preexistence of determined positions and discursive combinations, such as Ferguson's antipolitics machine tend to get stuck in explanations of reproduction of inequalities by adopting a fixed view of power locus, as Mosse (2005) argued. Although I agreed on the importance of how donor discourse shapes the NGOs' discourse and practice, the case I intended to assemble shows that the actors receiving the

discourse along with the funding, they are to a large extent influenced by field neighbors who are difficult to engage with because of diversified and unexpected shapes.

In an exposition of how critique can produce impact, Boltanski (2011) departs from the general statement on institutions that “everybody knows full well that these institutions are mere *fictions* and that the only real things are the human beings who make them up, who speak in their name” (Boltanski 2011:85). With this in mind, while aiming at establishing a common sense, people encounter constantly a *hermeneutic contradiction* – the unease between two options: relegating the task of stating *the whatness of what* in favor of an exchange of points of view, while taking risks of not achieving closure; and relegating the *whatness of what* to a bodiless institution whose spokesperson might impose his own will in the name of the institution (Boltanski 2011:86).

Regarding the triangle of interaction between Nicolae, Tîrcă and Radu, although Nicolae and Tîrcă share very similar approaches, displayed by discourse and actions as well, this is limited to one level: grass-roots initiatives. These are preferred by Tîrcă and, as Radu was satisfied with Tîrcă’s work, by Radu as well. Nicolae produces a very reflexive, insightful and fierce critique along with actions based on the survival of the fittest principle, by assembling a more spread and influential organization through persistent actions of legitimization.

He proved that the organizational power field can be modeled by actors in the development scene, by determining other involved actors to step down, while working toward obscuring its effects through a critique which aims at capturing the focus through a skillful alternation between the two types of relegating the *whatness of what* to both institutions and their spokespersons as well. More precisely, as it can be noticed on his blog posts, he addresses both

EU institutions as well as specific persons occupying high level positions, together with persistent efforts to enter in direct personal contact with them on his own established ground.

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