

POVERTY AND SOCIAL POLICY. GUARANTEED MINIMUM INCOME IN A ROMA COMMUNITY IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

This research aims to discuss how a specific social policy in Romania is applied in a local context, in a multiethnic rural area with a high index of material deprivation. Moreover, it investigates a general inspection in Romania that is proposed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection in January 2021, and it involves a specific social transfer -Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI). The goal is counting how many families that receive this financial aid can work but “choose to stay on benefits”. Fieldwork consisted of ethnographic research and interviews conducted in Bolduț with welfare workers and Roma GMI beneficiaries as a suitable way to grasp the realities and outcomes of the national program at a local level. This research site will illustrate how social policy is intertwined with local perspectives of racialized poverty, activation on the labor market and “deservingness”. The discriminatory discourse can shape what kind of assistance is seen by the state representatives as fair and ethical and can influence the quantum at a national level and the access at a local level. Framing who deserves or not can be based on the dominant discourses or on the experiences that state representatives have. The existing narratives influence if social workers in a specific context choose to do extra-work to help the individuals in need.

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Table of contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Literature Review.....	3
Part One: Structural Approach to Poverty.....	4
Part Two: Framing of Policy as a Response to Poverty.....	6
Chapter 2: Contextualization	10
Framings in Media and Political Discourse.....	11
Framings in Law	13
Chapter 3: Contextualization of the Policy in Romania.....	15
Chapter 4: Methodology.....	19
Chapter 5: Ethnography of the Particular.....	21
Introduction and Background Information in Bolduț.....	21
Constructions of Deservingness and Undeservigness in Bolduț	28
The General Inspection.....	33
Conclusion	36
Bibliography	39

Introduction

Passing through Bolduț (Romania) as a child, I always wondered about the causes of poverty as it was the only village I knew where there were beggars. Many families living at the outskirts of the village in improvised houses and there where questions related to the way that this village is different from mine. Beggars ranged from women to men to elders to children, a space where the effects of dezindustrialization, inflation and privatization were having effects on an ethnic minority: the Roma. This thesis follows this space in order to understand the effects of policy and the discursive formations in a local context, in a multiethnic rural area with a high index of material deprivation. I will focus on how different dynamics in relation to deservingness and undeservingness plays a role in this community.

In Romania, Roma population were enslaved for hundreds of years, subjected to the biopolitics of the Holocaust and then during the communist regime were targeted by the government with policies with the intention of assimilating them. Some gave up their identity because of the repressive state measures but, after 1990, it was visible that Roma wanted to be recognized and represented by a Roma elite, educated under socialism. Unfortunately, because Roma are so diverse in socio-economic status, as well as in values, the new political parties founded in the 1990s failed to address the rising gap between them and the majority and while poverty was rising during the post-socialist era, the visibility of such parties vanished slowly. They did not have the instruments to produce structural social change. In 1995, the law of social aid (GMI) was enacted, a mainstream policy which targeted poverty, not specifically the Roma population. This policy failed to acknowledge that some communities, like Roma should be treated differently to have the same universal opportunities. Later, social aid law changed its name to Guaranteed Minimum Income in 2001, but unlike the 1995 law, the quantum was capped. While inflation was rising, this policy covered less and less material needs. Today, having GMI, which

has a quantum per month between 28 euros (for one individual) and 106 euros (for a family of five members) keeps the receivers in poverty. Given the historical structural racism that Roma people were subject of and without targeted policies to correct this disadvantage, they are most affected by poverty. The social policy that is supposed to be a solution for material deprivation is GMI, whose access is conditioned by a bureaucratic process. In the research site, 28% of residents receive this kind of benefit and I was told by social workers that the majority of them are Roma. It is vital to understand the mechanisms that perpetuate the disadvantage of an ethnic community and how public discourses materialize in measures applied by institutions that have a key role in correcting inequalities.

The initial goal of this research was to investigate a general inspection in Romania that was proposed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection in January 2021, and it involves a specific social transfer -Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) with the goal of counting how many families that receive this financial aid are in fact able to work but „choose to stay on benefits”. Based on the the public declarations made by Raluca Turcan, the Minister of Labor (part of the National Liberal Party, which in Romania is a right-wing party), there are many families receiving several social transfers and they „indulge in poverty”, implying that their worklessness and welfare use is a choice. This general inspection is organized by the National Agency for Pays and Social Inspection (ANPIS) and National Employment Agency (ANOFM) who use data from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and aim in “proposing a radical change when it comes to social services”. At the level of each county, the Territorial Agency for Social Provision (AJPIS) is in charge of all files in the area and at the same time, it is in contact with the city and village halls. In order to understand how such a national program is put into practice, I chose a „strategic research site” (Merton, 1987), a village named Bolduț where according to the 2011 census, 26%

of the population is Roma. According to the Networks Research Report (2015), Bolduț had a higher deprivation index compared to other villages. I did ethnographic research in Bolduț, involving also interviews with welfare workers and GMI beneficiaries trying to grasp the realities and outcomes of the national program at a local level. This particular research site will illustrate how social policy is intertwined with local perspectives of poverty, labor and “deservingness”.

To guide my research, I have a central question: *How do representatives of the state like social workers from the town hall or from AJPIIS decide who deserves the Guaranteed Minimum Income?* The answer to this question will contribute to addressing the gap in understanding how social policy is applied in local contexts especially when there is a Roma community. However, I also want to get in touch with the perspective of the Roma, who are subject of this policy, because I find necessary to include their lived reality and integrate the effect of this specific policy in everyday lives. There is a dominant discourse in the media supported by the political right against the receivers of GMI because they affirm that this policy encourages welfare dependency and laziness. Given the fact that Roma people are most affected by poverty in Romania, they qualify for GMI because they have less assets and resources. These segregated individuals in Band are at the intersection of several categories: class, gender, ethnicity, religion and age, so several layers of oppression and domination manifest together to create the exclusion of the community. The discriminatory discourse can shape what kind of assistance is seen as fair and ethical and can influence the quantum at a national level and the access at a local level.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

In this section, I will draw some theoretical conceptualizations in relation to policy and poverty with a focus on framing narratives. In the first part I will discuss a structural approach

to poverty using Wacquant (2012, 2015) and Spivak (1988) then refer to policy in a European context. In part two, I refer to framings of policy and will bring Young's (1990) article as a concluding piece that brings together some of the perspectives that I have mentioned before.

Part One: Structural Approach to Poverty

A structural approach to poverty refers to the current entanglement between economic driven interests and state governance as a “political project that entails the reengineering of the state” (Wacquant, 2012: 71), that contributes to the growing poverty in neoliberal states. Neoliberalism is understood as a “normative mode of reason, of the production of the subject, taking diverse shapes” (Brown, 2015: 48) that is concerned with expanding and commodifying every aspect of human existence, while deregulating and controlling. In his lectures from 1970s, Foucault talks about this governmental rationality that started from the 1960s and it was introduced into welfare statism by postwar intellectuals. This art of government that meant transforming classical liberalism and one of the modifications consists in the economization of the state and of social policy, where economic growth is seen as the state's social policy. (Brown, 2015: 63) In accordance with this, Wacquant (2012: 71) states that markets are political creations, where the social relations support the economic exchanges and the neoliberal reengineering consists of the following: commodification, disciplinary social policy, penal policy, and individual responsibility. Further he describes the neoliberal state as a mythological creature, a Centaur that treats the citizens differently. The reason for this is the economic and cultural capital that some have, for which the state policies appear as liberating while for those who lack the two it becomes restrictive, trying to manage the populations, with the consequence of deepening inequalities. (Wacquant, 2012: 74) This idea is based on Bourdieu's (1998, in Wacquant 2012) reference to a bureaucratic

field where the state has two hands: a Right one concerned to regulate and a Left one that is social, and it is meant to protect.

A post-colonial critique that it is worth mentioning refers to the position that in my research site policy makers and state representatives embody. This position is not exclusively expressed by the actors I have mentioned, but can be extended, but for my specific research I will refer to them as I am following their narratives. Spivak (1988: 84) talks about how “there are people whose consciousness we cannot grasp if we close off our benevolence by constructing a homogeneous Other referring only to our own place in the seat of the Self”. This would be a first step where state actors create policy for this homogenous Other, while they encounter this subject as being different. The second step would be to take the role of a savior that is best described by Spivak (1988: 96) in reference to the practice of sati where “white men are saving the brown women from brown men” reinforcing in this way the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. This is not limited to the practice of sati in India, this is similar to the cases where state representatives are found in the position of saving the Roma women or children from Roma men, teaching these groups what are the values that should be followed, and which are the ones that should be abandoned. However, this way of thinking is found not just on a local level but are embedded in the policies at the European level, in the Roma Inclusion Strategies for every country.

Ryder and Taba (2018: 64) talk about a Social Europe that has the intention to improve the living conditions of the individuals from impoverished areas of CEE using redistributive policies and targeting certain regions. A Social Europe approach would focus on structural factors that cause exclusion. Given the fact that Europe does not function as a welfare state, the main responsibility lays on nation states that have the instruments: institutions, infrastructure, money, and laws to tackle inequality. To this can be added the vital role of the Roma

civil society that can develop local projects that respond to the needs of a certain Romani community. Ryder and Taba (2018) when referring to inclusive policies, agree that this local way of approaching inequality for example, cannot be generalized on a national level in respect to Romani individuals, because it would impose a uniform view. Going back to the national and transnational level of constructing policy, other researchers (Fenyés 2019, Maeso, 2015) see these with criticism because of the constant focus on “civilizing the other” while at the same time blaming them from their lack of resources or knowledge. Maeso (2015: 61) identifies how in the policy discourse power relations are invisible and the policy representatives see their role as a “moral educator” for the Roma who have to be taught how to make right choices and how to acquire a “will to change”.

Part Two: Framing of Policy as a Response to Poverty

If Western Europe embraced these neoliberal practices from 1980s, in Romania these were implemented slowly especially during the 1990s. Ban (2016) states that after the revolution there was a developmental stage that evolved towards the 2000s because during those years the elites promoted market rationality over well-being of many citizens. This was visible in practice in the growing risk of poverty from 2000 in Romania that was 22% and it rose to 31.9% in 2020. (Eurostat) At the same time, Romania spends the least on social protection in EU and even if the poverty risk increased, the social protection expenditure remained constant during the last 20 years. This was able to be maintained in this way because of the general acceptance of neoliberal ruling that legitimized low social spending through a meritocratic approach and praising individual responsibility. Changes according to pensions and wages are done out of a neoliberal populism, that is an electoral strategy where before elections political actors increase the pensions

for example to win the vote of the older generation but refrain from generating structural strategies like universal public services and generous social policies. (Ban, 2016: 6) But changes in the neoliberal practices were coming from several parts, one being the IMF, World Bank and EU that demanded the implementation of free market strategies, but as Ban (2016) put it, there was not just a transnational advocacy for neoliberal ideas but the support of academia, nonprofit and corporate sectors that embraced and dispersed this perspective.

At the policy level, the transnational institutions mentioned above influenced how policy was framed and what was prioritized. Lendvai and Stubbs (2015) talk about a Europeanization of policies that involved that CEE states saw the social policies as neutral, taking for granted concepts like activation, flexicurity and social investment. During this time, states distanced themselves from any ideas of the class struggle, the historic role of the proletariat and exploitation as if they ceased to exist once the Berlin wall fell. (Buden, 2009) In a post-colonial way, the new democracies were told what is the right way to govern by a group of individuals that came from the Western states. I do not condemn importing knowledge and expertise from other states, as long as it is applied for social justice, but when this knowledge is transformed to benefit a social class and it dispossesses another, policy becomes an instrument for making profit and maintaining inequality. However, neoliberalism is not an exact replica of neoliberalism in the Western countries, but as Brenner and Theodore (20: 366) state, we cannot talk about a “unilinear transition from a regulatory system to another but rather as uneven, open-ended restructuring process that generates governance failures, crisis and contradictions” together with a context dependence where local structures restrict sharp changes in the post-socialist countries.

The neoliberal ideology that is put into practice by a Centaur-state creates further marginalization and poverty for less privileged citizens. In this category we can identify those that

are at the intersection of different categories: class, gender, ethnicity. As a response to these situations, focusing on one category, EU and World Bank created policy that is supposed to target a group of individuals based on ethnicity. There is a similarity in a post-colonial framing between the discourse of development for CEE states after communism and the practices envisioned for the Romani groups across Europe. Because Romani groups have become overrepresented structurally among the poor, states and transnational organizations racialized poverty and became involved in governing their poverty rather than improving their living conditions. (van Baar, 2018: 2) The post-colonial discourse with models, technologies and practices was “brought back to the West, and the result was that the West could practice something resembling colonization, or an internal colonialism, on itself” in respect to Romani groups. (Foucault, 2004 cited in van Baar, 2018: 6) In the media, and in the political actors’ discourse in Romania when there is a debate about social policy and the ethics/social (in-)justice of “offering benefits to people that do not work”, there are images who portray darker skin individuals and some racist media articles that directly state that Romani groups are the ones that receive social assistance without deserving it. Political actors refrain from naming the beneficiaries Roma but persistently talk about the dependency trap and meritocracy. The neoliberal discourses stay in the way of creating solidarity webs between different ethnicities and classes, and instead focus on blaming the poor for their poverty while trying to teach them what a “good citizen means” and what values they should have.

When designing a policy, especially one that wants to bring equality, it is worth thinking about how this concept is framed, because it can generate exclusion. Fredman (2002) talks about the aphorism by Locke (1690) according to which men are by Nature equal due to the virtue of their rationality, that gave space for the exclusion of individuals such as women and slaves who were considered irrational and emotional. At the same time, when the aim of a policy

is to bring equality, a question worth asking is, equal to whom? Generally, the states have an image of a universal citizen that embodies a way of life valued by a so-called middle class. When states, through policy try to transform the beneficiaries in a universal individual, it happens by creating a conforming pressure. In this case, when the Roma identify themselves with specific practices and call them their culture, or when non-Roma identify the practices of Roma as a separate culture and this overlaps with poverty, the inequality is rather perceived as a result of culture. Then in order to achieve equality, equality with this universal individual (who is often a non-Roma), the practices and values of Roma have to be transformed. This abstract individual is part of the dominant group and implicitly has a culture and ethnicity, yet these attributes are perceived as universalist, while ethnicity [and culture] gets often tied to minorities. (Fredman, 2002: 16)

Goldberg (2009, in Kocze and Rovid, 2017) identifies a classification that is “the working of racial neoliberalism” where through discourse the individuals are part either from the worthy, entitled citizen group or the less worthy often associated with deviance, having a lack of market potential. In this research, the terms of deservingness and undeservingness are strongly connected to the practices of state representatives. Kymlicka (2015: 10) conceptualizes “deservingness” as being influenced by three factors: 1) related to the control of the individual; 2) related to the identity if the individual is seen as belonging to the society; 3) related to their attitude and contribution/reciprocity to the society. Another distinction in relation to this classification is the one proposed by Stanculescu (and al. 2001: 395) that states that dividing the poor into these two categories is something that the state representatives do, based “not on administrative-bureaucratic criteria, but on direct contact and personal interactions or stereotypes.” Poverty is perceived as having structural causes, when it is affecting a certain segment of population, the deserving one, but extreme poverty is often seen as an individual responsibility, the undeserving

ones. Social justice is perceived in a different way in relation to how state representatives understand the capacities and ableness of the subjects of policy. In this way, the poor that cannot support themselves because of visible restraints like age (elders and children) are considered deserving. On the other side, there are the undeserving poor that embody adults that are not in the labor market. Stanculescu (et al. 2001) identify another key aspect of undeservingness: ethnicity, when being Roma immediately puts an individual in the this category.

In the end, I drew a few lines around perspectives on poverty and on how policy is framed. Previously, I have done participant observations in state institutions and content analysis on the laws around social policy that helped me identify certain directions that I have explored here through theory.

Chapter 2: Contextualization

This chapter aims at discussing framings around policy on two levels. First would be the legal framing and I would engage with certain directions that the Law of Guaranteed Minimum Income embodies. The second level involve framings from political discourse and media in Romania in relation to the same social policy. By following the legal, political and media framings I aim at drawing connections between these three with the goal of understanding how these narratives materialize in the lives of a Roma community. This would require an in-depth analysis and for this short chapter, I will focus briefly on Law 416/2001 and will bring together media and political discourses.

Framings in Media and Political Discourse

Looking at the way policy is framed it can emerge an understanding on how certain perspectives are hierarchized especially in relation to what justice means. One of the key arguments I previously stated in my 2018 thesis refers to how social benefits in Romania are split into two categories based on the perception in the dominant media discourse. According to this, for example disability benefits are seen as having a history, being one of the first ways that the state supported a citizen that could not work. This type of social policy is not contested because it reflects a certain type of social justice that is tied to a visible constrain that can be identified by the abled bodied individuals who recognize the vulnerable situation that disabled people face. However, the debate changes when media talks about Guaranteed Minimum Income because the causes of the precarious situation of beneficiaries is not tied to an impairment, but to structural inequalities, that are highly contested in a neoliberal logic where the individual is seen as having the responsibility to enter the labor market and according to this the economic system will reward him in a meritocratic way. The GMI is contested (by political actors, journalists, media representatives) firstly because the idea of offering money to individuals that are not having a job, clashes with the ideals of the market that regulates and offers freedom to subjects. Secondly, because Roma people is majoritarian in receiving this kind of support, GMI becomes a racialized measure, and it is often tied to undeservigness and in a subtle way implies that Roma ethnicity is related to poverty.

There is a dominant discourse in the media supported by the political right against the receivers of GMI because they affirm that this policy encourages welfare dependency and "laziness". Given the fact that Roma people are most affected by poverty in Romania, they qualify for GMI because they have less assets and resources. The discriminatory discourse can shape what

kind of assistance is seen as fair and ethical and can influence the quantum at a national level and the access at a local level. In a multiethnic site with a high index of relative and absolute deprivation, the way social policy is applied can uncover how a mainstream policy is transformed to respond to the needs of a Roma community. Framing who deserves it or not can be based on the dominant discourses or on the experiences that state representatives have. The existing narratives influence if social workers in a given context choose to do extra-work in order to help the individuals in need. For example, many of the Roma in Bolduț are illiterate but the law of GMI states that the citizens requesting the social aid are the ones responsible of gathering and writing all the documents needed. Do social workers understand the difficult situation of these individuals and realize that without additional help, they will not be able to pass through the bureaucratic process? Or their perception of the causes of poverty and illiteracy are attributed to individual factors and refuse to write the documents for the future beneficiaries?

In order to understand the current blaming narratives in the media, that might shape the perspectives of social workers, of the majority of population and of the Roma as well, I will use the recurrent expressions used in the online newspapers that have the highest numbers of readers. However, an analysis of such a discourse in Romania has been done before by Vincze (2019) who identifies how poverty and segregation is portrayed in the media. She says that there is a dominant image of poor individuals that are Roma, with an emphasis on a clear distinction from the majority, they become “others” who face struggles and sometimes they deserve empathy and sometimes they are blamed. (Vincze, 2019: 152) But I find necessary to bring in the words used in some of the main newspapers/interviews, because in that way the discourse can be easily identified as being reproduced by Roma and social workers. Usually, the articles, from the start, use a derogative term to identify the beneficiaries of GMI: “socially assisted”, which is based on

the assumption that these individuals have no autonomy. The president of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, as well positions himself against this “inadmissible situation” in which the state is burdened by “a high number of assisted people”. Two former prime ministers supported this view as well by saying that the GMI is “an invitation to stay out for labor” and the only reason they cannot cut it off is because it “exists in all civilized countries of European Union”. The current prime minister is skeptical and would rather redirect money from social policy, like GMI, to investments like pensions. Besides the state actors, the articles use the words “lazy”, “alcoholics”, “dependent”, “passive”. The usage of these individual attributes is visible when talking with representatives of the state and beneficiaries as well. As, Jindra (2014) says “solving” poverty is seen by the media, political actors, and the media consumers as an individual approach to inequality.

Framings in Law

I start from the assumption that policy is not neutral and is often constructed for a specific group without involving the beneficiaries in the policy making process. In this way, I could argue that policy could play a post-colonial role, where the Other is created constantly and through civilizing measures is repeatedly taught the *correct values* of a European and/or Romanian. The Other is created based on difference that is best described by Said (1978: 54) as a “universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs" is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary”. When spatial segregation and ethnicity overlap, the Otherness is further reinforced. This creation of the Romani Other has a history that was produced by people with superficial knowledge that often-portrayed exotic stories and mystery, (Mayall, 2004: 126)

creating stereotypes that are part of the imaginary of non-Romani individuals. In the intellectual world a major role in this perpetuating racialized modes of thought were reinforced by Gypsy Lore Society, whose knowledge legitimized hierarchy in the usage of law and policy. (Matache, 2017)

I find relevant to introduce how policy is framed in a national context by looking at the law because it can illustrate one of my main statements: social policy is not designed to support the individuals or help them avoid poverty, but it traps them in a circular bureaucratic process while perpetuating poverty. The main aspect I will focus on is equality and I am using the conceptualization by Fredman (2002) that identifies some key aspects that are worth considering when analyzing policy. She recognizes structural inequality especially when talking about the possibility to have a secure job by saying that “the rule which requires a high level of formal education as a precondition for employment, will, although applied equality to all, have the effect of excluding many who have suffered educational disadvantage, often a residue of racial discrimination or slavery.” (2002: 2)

According to the Law 416/2001, the GMI’s basic principle is social solidarity, meaning that the state theoretically recognizes the possibility of structural inequality, but when creating a response for this segment of the population it rejects the principle of equality in a subtle way. It is paradoxical how one mainstream policy that wants to situate itself as a solidarity measure it is not concerned with having equality of results. Then we cannot talk that the current law fulfills its aim of redistributing resources through solidarity, as long as it is widely contested by the state representatives and this constant questioning keeps the actual quantum very low. In this way, we cannot talk about solidarity, rather about a measure that has an instrumental role, keeping Romania in line with other EU states that have this type of policy and offering a precarious possibility for poor individuals to have health insurance. The latter is one of the most important reasons why

individuals go through the bureaucratic process and gather the necessary documents so they would be covered in case they need medical assistance. The beneficiaries are willing to perform the mandatory labor, that is often perceived as stigmatizing, gathering the garbage for example just so they can be covered by insurance. In a democratic society having access to medical services should not be conditioned by the individuals' participation on the labor market, or by them doing community service that attaches stigma to them. In this sense, the current GMI law is reflected as way where "a person or a group has been discriminated against when a legislative distinction makes them feel that they are less worthy of recognition or value as human beings, as members of society." (Fredman, 2002: 82)

In the end, the legal, political and media framings are often embedded with post-colonial ideas that aim at putting conformist pressure on individuals that are perceived as Other. At the same time, the GMI policy that seeks to be a solidarity measure is highly contested by media and political actors that blame the subjects of policy for their poverty. These narratives might create in practice discrimination, perpetuation of stereotypes and a circle of poverty where the structures of society that create inequality, cultural imperialism and racism are kept in place while the individuals that are affected by these injustices are the ones targeted for change.

Chapter 3: Contextualization of the Policy in Romania

The Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) is a policy that was enacted in Romania under the Law 416/2001, but the initial project was initiated in 1995, due to the rise of poverty, unemployment and instability. The Law 67/1995 covered approximately half of the minimum wage in the 1990s, but because of inflation, the quantum needed to be adjusted. In 2001 the Law 416 was proposed and the GMI was tied to the Social Reference Indicator (Indicatorul Social de

Referință- ISR) which was supposed to grow annually according to the change of prices and expenses. It is worth mentioning that the value of ISR was decided in 2008 and the quantum was 500 lei (101.15 euros), and it changes in 2021, increasing with 5,1%, according to inflation, so the amount changed to 525,5 lei (106.31 euros).

The quantum of GMI for 2022 is the following, based on Social Reference Indicator (ISR). This is what an individual or a family received from the state in a month:

One individual	0.283 x ISR	149 lei (30.14 euros)
Family of two individuals	0.510 x ISR	268 lei (54.22 euros)
Family of 3 individuals	0.714 x ISR	376 lei (76.07 euros)
Family of 4 individuals	0.884 x ISR	465 lei (94.07 euros)
Family of 5 individuals	1.054 x ISR	554 lei (112.08 euros)
Any other individual over the number of 5	0.73 x ISR	36,5 lei (7.38 euros)

The application process is described by Ciornei (2017, 106-108) as a bureaucratic process which includes an application and copies of identity documents. The case is analyzed by

social workers that have to complete a welfare report by going to the household of the individual/family to register the goods that exist. The quantum is decided based on the number of family members reported to ISR. After that, the social workers write a disposition that has to be signed by 7 workers from the city/village hall. The file receives a specific registered number that is then sent to AJPIS (County Agency for Pays and Social Inspection), the entity that is in charge with GMI files in the county, the institution that centralizes the files.

On a theoretical level, Rees (1998) aims at explaining three main policy approaches that have the goal of dealing with inequalities in a society. First, there is the equal treatment approach that focuses on offering the individuals the same opportunities and uses anti-discrimination measures and brings awareness around a specific inequality. This is also named tinkering and it is necessary as a first step towards a more equal society. The second approach is positive action or positive discrimination that acknowledges the accumulated disadvantage of a specific group and offers a compensation or equal opportunity programs/ affirmative actions that are conceived as temporary. However, the weakness of this tailoring is that it makes disadvantaged groups conform to dominant norms. The third approach wants to bring transformation and targets the social norms, the structures, and institutions, as well as relations between groups. Rather than adjusting the individuals to society, aims at challenging the existing practices to actually change the structures that create and legitimize inequalities. Such an approach is complex and costly, and it will mean as well a slow process, but it could be the path towards equality on a larger scale.

Thinking about this research, GMI is a mainstream type of policy that targets poverty, not a specific ethnicity, gender, but it targets a specific class. It is worth mentioning that the most vulnerable individuals that live in settlement in illegal housing do not have formal documents and they are excluded from GMI as they cannot bring the documents for the files, as

they do not have IDs. The Guaranteed Minimum Income is considered a mainstream policy, but analyzing the framing of the law and the practices in the institutions, the discourses of political actors, does this policy actually challenge the existing norms and practices of the structures that created and maintained disadvantage? I would argue that the current structures of society do not simply disadvantage certain individuals, but that this disadvantage comes from the manifestation of oppression.

Young (1990) brings together Marxist, feminist, and post-colonial theories to discuss the five faces of oppression. Oppression is structural, not a result of some individuals' choices or policies, but rather as Fredman (2002) argues is embedded in the structures of society, it is systemic. In this sense, we can talk about deep injustices that take place more often towards certain groups because of well-intended actions and assumptions that are translated in interactions, stereotypes, bureaucracy, and market mechanisms. (Young, 1990: 41) She talks about exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence that help with understanding the different layers that a policy should address in order to be able to achieve its intended goals: solidarity and equality. This way we move beyond reducing disadvantages and injustices to either class or race alone and we could construct policy that does not respond only to one of it, but to the dynamics that the intersection of different categories and structures create.

Imagining a policy that could be an answer complex situation of poor individuals in Bolduț, but also one that takes into account the faces of oppression, Hankivsky and Zachery (2019) that suggest the need to bring intersectionality into policy: into the framing, creation, and implementation of policy. In this way it would adequately respond to the complex needs of individuals who are not defined only by one category, but have a gender, class, age, ethnicity and so on. Also, the geographic location and the current policies influence the experience of groups

and it need to be taken into account when constructing policy. For this, as a starting point, we would need to acknowledge that difference between individuals and groups is not about “otherness”, but about building relationships between and within groups. (Fredman 2001: 75)

Starting with an analysis of the Critical Policy Studies, the researchers consider essential in the process of policy creation to involve not only experts, but also the citizens who would be benefiting from it. This could be the path that will allow for not just a situated response of the policy, but it will promote a more adequate representation of a group’s needs. The target populations should be included also in the implementation and evaluation stages as Hankivsky and Cormier (2011) suggest.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The methodology I used for this case study has the purpose of illustrating if the Romanian state supports the individuals that ask for financial aid. Previously I have started from the assumption that the research will show the patterns of discrimination but going into the fieldwork I learned that reality is more complex and cannot be reduced to a single pattern. There are multiple power relations that come together to create several layers of domination and at the same time there are forms of resistance. Practically, I followed the state institutions, in the first phase, the County Agency (AJPIIS) to see what are the general aims in relation to the inspection and how is put into practice at the local level. After that, I focused on the local level, trying to understand how a project like that becomes territorialized in a specific village with a high percentage of GMI beneficiaries, and the unit of analysis here is the village hall and the state representatives. In the second phase, I found necessary to speak to GMI beneficiaries that are most affected by poverty and live in segregated areas, and this is important because it will provide access

to how Romanian and/or Roma are experiencing the interaction with state agents. Additionally, this type of knowledge is meaningful because rather than focusing either on ethnicity or class, an intersectional analysis will exemplify the interdependence of several categories/identities in relation to the existing policy in a neoliberal state. (Hankivsky and Cormier, 2011: 218)

Burawoy (1991: 10) states that a good start for a case study is knowing the literature and theories around what we want to research with the goal of “seeing how observations conflict with existing theories and can solve theoretical gaps and silences”. As a starting point, I found necessary to discuss my interest with other scholars and students who have previously done research in the area that prepared me for possible challenges on the way. The second step was to do participant observations in the two institutions mentioned before that will start from the personal experiences of social workers but “aims at uncovering the institutional power relations that structure and govern those experiences.” (Babbie, 2020: 307) The third step was to do in-depth interviews with the social workers and beneficiaries of GMI and this method is the appropriate one that will give a voice to the individuals and will best illustrate the lived realities. In this way, I will try to connect the policies of a neoliberal state to its outcomes with the aim of developing a situated knowledge on a segregated Roma community. For this, I had less structured interviews, but I had several themes I brought into discussion and allowed the respondents to express freely their values, perspectives, and emotions, while I listened and guided the interviews.

I called the village hall before going there and I have been in contact with one of the social workers. I went there on a Wednesday morning at 9am and I was received directly into the office. The office is built in a way that reinforced distance between the subjects of policy and the state representatives, because there is a small window from where the interactions happen. This means that the wall built between citizens and social workers is seen often as a protection,

especially in covid times, where the poor communities did not vaccinate, even if in certain situations they were threatened with cuts on the GMI by the mayor. I went for several days there to observe the interactions and I went with the social workers to do the welfare reports, but never to GMI families, as those were filled at the office for lack of time. The other welfare reports, especially for disability, are more often checked by several commissions on one side, and on the other, usually it involves a disabled person that sometimes cannot come to the village hall. This makes it necessary to have welfare reports at the residence while the GMI are not prioritized in this way.

Chapter 5: Ethnography of the Particular

Introduction and Background Information in Bolduț

Bolduț is a place that can easily pass as a contemporary representation of rural life, a multiethnic village that has 7000 dwellers: Hungarians, Roma and Romanians. It is located 25 km away from a bigger post-industrial Romanian city. Bolduț is however a fictitious name, because I chose to anonymize the place and the people I interviewed as I was asked by some of the individuals I talked to.

Most of the Roma from Bolduț were born in other areas of Romania and moved in this village because of deindustrialization. Some that are younger came with their parents at the beginning of the 1990s as there were available informal jobs in agriculture and farming. However, individuals stated that in the last 20 years things changed as the landowners started buying their own machines to cultivate the land and the informal labor force that the majority of the Roma did, was no longer necessary. This transformation I encountered while previously doing research in

another village, where Roma are the most affected by the fact that farmers replaced them with machines. In Bolduț there are around 2300 Roma, and the high majority are receiving Guaranteed Minimum Income. The Roma community stated that everyone is receiving this type of social policy. According to the data from the village hall, there are approximately 300 files of GMI. One file is composed from at least one person, and it does not have a maximum of people that can be part of the file, it all depends on the number of family members. During the month of June 2021, in Bolduț, there were 300 files and 1700 people that were subjects of GMI. Spatially, the Roma live in three main areas, all at the margins of the village, that have been hierarchized by state officials according to vulnerability and precarity. For the interviews I chose the settlement that was categorized as the poorest, because the key person lived there and facilitated my access. The key person in this case, is a Roma man that is the pastor of the Romani Pentecostal Church. He is well-known in the community, and he granted my access in the most impoverished settlement. Everyone I interviewed mentioned religion, for some of them being of crucial importance, that gave them a sense of belonging, while others stated that are attending church without a formal commitment.

Social workers and state officials spoke about the Roma in Bolduț as having Guaranteed Minimum Income, correlating ethnicity and poverty to this specific social policy. In this context, the GMI becomes a racialized policy. Even if GMI is constructed as a mainstream policy that is not targeting a specific ethnic group, in Bolduț it is acknowledged that if you are Roma, you most certainly are poor and a subject of this social policy. This correlation is encountered in the perspectives of non-Roma state representatives, and it goes even beyond the village, as state officials from the County level from AJPIS and AJOFM are having the same discourse.

In the village, there is a social canteen that works on the principles of an NGO, in charge being the Pentecostal pastor. This entity has some volunteers that are paid, usually the family members and some young boys from the most impoverished settlement. They work in an informal way either in the kitchen or in construction. The NGO's activities include feeding the children from the settlements and building houses for the families that are considered deserving. The social canteen is in the poorest settlement and most of the children come to have lunch at the pastor's house, where the canteen functions. I was told that the capacity of the canteen is to feed approximately 100 children, but sometimes there are between 80-100 children every day. The funding comes from donations from other Roma that live in Western Europe, usually, "brothers from the church". When there are no funds, the pastor goes to a deposit of fruits and vegetables where he buys the products at a low price and then goes in a market to sell everything in order to cover for food. The pastor identified his work as "spiritual and humanitarian, with the goal of saving children", that goes hand in hand with the religious ethic. He described the situation of the Roma in the following words:

"We tried to help some to have documents and IDs as well, many of them are illiterate and go to the village hall and they find metaphorically closed doors, many of them are discriminated, that is why there is so much poverty, during Ceausescu I could say we lived a better life, now that there are no more jobs in agriculture and farms, they live on GMI, many leave the country" (M, 55)

Given these circumstances, he stated that he feels useful while being so involved with the community and even if this kind of work is pleasant, he recognizes that the houses should be built by the state representatives, not based on charity, as the well-being of the Roma is a

national responsibility, and an active involvement could chance the precarious situation. He would expect the following:

“The Romanian state should be involved especially with Roma, if the village hall or the state would support me, I would be able to do even more, for example offer 2 or 3 meals a day, the village hall never gave us anything, not even some bread, they came and looked at poverty and left. They respect me when I go to the hall, but they are not helping me do more. I know I could do more; we do not have enough funds, that is why”

During the interviews, most Roma interviewees recognized the importance of education and expressed sadness because of their lack of it. They said they are illiterate but stated that they wish to change the future of their children, so “they won’t be like me, without school, because it is very difficult”. (F. 45 years) Their preoccupation with the future of the children was a leitmotiv that governed the interviews, where parents were concerned about the chances of their children in this unjust society. During a focus group, a teenage girl spoke about the context in which she is forced by circumstances to give up her education.

“I liked school, I loved History and Romanian, all the professors said that it is a pity that I am not continuing my education, I do not have the money for transportation, stationery and food, and I don’t have the possibility to go” (F.16 years)

The lack of money in this case is staying in the way of a possible social mobility and it narrows the changes for decent living conditions. She is left now with a similar path to women from the community: get married and share the financial struggles with a partner, which means in most of the cases that either one, or both individuals can go work in agriculture in

Western Europe. Usually, the male is the one that leaves the country, as the female has children that needs to care for.

One important aspect that every Roma mentioned is the importance of religion in their life. They belong either in a formal or informal way to the Roma Pentecostal Church that is connected on a dogmatic level with other Roma Churches from Western and Northern Europe. The Roma talked about a sense of meaning and peace that they found from the moment that they converted. They perceive their life around their baptism. There is a before when they smoke and drank and a present and future where God is influencing every aspect of their life. In the discussions with women, they used religion to explain the number of their children, some had between 6 and 9 and the reason is that they “*could not take any contraceptives anymore or have abortions, so this is what God gave us*”. (F, 31 years) It regulates at the same time, how one organizes labor, for example some men that have a role in the church, as deacons or preachers, cannot leave the country to work in agriculture. Because preaching in tongues (a spiritual practice common to Pentecostal religion) is a vital responsibility that happens every Sunday and cannot be disrupted without affecting their relationship with God. Hope is a leitmotiv that appeared in each of the conversations, where the term was in relation to religion contrasting the harm that this society caused to them. Because of the enduring injustice (Spinner-Halev, 2007), the segregated community lost hope in state institutions and state actors. They do envision a just world, but they do not believe that these equality scenarios could actually take place. Protestantism resembles the Bible’s Promised Land where the ethnic group that was “mocked and spread around the nations, when religion comes to bring hope. We are not a land without hope and direction, we have a future now, we have a land.” (Jimenez, 1981: 17-18, in Delgado, 2004: 70) This hope is strengthened when certain miracles take place in the community, where children that were ill, get well without

medical treatment together with some rituals like the Descent of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues.

The entrance in the community was facilitated by a key person, whose contact was from the state representatives. I was advised to be skeptical of this key person, but at the same time, I was told that a discussion with him might be helpful for my thesis. Until this man was available, because of time constraints I decided to interview some Roma at the village hall, where I was given a room for me and the individuals that would agree to have a conversation. Only after I entered the settlement, I could see the difference between the interviews from the village hall and the ones held in their own house. Roma at the village hall were careful with their words, not saying anything negative about the state representatives, because of the space and context in which we had the conversation, a setting in which I was associated with the state. When asking an illiterate woman about the bureaucratic process of applying for GMI, she identified the mediator as the main figure that helps the Roma.

“we are giving the papers to someone who knows how to write, to X [the mediator], and this is how we do it, he is helping us, if he is here, he is helping us, if he is not here, we are coming to the village hall another day trying to find him; the social workers are not that bad, if we talk to them nicely, they understand us, I cannot say otherwise cause God will punish me” (F. 45)

These words were later supported by other Roma that also spoke about the help they receive from the mediator, a Roma man that works at the village hall and serves as an intermediate person between the mayor and the community. This is contrasting what I was previously told by the social workers, that said that they sometimes provide additional help in order to fill in the documents. From the interviews it seems that this work is done in the majority

of the cases by the mediator and while doing participant observations in May 2022, I saw in several situations how the social workers sent the Roma to look for the mediator, as they would not have the necessary time to provide the needed help. When I spent 2 weeks at the social work office, I saw the amount of bureaucratic work that there needs to be done, as individuals come to bring documents for their files. There is a high number of GMI files, to which is added the other social programs: for disability, for families with children, emergency help and financial aid for heating. The amount of work for the two social workers allows for doing only the mandatory tasks and it does not allow for the other necessary but not so urgent work to be postponed or simply not done. An example would be that for the approximately 300 files of GMI, the law asks for a welfare report that should be done at the family's household. These welfare reports are necessary for disability and for the financial aid for family with children. The mayor has a car that takes the social workers to the households of Roma, but it happens often that the welfare report is conducted at the village hall, unless there is a signaled issue. This signaled issue could be a problem in a family, for example, during my fieldwork, the County Agency (AJPIIS) sent a message regarding an abuse in a family, where a 12 year old girl was pregnant, a situation that required a welfare report. The amount of work of the two state representatives is too high for what they can actually do. Because of this, the people that are additionally helped is often influenced by the tasks from that particular day, but also by a discourse on who is deserving enough to interrupt the flow of the tasks. They stated:

"I am overwhelmed because of the amount of work because many people come every day especially for GMI and they have so many questions. They remember what I am telling them exactly and if I tell them to come back one day they do. I don't remember everything I tell them. Sometimes I send them away as I have so much work to do" (social worker A)

“Everyday people come and ask the same things over and over again. This work is repetitive: we collect the data, we are writing up files and we cannot do work on specific cases, to pay attention to the needs that citizens have. What we do is anything else but social work” (social worker B).

Constructions of Deservingness and Undeservingness in Bolduț

The space where deservingness and undeservingness is constructed with direct outcomes is the village hall. When asking the Roma from the most impoverished settlement about their relationship with the village hall and the workers from there, the words they used expressed disappointment and sadness. They referred to them as being categorized as undeserving by the social workers and compared themselves to other Roma that were seen as deserving. The practical aid is dispersed according to these two classifications, which are perceived as unfair. One woman spoke about a difficult situation in which, 2 years ago, she was sick and needed surgery. She was registered as having GMI, so according to that she had health insurance. She went to the hospital where she received the necessary care and after that she was told that she must cover the expenses. She went to the village hall in Bolduț and asked the social workers to clarify the situation and they refused to help her. Further she discussed with the hospital about her situation and the doctor that was attending her explained to her that she needs to bring a paper that proves she is a GMI beneficiary. She went back to the village hall and received the paper. She then said: *I told the social worker, good for me that someone else wanted to help me because you did not want.*” (F, 30 years) Because of the lack of information, this woman feared that she would have to pay the 800 euros that the hospital asked, a situation that caused her anxiety. In the eyes of state representatives, she was considered as undeserving of a conversation where she would understand

her rights. She continues then: *I know that others were helped, even with money, but if I go, they tell me I am young, I told the social worker, yes, I am young but for what? I am not healthy myself and my children. The ones that are older are more often helped, the elders that do not have husbands*” (F, 30 years) Even if this woman was considered undeserving, she explains that her youthfulness is not a guarantee of good health, and the social workers’ failure to acknowledge her precarity and the physical constraints are excluding her from receiving an equal treatment.

While doing participant observations on a Monday morning in June 2021 there were two situations at the social work office. Around 9:30 am one young Roma woman came to apply for GMI, but she was illiterate. The mediator was not at the hall, and no one was available to fill in her documents. She did not want to come back another day, so she asked the social worker to help her. The social worker told her that she is too busy to stop her work, but the woman insisted, even tried to give her 5 lei (1 euro) in order to avoid coming again. She was rejected. Around 11 am an old Roma woman, who had GMI, came to complain about a fight she had with her daughter, where she was left without money and now, she was hungry. The social worker listened and told her that she can try to make her a separate GMI file, so that she can have access directly to the money. After that, the social worker gave her 5 lei (1 euro) so that she can eat something. The older woman was deserving in this sense, because she disrupted the flow of the tasks and the social worker showed interest in her situation. In the end, she did not refrain from giving her a moral advice: *“your daughter is your own family, you have to get along and the state is already doing enough for you by giving you GMI; this is your job now, to get along”*.

The construction of deservingness versus undeservingness is encountered at a local store, as well, the one that is in proximity of the settlement. There, Roma individuals buy the necessary food even when they cannot afford it. There are the families that are considered

deserving and “serious” because they return the money when they receive the GMI. The salesperson is the one that decides who can have access to groceries without money. This could be based on a personal hierarchy of Roma families, or it could be a utilitarian decision. The salesperson and their construction of deservingness has material outcomes as it provides access to food, when the families cannot pay for it. One thing that is worth mentioning is that this situation perpetuates the vulnerable position of Roma individuals as they are caught in a circle of poverty, where they are left without money from the moment they received the GMI, as illustrated below:

“We go to the store and ask to give us without paying, we have to because we are hungry, when we receive the money from GMI we have to pay the store for the food we ate and once again we are left without nothing” (F. 30 years)

Lastly, the deservingness is also a concept that appears in the Roma community, as they hierarchize one another. The social canteen in Boldut offers food for the children from the settlement and to some widows as well. This construction of deservingness is based on a Bible verse that the pastor kept citing from Jacob 1:27 that states: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” (King James Version) Because of this there are two categories of people: those who can work and those who cannot. Children and widows have a “weak”, vulnerable position compared to adults that could commodify their labor, who are undeserving in this sense. Children that are fed daily have families that ask for help from the NGO to be able to build a house or buy a bed, so that the children could sleep in a separate bed from their parents, but on the pastor refused to do so. In several situations there was conflict in the settlement because of the separation between deserving and undeserving in a group that has limited access to resources and in a larger logic they are all in need of aid. Prioritizing certain individuals based on age arises

frustration in the parents that also need to eat. If the adults express their perspective about the perceived injustice, and “threaten” the pastor, their children are nevertheless still considered deserving, even if the parents are identified as undeserving:

“Our focus are children and elders, as they are weak, but there are adults that can go to work, that talk dirty or threaten me, and my family told me: “stop going there” and I did, I invested in someone else. There are people that I am feeding their children, clothing their children but they talk bad about me” (M, 55 years)

In the Pentecostal Romani community, helping others is vital, as it is a sign of “pure religion”. They choose to help the ones that are in a difficult situation (even if all of them are in difficult situation when it comes to access to resources), and deservingness goes beyond the baptism or belonging to the church. But here it appears the skepticism with people that are from “the world”, that are not so easily trusted compared to the brothers and sisters that have a commitment to the church. There is a clear difference that Pentecostals make when they “interpret parts of the Bible literally, as they follow many behavioral restrictions based on their readings of Bible passages; these restrictions, combined with the ecstatic nature of their religious experience, serve as a boundary between them and a secular society”. (Lange, 2007: 7) Following this way, the Pentecostals can avoid being accomplices to encouraging certain “unclean habits”, like smoking and drinking. The safest way for them is to follow the Bible principle on deservingness and help children and widows. By analyzing the context in which the Bible verse was written, “the widows” has a strong gender dimension where women were considered to be the vulnerable ones and in need of aid, while male are often left out. This was related to the way that inheritance worked in ancient times, where women were not having access to. But this principle is encountered

today in Bolduț, where the only two categories of people that visit the canteen are children and widows.

“Even with all this poverty, we need to know whom to help, there are people that are stronger than us and they could work and if we give them that money, they might buy cigarettes and alcohol and the money was for nothing. Better we help orphan children and widows [referring to the same Bible verse Jacob 1:27] and this is something that God accepts.” (F, 31 years)

If there are Roma who identify other Roma as undeserving, as I have discussed earlier, there are Roma that think of themselves as undeserving. Several teenage boys stated that they think that the food at the canteen is for individuals that are in a more vulnerable position, and here the Bible principle repeated where children are the deserving ones. The teenage boys were 11, 14 and 18 years and all three are ashamed to eat together with younger children. There functions an individual responsibility logic, where the teenagers get involved in volunteering services at the canteen or doing constructions for the NGO, where they are paid a small amount of money (around 60 euros a month):

“Our children do not go to eat food anymore because they grew up and they are ashamed to go together with the younger ones, if this man would not exist, I cannot imagine how things would be here in Bolduț” (F, 75 years)

In this sense, the teenage boys are undeserving, in their own perspective, to have a free meal but become deserving in the eyes of other Roma from the community, as young citizens that take responsibility and sell their labor in order to survive. But this is perceived differently by state representatives, that have a skeptical view towards child labor. During the interview with an official from the County level, (from AJPIS) that is in charge with the area where my research is

located, the social canteen was presented to me as a problematic entity. Firstly, because of the fact that it works in an informal way, without paying taxes, a situation that the County institutions are tolerating because there is a need in the Roma community for free meals. Secondly, the main issue is related to exploitation of children and family members that are paid an unethical wage, that is unjust in the state representatives' opinions, even if the goal is to feed the children. He stated that helping the children from the community to have access to food is vital, but it should not be done in an exploitative way. For the volunteers to have a decent wage, the social canteen would need regular funding that at the same time will allow for preparing the food in a hygienic way as well.

This illustrates how subtle hierarchies create deservingness and undeservingness, in three physical spaces: the village hall, the local store and the settlement. Further, I will touch on the last part of the thesis, exploring the general inspection of January 2021.

The General Inspection

With the idea in mind that the general inspection proposed in January 2021 should have material consequences, I emerged into the research site to see how the process is approached. It was June 2021, and I went to the village hall in Bolduț and spent time at the social work office. The first two days I tried to observe the interactions between the social workers and individuals receiving GMI, looking for ways in which the general inspection is put into practice, but surprisingly I could not identify any measures that were aimed at reducing the number of beneficiaries. Since the GMI has to be renewed every 3 months or if there is a change of address, marital status or birth and death, many individuals would come to the office to renew or require GMI. Social workers did not visibly inspect their need, so on that week, I asked casually about the

general inspection proposed by the Ministry of Labor. I was told they have not taken any measures yet and I focused my attention on why this hall ignores the national inspection. This situation in turn slightly changed the framing of my research question. Even without a general inspection, social workers influence who has access to social policy, by facilitating bureaucracy measures or refusing to do so for example. Further, I followed the material context that affords for the general inspection to be ignored and how power relations between the local and county play a role in the current social order.

A state official that works at AJPIS when asked about the general inspection said the following:

„The general inspection is a constant matter, it is happening anyway, we have the team of social inspection, they are paying attention to everything that happens on a social scale in addition to the work that the halls do, we check usually the hall that have a high number of files, we can tell if there is a problem if there are too many files compared to the number of residents, that is how we check. If out of 8000 dwellers, all 8000 are receiving GMI, there is frauda there for sure, probably there are people that should not receive it. There is also the IT program that the halls have access to where they check the income, we check if a citizen has income before approving the GMI, there is no way that someone with a wage is receiving GMI. The deservingness and undeservingness has no clear foundation, because all the files are checked before by the hall and by us, there are also welfare reports where we check if the person is at home and not abroad to which there is the community work they have to do, there is not way that you work abroad and receive the GMI in Romania, the chances are so low that someone does that” (AJPIS official)

These words are meaningful because it represents a different perspective, that the one that I encountered in the interviews with hall’s workers and Roma families. First, it is denying

that the state, the institutions (halls and AJPIS) or state representatives would be racist in any way, that institutional racism even exists. It implies that there is no foundation for the distinction between deservingness and undeservingness I found during ethnography. Secondly, their words have another assumption: that the policy and law is perfect and there are no mistakes made by state representatives. It would not allow for undeserving people, which in this context he identified as citizens enrolled in the labor market, to have access to this type of policy. The citation reflects a different position than that of the media's or political actors' speech.

In April 2022, when asking about the general inspection in Bolduț, I did in a subtle way, as I wanted to minimize any possible repercussions. One of the social workers expressed their opinion in favor of such a project. She said:

“This [general inspection] would involve a colossal work, just like it was with the recalculation of the pensions in Romania, it was a huge project and for that they hired more workers, they would have to do the same for this as well, hire them for a determinate time just so they could go to the beneficiaries' houses and do welfare reports, to see what each person has in their household. This is my opinion, but right now we do not have the resources for that”

This could be a reason why the general inspection did not take place immediately, in January 2021, when it was proposed as a policy project. The village and city halls did not have enough social workers that could do the sorting based on welfare reports. Also, an important factor that disrupted the general inspection was the changes that took place in Romanian politics since January 2021. Raluca Turcan is not the Minister of Labor and Social Protection as the Govern that she was part of (PNL), conducted by Florin Citu, was dismissed in November 2021. PNL (National Liberal Party) is a right-wing party in Romania that prioritized the market and is a supporter of the individual responsibility trope. The new Minister of Labor and Social Protection is Marius

Constantin Budăi, who is part of PSD. This party is slightly different than PNL in the sense that they present their governance program as being interested in a „strong social state”. This means that they are raising the quantum for some social policies, but so far not in respect to GMI. At the same time, they did not show interest in cutting down the number of recipients, and the change in governance from a right wing party to a so called social-democrat party has put a stop so far on the general inspection program that was proposed in January 2021.

Conclusion

The title of this thesis makes a connection between social policy and poverty and it anticipates this research that uses the two concepts on different levels, building an ethnographic story that illustrates this correlation. GMI recipients from Bolduț, even if they are subjects of a policy that has the aim of countering poverty, because of the low amount, their precarity is maintained.

The general inspection was the initial focus of my thesis. Until I emerged into the fieldwork, and I encountered a different reality. I followed an ethnography of the particular (Abu-Lughod 1992), where the data cannot be generalized, as in other spaces in Romania, GMI is common in homogenous spaces, and it cannot be tied to ethnicity. My claim however is that in the strategic research site, Bolduț, GMI is a racialized measure, because the majority of the subjects of policy are Roma. Even if there are no specific statistics in relation to that, talking to the Roma community and state representatives, I accept their assumption that GMI recipients are majoritary Roma.

The general inspection, as it was proposed in January 2021 has no material outcomes in Bolduț, as the number of GMI remained rather constant during this time. I chose then to ask the County’s main institution that was nominated to take over the general inspection and I

was told that this is something that has been happening constantly and that the new proposal comes just to strengthen something that already takes place. At the same the initial purpose of understanding the deservingness and undeservingness in relation to the general inspection had to transform, as the categories were there, but they worked in a different circumstance. The context was not a law that tried to exclude the undeserving, but it was related to the day-by-day interactions between social workers and Roma families that requested aid, and some received it while others did not. I went further and mentioned how these categories influence the dynamics between Roma. However, I would consider that my understanding is not complete, as I did not fully comprehend why some Roma were helped while others were not. There could be factors related to the social workers' biography, previous conflicts, that I could not grasp in 3 weeks of fieldwork. Other limits of this research are related to time constraints, as I was able to spend more time in state institutions, but less time in the Roma settlement. Secondly, while doing participant observations, some village hall workers spoke Hungarian, between them and to the Roma that were coming to the social work office and as I do not speak this language, I could not understand in several occasions the meaning of conversations and the interactions.

The construction of deservingness and undeservingness, based on the ethnography in Bolduț, is more nuanced than how it was presented by Stanculescu (et al 2001) as their research was based only on interviews with social workers. My research went beyond that and included participant observations and interviews with Roma families. Because of this, I state that there are Roma who are seen as deserving by the state representatives and also that this dichotomy is used by the Roma themselves to hierarchize the families and the settlements.

In this research I identify two layers of deservingness/undeservingness. One is used by the state representatives from the village hall that identify the age and the capacity of work as

being vital in deciding who is deserving or not. The second layer refers to the community itself that uses these categories to refer to themselves but also to the families around them. In this sense, the categories are not fixed, as some individuals that were deserving at the certain point, became undeserving, for example the teenage boys who ate at the social canteen but from a certain age they were „ashamed to eat with the children”, even if no one told them specifically that they are undeserving. Also, the power dynamics within the community play a role in deciding who has access to this type of charity, because the pastor has the resources of building houses for some Roma families. The purpose of the project that the pastor does is to cover for something that the state is not doing. When Roma families are excluded, even from having access to social policy, because of the lack of documents, the pastor covers the need, building a house in the settlement, recognizing at the same time the failure of the Romanian state.

The research question that guided this thesis: How do representatives of the state like social workers from the town hall or from AJPIS decide who deserves the Guaranteed Minimum Income? is answered in a partial way. The social workers decide based on age and labor power. However, because the general inspection did not take place as the former Ministry of Labor planned, there were no cuts from GMI. This does not mean that there are not narratives according to who is more deserving to receive additional help with bureaucracy for example. The AJPIS officials deny that there are undeserving subjects that receive the GMI and consider that the general inspection is an ongoing project. The law in this way, is perfect and “*there are no foundations for deservingness and undeservingness*”. However, the ethnography precisely shows that the categories are present in the village hall and in the Roma community I was in.

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