

## Social Movement and Civil Society in Post-communist Romania: Local Evolution, Global Comparison

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**Abstract.** This article highlights the disjunction between, on the one hand, the Romanian civic and environmental local movements and the transnational NGOs actively working to implement “democracy” and “civil society” programs in Romania. The 2012-2013 environmental and social mobilizations against the whole Romanian political class brought to the surface this compartmentalization, hitherto latent. These social realities cannot be understood without a discussion of the history of NGOs in post-communist Romania. I argue that the big NGO democratization programs have been oriented towards an imagined normalization of Romania, based on an anti-communist and neoliberal ideology. This explains why they cannot be representative of a larger social spectrum. Next, I discuss the new social movements that emerged in 2012, built around gold-mining issues in the Roşia Montană region. An analysis of the mobilizations and debate around the gold-mines reveals a gap between two civil societies with divergent interests: one favoring the reproduction of capitalism, the other representing local aspirations. In conclusion, this article proposes a more general view on this topic comparing this situation with those of Georgia and Cambodia.

**Keywords:** civil society, social movement, neoliberalism, democratization, environment.

Early in 2012, a social movement both unexpected and unusual took center stage of Romanian public life. The Undersecretary of State with the Ministry of Health Raed Arafat, a former doctor with no actual political affiliation, was officially relieved of his duties after being admonished by the Romanian President during a TV show. The bone of contention was the privatization of the emergency medical services, which had been the creation and pet project of R. Arafat. This was part of a long chain of “shock therapy” policies aimed at dismantling the “welfare state”. In response to this new episode of mass-media politics, a small group of actors consisting mainly of culture professionals got mobilized in Bucharest. One prominent figure in the group was Sandra Pralong, former Ph.D. candidate under Raymond Aron’s supervision in Paris, former communication director for Newsweek in New York, and, more recently, former head of the Romanian Open Society Foundation (the creation of George Soros; for more on the Open Society Foundation – Soros, with its headquarters in Budapest, see Guilhot, 2007).

As the protests quickly spread to more than fifty cities, they underwent a constant change; most significantly the social categories became very heterogeneous. The demands now went beyond the original scope of the protest as the protesters asked for the resignation of the Romanian President, the Government, and the whole political class. In Bucharest’s University Square – the place of social mobilization par excellence after the fall of communism –, the main NGOs made a tentative appearance, but they failed to become a part of the social movement. To make things

worse, the division between the protesters and the so-called civil society representatives – also a spatial division within University Square – was so obvious that it was picked up even by the mass media. The phrase “the two University Squares” – one belonging to the protesters, the other to the NGOs – sums up this very split which until then had lain dormant (Heemeryck, 2010, Cîrstocea and Heemeryck, 2004).

It is in this context that a journalist, during a TV interview (broadcasted by B1TV) with the head of one of the main NGOs (The Resource Center for Public Participation which is in fact the former Romanian branch of the National Democratic Institute-US), questioned the representativeness of the aforesaid organizations. “What matters is not to be representative,” the head of the NGO replied, “but to be relevant.” The purpose of this statement is to cancel out the question of the main NGO legitimacy and to hide the deep and long-lasting split within the civil society between, on the one hand, its dominant branch and, on the other, the protests of the politically organized society. This division resurfaced sometime later during the protests against gold mining in the Apuseni Mountains and against hydraulic fracturing for shale gas (“fracking”) in Pungești.

Looking at the gap between large NGOs and a social movement over which they could have little or no control at all allows the inquiry into the sensitive issue of the conceptions, uses and forms of civil society as well as the causes of such disjunctions which seem to shape the functioning of civil society in Romania and elsewhere. I argue that the big NGOs behave nolens volens as drive belts for neoliberalism. To a large extent, they are, in the words of Antonio Gramsci, similar to an ideological “hegemonic apparatus”. Further, I claim, a counter civil society emerges to curb the former’s domination and promote a project closer to the nation, to culture and nature.

This article is based on several years’ worth of fieldwork in Romania. I have conducted an investigation in the big Romanian NGOs for more than one and a half years, to which I added observation of everyday relations in several NGOs and over seventy interviews. As concerns the 2012 and 2013 protests, apart from my on-site observation, I had the opportunity to discuss them several times, during my Comparative Sociology seminars, with some of my students who were actually involved in the protests. My fieldwork inquiries were supported by extensive research – analyses of press materials, NGO documentations, activist websites, funder.

In order to follow up on this claim, I will first focus on the leading NGOs which are supposed to represent civil society as a whole. Next, I will discuss the biggest social movement in post-communist Romania, i.e. the protests against gold mining at Roșia Montană (RM). This emergence of the RM mobilization fits into a chain of social movements which is currently gathering momentum.

## **1. A Civil Society Caught Between Anti-communism, Normalization, and Neoliberalism**

### ***About anti-communism as a mode of action***

The dominant branch of Romanian NGOs is made up of a dozen NGOs at the most, all of them created in 1990. Their ideology can be described by a strong anti-communist stance, which was shaped during the first months after the fall of communism, modes of action that aim at an abstract normalization, and the promotion of a latent neoliberalism. It is against this backdrop that the structuring effects need to be reconsidered (on the debate surrounding the uses of the memory of communism see Heemeryck, 2014).

The 1980s saw an extreme development of the communist regime’s means of surveillance and the undertaking of gigantic construction projects, epitomized by the People’s Palace in Bucharest. Coupled with a policy of repayment of the foreign debt, these titanic construction

projects brought about a sharp decrease in the population's standards of living. The political structures were largely monopolized by the Ceaușescu and their reference group as illustrated by the policy of rotating cadres (both geographically and administratively) and the appointment of people to the top positions in the state exclusively based on nepotism. These are the two levels that allow one to understand the overthrow of the regime in 1989, which can be described as a coup taking place against the background of a popular uprising.

It is in this context that the 1989 mass protests took place. Despite their authoritarian nature, the first policies adopted by the first post-1989 Gorbachev-inspired government were experienced as a breath of fresh air by a harassed and starving population. This explains the considerable electoral success of the new political coalition despite their repeatedly rigging the elections in 1990 and 1992. However, the takeover does not go uncontested and a student social movement, backed by the right-wing political parties freshly (re)created and fully supported by Western countries, occupies Bucharest's University Square in April 1990. The protesters naively demand the lustration of institutions, i.e. forbidding former members of Securitate (the political police) and members of the Communist Party to run in the elections during several terms. Acting out old authoritarian habits, on June 14 and 15, 1990, the government organized a violent repression of the protests with the help of Jiu Valley miners, resulting in 277 people wounded and 7 dead. It would not take long for this event to become a genuine origin myth, central to the collective imaginary of both the NGOs and the right-wing opposition parties.

Anti-communism, which deems any progressive ideology as conducive to totalitarianism becomes the credo and the glue of the very heterogeneous University Square social movement. The pattern of the political and associative opposition to the government was embodied by the Civic Alliance. The motto of this macro NGO, unchanged since December 1990, is representative of this movement: "As long as the Romanian society does not enter a state of normality, as long as the Securitate members, the crooks and those who steal from the Romanian people do not disappear from Romania's political life, the Civic Alliance will be on the barricades, holding the banner up". A large proportion of the movement joined forces with the right-wing political parties (Huiu, Pavel, 2003) and obtained, in 1996, a great yet short-lived success. The first post-communist neoliberal political era, between 1996 and 2000, will prove to be a disaster.

To this day, all the big NGOs share this multi-purpose abstract anti-communism. From an insider's perspective, it grants the movement an appearance of solidarity and coherence. From the outside, it appears to justify their discrediting of the so-called left-wing parties and, as a corollary, their constant alliances with right-wing parties, which are known to show their gratitude to these social groups when they accede to power. There is an actual circulation of elites between the NGOs and the political parties. It also makes it possible to discredit the population, deemed spineless because it refuses to vote the way these NGO members want it to vote. In both cases, they decry a mentality seen as incompatible with democracy. Finally, from the perspective of class relations, this particular brand of anti-communism allows this lower tier of the elite to conceive of itself as a new political avant-garde and, consequently, to grant itself a special positive status at the expense of undermining the political class and the population.

In passing, let us note the change in the way the local actor is represented: formerly, back at the dawn of the development era, imagined as a political force, the local actor becomes, starting with the 1980s and the emergence of the humanitarian sector, a victim or a body whose biological survival needs to be ensured. In post-communist countries, the local actor is deemed, when they do not pledge allegiance to the neoliberal parties, alienated by life under dictatorship, in line with the representations that funders and development agencies have of the local actor.

The 2004 program “for a clean parliament”, supported by eight NGOs (Freedom House Romania, Open Society-Romania, Transparency International Romania, etc.) during the 2004 legislative elections, is an illustration of how persistent this view of society really is. The NGO coalition envisaged putting pressure on the political parties to get rid of candidates that were falling into the following categories:

The candidate or a member of his/her family pursues business relations with the state while holding a position of power in a state institution; the candidate has a history of migrating from one party to another during the same term; there is a gap between the candidate’s stated income and his/her actual income; the candidate collaborated with the former Securitate and/ or was a PCR (Romanian Communist Party) cadre during communism.

### ***Global Standards, Virtual Democracy***

The neo-liberalization of the United States coincides with the reviving of an anti-communist stance as illustrated by Ronald Reagan’s Evil Empire Speech (1983). The international political institutions created during his reform of the state, such as the National Democratic Institute (1983), the International Republican Institute (1983), will be the ones to invest and to set up the main NGOs in post-communist countries. By recalling this historical moment, I aim to reveal the convergence of anti-communism, democratization, and neoliberalism as manifested in the early 1980s. This ideological triad reflects the collective identity and the modes of action of the big Romanian NGOs.

As a matter of fact, the strongest Romanian NGOs operate in the fields of democratization and civil society building. Most of them were created following the massive intervention of US and European institutions. This applies to the entire post-Soviet area and there are no frictions between these different organizations but rather a mutually agreed division of labor. However, these relations can prove very difficult to account for in their home societies.

Financially, the NGOs are fully dependent on their funders. This is a subcontracting type of relationship which does not allow for the development of critical thinking. The symbolic economy of these social fields illustrates to what extent the submission was internalized: the awards granted by Western institutions are displayed in the organizations’ headquarters as the only markers of legitimate acknowledgment of the work done by an NGO. All consecration exists solely under the control of the external authority – be it imagined or not.

As a result, the programs of these NGOs, a reflection of their funders’ agendas, are focused on the election process, the respect for the Constitution, the behavior of the members of Parliament, of politicians, on the sustainability of the civil society, transparency, and the fight against corruption. From Romania to Kyrgyzstan, these endoxic standards are the same. From this perspective, democratization is designed as both mode of transformation and monitoring of political and administrative structures and proliferation of associations. It targets the top of society and not the bottom. There is no better proof than the almost total lack of programs that explicitly use the word grassroots. The concept of empowerment is also absent from this world.

Therefore, these organizations work as proxies of minimal global political standards (transparency, rule of law, human rights, a competitive market-economy, a strong civil society, etc.). These are no longer Durkheimian norms, i.e. social norms that ensure the reproduction of a society, but virtual norms modeled by hypostasized Western societies. This is one of the prerequisites of their global applicability, of their postulated universality.

The internalization of this power relationship in these NGOs is explained by the reinvention, after 1989, of an “allocentrism” directed at the West, otherwise traditional in Romanian culture. The entire Romanian national history, unfolding at a crossroads of empires (Austrian-Hungarian, Ottoman, Russian, USSR), was marked by identity stretching between an often ethnically-flavored autochthonism, on the one hand, and a synchronism centered on the belief that the West is a social, political and economic space that Romania should emulate in order to become civilized. The civilizing role is attributed to intellectuals and NGOs. This explains why there are few or no voices critical of the European Union, the USA or NATO in these NGOs.

While, as a rule, throughout the post-communist landscape, this particular type of NGOs did not oppose their funders and foreign partners – with the notable exception of Cambodia as we will discuss later in this article –, in the Romanian case, this reinvention of tradition rather proved to be a breeding ground for them. Indeed, the “partners” know how to be authoritarian and can terminate an entire NGO network if they do not approve of the political choices of the members as illustrated by the case of the NDI in Kyrgyzstan (Pétric, 2008). Subservience is, therefore, a must. But recent history also favors this attitude of consenting to authority: in the first hours following the fall of communism, democratization agencies and their funders were the only ones to provide support to the pioneering seeds of civil society. As a result, this is also a debt to their foreign partners, a debt that senior activists who now hold managing positions have “inherited”.

Democracy and civil society thus become fetishes of globalization. Globalization prevails as the last stage of human evolution, hence its apodictic nature. It regulates legitimate hierarchies between nation states, between those whose past is stained by dictatorship and those who can claim historical primacy.

Therefore, we can speak of an instrumentalization of global power relations: since Romania is a post-communist country, because of this stigma, it is perceived internationally as a backward country. NGO activists appropriate these power relations via an instrumental allocentrism and reflect back to the population and the political class a degrading image of communism in order to better distance themselves from it.

It stands to reason that these organizations have little interest, to this present-day, in local issues that challenge the alleged Western sociopolitical model. This evidently pairs well with the conception of a government controlled by an enlightened elite, an avant-garde, an ideal also dear to neoliberal followers.

### *A Neoliberal Democracy?*

During the winter 2012 protests, in a letter addressed to the government and to the President of Romania, signed by twenty-four organizations, the NGOs protested against “corruption”, “savage deforestation”, “the destruction of national heritage architecture”, “the arrogance of government officials”, “the violation of the rights and liberties of disadvantaged groups”, “the maintaining of the huge gap between rich and poor by the entire political class”. Born out of an exceptional context – a sudden social movement that does without the NGOs – this letter voices an almost unprecedented level of social, ecological and political criticism.

The main cause of this exceptionally broad claim-making is the participation of a larger number of non-governmental organizations. More critical organizations, such as the Internet-based *criticatac.ro* journal, were called on to make their contribution to the claim-making. Nonetheless, with the exception of environmental NGOs, this message was unusual for the big Romanian NGOs. The latter’s criticism is – as ever – rather general; it did not result in action; and it was aimed at capitalizing on then-ongoing social movement. They were actually incapable of putting forward a fiscal and redistributive policy meant to diminish inequalities. Although they expressed regret about

the harassment and random arrests made by the police, which were – I can bear witness – a source of constant fear for the protesters, they were incapable of supplying the needed legal assistance.

As far as the organizations meant to represent the civil society are concerned, criticizing capitalism is simply unthinkable for them. These NGOs see themselves as mediators between “the Western wisdom”, the very source of democracy and capitalism, and Romania’s perceived lack of civilization. Being critical about capitalism can mean betraying many years of personal investment and would constrain activist to a reconstruction of a specific subjectivity. This also partly explains why these organizations cannot foster change and alternatives.

Defying all expectations, the 2007 economic crisis has had no impact on their public position. Like multinational corporations, these NGOs seem to be remarkably resilient. Their moral economy calls for the prosecution of local elites. In their view, the dysfunctional Romanian economic system and institutions are the result of Romanian capitalism being a fake capitalism, spoiled by the former communist elites and by corruption. Therefore, they make a distinction between genuine capitalism, which remains fair and desirable, and fake capitalism, which is local, savage, the kind that you can find in Romania.

On yet another level, the normalization operated by previously mentioned NGOs limits the exercising of sovereignty and democratic representativeness to the electoral process, the transparency and the monitoring of public institutions, without criticizing the current capitalist system. They share this conception of politics with neoliberal doctrines. From the very beginning, neoliberal ideologists were faced with a contradiction between the market system and popular sovereignty.

In short, one could say neoliberalism consists of the will to impose the pattern of the market all the way to the cellular level of society (for more on the genesis and evolution of neoliberalism see Dardot and Laval, 2009). This presupposes the transformation of all social forms into companies subjected to efficiency calculus. The notion of the market undergoes a subtle change: the emphasis is no longer on the exchange, the commodification (etc.) but rather on the competitive nature of relationships among agents.

Unlike the greatest liberal thinkers of the XIXth century (J. Spencer, J. S. Mill), the neoliberals do not believe that the market system is a natural one. Contrary to the widespread confusion within the social sciences, neoliberal conceptions are radically alien to the *laissez-faire* doctrine. If the market system is not natural, it then must be instituted and maintained through the intervention of the state. The state is, therefore, the main agent that ensures the implementation and maintaining of the market as a social order (Dardot and Laval, 2009). Now, this endeavor is hindered by one huge obstacle, i.e. democratic sovereignty and the “irrational masses”. This explains why, according to Walter Lippman, democracy needs to be strictly limited to the electoral processes (Lippman, 1943). Ordoliberalism goes even further pleading in favor of constitutionalizing neoliberal economic policies so as to place them outside the deliberative system. According to this view, the European Union is the perfect expression of this policy (Dardot and Laval, 2009, pp.328-346; Denord and Schwartz, 2009). The anti-democratic nature of this conception is revealed in the work of F. Hayek and his open preference for a liberal dictatorship rather than a social democracy. However, I must point out that the ordoliberal functioning of the EU has been repeatedly shown to be incompatible with the sovereign expression of the people (see for instance the 2005 referendums on the ratification of the European Constitutional Treaty – to which several people said ‘no’ only to be forcefully adopted by their elites).

The NGOs I discuss clearly chair this worldview. They have reduced democracy to a formal standard built around electoral procedures. They rule out *de facto* any claim-making beyond the scope of electoral claims, except for challenges to the authoritarian tendencies of the state, thus

allowing for the maintenance of an environment favorable to market development and securing foreign investments. They work as an alibi for neoliberalism; in the absence of elections – despite most thinkers’, from Aristotle to Montesquieu (Manin, 1997), having conceived elections as the tool of an aristocratic government – any society would become a morally bankrupt project. Finally, one could also wonder what is the use of fully legal elections and total freedom of expression for every citizen if the choices in terms of economic policies and social projects have been set in stone by the European treaties.

NGOs are often perceived as the vectors of global claim-making, according to an idyllic view recurrent in the social sciences. Quite on the contrary, these organizations turn out to be keys to global domination. This aspect becomes obvious in the case of so-called democratization NGOs, whose task is to impose a hegemonic ideological framework in the name of an alleged popular representativeness. Nevertheless, exposure to globalized capitalism and neoliberalism characterized by oppressive tendencies forces societies to find alternative solutions to ensure their political, economic, social or even biological survival. As a result, heterodox social movements emerge and contribute to the creation of a counter civil society. And this becomes the locus of nascent subversion. Next, we are going to see how this happens based on the case study of a social movement that opposes gold-mining at Roșia Montană.

## **2. The Polymorphism of the Counter Civil Society**

The Roșia Montană gold-mining project has generated the largest, most important social movement in post-communist Romania. (As concerns the Save Roșia Montană Campaign (CSRM), the journalist Mihai Goțiu provides the best synthesis of information in his book – see Goțiu, 2013.) Roșia Montană is a small commune comprising a few thousand inhabitants, located in the heart of the Apuseni Mountains, a mountain region known for its magnificent views but also for its mineral resources. It is this particular richness that stirred the interest of big Wall-Street investors (Thomas Kaplan, John Paulson, Beny Steinmetz) and the Canadian mining industry about fifteen years ago. An estimated 300 tons of gold and 1,600 tons of silver could be extracted over a period of fifteen years. This would make it the biggest cyanide gold mining project in Europe. In addition to the environmental damage, the mining method would entail the construction of a dam, displacing almost all the inhabitants of one village and destroying an archeological heritage site over 2000 year old.

This particular mining project reveals a general phenomenon of “condensation” (Poulantzas, 2013) involving the main global capitalist actors and the local political and administrative structures. On the one side, there are the Romanian investors – known for their past connections with drug dealing in Australia and later as members of the international financial elite – and the foreign investors involved in the “blood diamonds” mining industry in Sierra Leone. On the other side, starting from Romanian President Traian Băsescu (2006-2010, 2010-2014) going through the various ministries (culture and religions, environment, economy) and down to the level of the regional and local administrations, there are the elites who used their power to make the project possible (Goțiu, 2013, 25-141). The first contract-awarding procedures started in 1999 and followed the usual pattern for the privatization of profitable state-owned companies. With the involvement of the World Bank, the Canadian and US diplomacies, the operation built on a sequence of corruption acts is indeed reminiscent of postcolonial scenarios.

Before going any further, I need to provide some background information on the Romanian case. In 2008, Romania started to feel the consequences of the global financial crisis. As in many countries, its upper middle class, the holders of considerable cultural and technical capital, was deeply impacted. As in many Western countries, the crisis was a good opportunity for speeding up

neoliberal reforms. Moreover, the ideological homogeneity of the political field, attributable to the weakness of the state, became increasingly visible: the three main political parties, the Social-Democrat Party (PSD) – perceived as a left-wing party –, the National Liberal Party (PNL) and the Liberal Democrat Party (PDL) – both right-wing parties – took turns in forming alliances to govern the country: the PNL-PDL alliance between 2004 and 2007, PDL-PSD between 2008 and 2009, PSD-PNL from 2011 to 2014. Finally, in 2012, the Parliament introduced a referendum procedure for the impeachment of President Traian Băsescu. It was the biggest voter turnout since 1989, i.e. around eight and a half million voters – or 46.24% participation –, out of which 87.52% were in favor of the removal from office. Owing to a legal loophole, Traian Băsescu was able to remain in office. That much can be said for the democratic political scene and democratic legal means. This enticed large shares of the population to become involved in a larger social movement. The multiplying crises, typical of neoliberal governmentality, led to a clear division between capitalism and democracy, on the one hand, and original social movements, on the other.

The opposition to the Roșia Montană mining project started to take shape in 2002. The national power dynamics were such that the villagers had virtually no chance to oppose the project on their own. Moreover, they were subjected to a skillfully maintained doxa according to which the foreign investor is a messianic figure, reminiscent of some Melanesian cargo cults. The local opponents of the project were quick to create an association, Alburnus Maior, and to invite NGOs and activists to their first meeting. Most of these actors came from Cluj-Napoca, a Romanian city which, as opposed to Bucharest, had a genuine progressive and protest-oriented intellectual tradition. The success of the movement, as it would turn out, lay with its capacity to form alliances with very diverse social groups. This allowed the movement to reach transnational status instantly. The Roșia Montană issue gained international recognition with the publication, in the 2000s, of articles in the international press such as: *Le monde*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Der Spiegel*, *The Ecologist*, etc. A prerequisite of the movement's expansion beyond the level of the state and of its national success, these alliances with urban organizations and actors, not at all common in Romania, would only become stronger in time.

The nature of the mobilization is polymorphic: the village inhabitants whose ownership rights were violated are definitely the most concerned, but alongside them we find environmental NGOs dedicated to the environment preservation, cultural heritage aficionados or professionals, miners who are against mindless extraction, etc. The actors come from very diverse social strata: journalists, architects, legal experts, graphic designers, peasants, former miners, NGO workers, writers, students, unemployed people, etc. The chair of Alburnus Maior himself embodies this social kaleidoscope. The toothless 46-year old man, a former employee of the state-owned mining company of Roșia Montană, can be seen performing tasks ranging from manual haymaking to lecturing at conferences on the entanglement of transnational and national economic interests in this particular mining project.

This plurality of voices within the movement implies a minimal or overlapping consensus. In Romania, the rejection of the elites defined as consummately cynical and greedy is a representation rooted and visible in the granite-like stability of the indicators of trust in the institutions. (Cf. on this point to the opinion barometers published by the Open Society Foundation – Romania together with Gallup.) Consequently, the ideal framework, inclusive of all the different shareholders, claims to be apolitical. Centered on the protection of nature, culture and moral values, its definition can be backward-looking or neutral at best. Here it is in the words of one activist: “Roșia Montană is this threshold between absolute corruption and the hope that the Romanian people will one day find its way towards healthy moral values.”

The movement's lack of ideological consistency, which could be seen as a weakness at first sight, quite on the contrary, allows it to integrate large sections of the population and to support alliances of social groups geographically and socially far apart from each other. As a result, the movement cannot be controlled by its enemies, since the Save Roșia Montană campaign (CSRM) is not a legal entity and it has a hydra-like organizational structure.

The same observation applies to the winter 2012 protests, although they were much more loosely structured. During the day, groups of elderly people would protest in University Square, while in the evenings, groups of young people, some of them coming straight from work, would take their place. During the October 2013 protests against "fracking" and, by extension, against the Romanian government and Chevron Company, groups of poor and uneducated peasants attempted to resist the installation of a gas drill in the village of Pungești, while groups of younger people, holders of cultural capital, protested in Bucharest alongside environmental NGOs. These alliances are clear proof of the repoliticization of large categories of the population formerly excluded from the official mono-ideological environment of the political structures. This social plurality, particularly in the CSRM case, allows for an extraordinary accumulation of technical and tactical skills: design, legal, archeological, etc. This last point is crucial since the battle will be fought over very complex technical issues and will take the form of a fierce propaganda war.

A group of street-art anti-establishment activists – Mindbomb – will become one of the driving forces of this tactical war. On the one hand, the alumni of the art and design school, whose works are being exhibited all over the world, will provide the movement's key symbols (logo, flag, etc.) whose transposability will reinforce the identity of the movement both nationally and internationally. Moreover, the use of the symbols being free, anyone will be able to claim an action on behalf of CSRM. For instance, a group of Romanian mountain climbers will carry the CSRM flag to the top of the Mont Blanc. On the other hand, inspired by the San Francisco Print Collective, whom they had an opportunity to see at work, the Mindbomb activists will start a subversive poster campaign meant to question the interests of Romanian elected representatives connected to the gold mining project. Their network structure will allow them, for instance, to paste 10,000 posters in one night, in sixteen Romanian cities (Goțiu, 213: 378-379). This goes to show the extent to which this particular group is able to conquer public space.

The involvement of legal experts is just as decisive. Repeated demonstrations will take place in Cluj-Napoca and Bucharest and the participants will be subjects to a soft but nonetheless constant repression by the law enforcement forces. In Cluj-Napoca, lawyers will defend pro bono activists illegally arrested by the police and the riot police. This is precisely what the big Bucharest NGOs failed to do in these last years' sporadic protests. Furthermore, flyers containing legal advice will be put together fast and shared among participants so that each one of them could face the state's repressive forces. In brief, this is a genuine *modus operandi* aimed at bypassing the objective balance of power unfavorable to this fragmented movement. The same legal skills will be put to good use in getting annulled in court all of the permits that Roșia Montană Gold Corporation (RMCG) had obtained fraudulently from the public authorities: Certificate of exemption from listing as cultural heritage, the General Urban Plan, the Planning Certificate, the various reports issued by central authorities used by various ministries as support for their decisions, etc.

Faced with this kind of mobilization, the Canadian-Romanian company will launch their counter-offensive. An invalid local referendum is conducted under the direction of the multinational corporation, with a less than 28% turnout. Further, a mock civil society is created with the help of NGOs incentivized by people with vested interests in the mining project. Nothing was easier than to co-opt these NGOs, following the example of the big environment preservation foundations (WWF, Conservation International) which are today funded by the world's most polluting industries.

In an attempt to counter the involvement of a part of the transnational science community, the company calls on a few members of the Romanian Science Academy. This is a common strategy of securing the services of a few actors and allowing them, due to resources from outside their field of reference, to change their position in the field's hierarchy. Once one or several actors are co-opted, it becomes easier to claim and use fallaciously the agreement of the institution as a whole. However, this strategy will backfire as the Romanian Academy, clinging to its precarious independence gained after the fall of communism, will unequivocally and repeatedly make public its opposition to the Roșia Montană mining project.

Next, RMGC will put more pressure on the media. They will first muzzle the media through their main shareholders as the latter are connected to political parties which, in their turn, are connected to the gold mining project. The mass purchase of advertising space will also make it easier to buy off a parti-pris purged of divergent opinions. The censorship of the media will be further enabled by co-opting actors in authority positions (editors in chief, TV presenters, moderators, etc.). They will be convinced by the multinational corporation with the help of luxury "research" trips to New Zealand.

The relentlessness of the multinational company – which otherwise has not produced any wealth so far – can only be explained by the speculative nature of today's capitalism. The actual purpose of this company is to maintain the stock market price of a virtual swappable product in order to ensure its circulation and the drain of money. This also applies to the local elite for whom this company is a source of extraordinary wealth. However, the success of this strategy relies on the heteronomy of the social fields targeted by the mentioned company and, consequently, on their versatility.

As a corollary, this strategy of creating a fictional democracy reveals both the internalization of constraint typical of globalized moral standards manifested as fair and free elections, civil society and the freedom of expression, and the transformation of the relations between power and counter-power. From here on, this pantomime of democracy will have to be reenacted every time one wants to raise public awareness. This is the main quality but also the main drawback of globalized moral standards.

The participants in CSRSM will also take it upon themselves to educate these populations who are not used to voicing their opinion. This is another fundamental feature that sets them apart from the main democratization NGOs in Romania who provide at best a few reports and brochures on the leanings of political parties and the biographies of their members. The work of organizing a march from Cluj-Napoca to Roșia Montană illustrates this educational endeavor. The organizers stopped in each village and talked at length, sometimes meeting with a lot of bitterness from the villagers, about the underlying stakes of the mining project (Goțiu, 2013: 364-367). It is important to emphasize that this region in Romania is marked by high unemployment rates, an argument that was used ad nauseam by the Romanian-Canadian mining company.

As an extension of their actions, the movement will focus on the village of Roșia Montană and set up several projects there: an architecture summer school on heritage building restoration, an annual music festival to help develop tourism in the local guesthouses. Given the spatial dimension of the political struggle, the activists had to appropriate a space previously under the control of the company – which had bought property in the village – in order to effectively operate the shift in the balance of power. The restoration of the Greek-Catholic parish house gave the activists the opportunity to appropriate a place and to convert it into a museum that would host their lectures and public debates. This happened on several occasions and led to the Alburnus Maior association's claiming for the parish house as its headquarters.

For the activists, the alternative to the gold mining project is to turn this place into a tourist attraction, with cultural heritage and agritourism at its center. There are surely many arguments in favor of this. But there is no real break with the dominant global ideologies as these propositions are clearly part of yet another register of the political hegemony of globalization. First, these propositions push the debate in the cultural sphere at the expense of the political, overlooking, for instance, political ecology. Second, they encourage the commodification of culture, identity and heritage, all of them being reinvested in the intangible economy of tourism (Bazin, 2001; Heemeryck, 2008). It stands for the very demise of the industry, in this case, mining, on which the legitimacy of the state relied in the past and which now allows for its commodification as tourism. The same might apply to the environmental-friendly tourism that the CSRM key members praise so much. Finally, one can only wonder if this urban petite bourgeoisie a.k.a. creative class (gentry) is not actually imposing its own worldview on the others. Being a tourist requires having surplus earnings and only a few social categories will be able to afford that. By way of illustration, during the 2014 FânFest music festival, the prices of accommodation ranged from €20/ night for setting up your tent in a villager's yard to €42/ night for a room in a villager's house, in a country where the minimum net monthly salary is €115 and the average net monthly salary is €366. This is where the narrowness of these activists' vision becomes apparent.

## **Conclusion**

In his prison writings, Antonio Gramsci distinguished between a political society (the night-watchman state), an equivalent of the legitimate functions of the state (the army, the police, the legal system, etc.), and a civil society whose role is to maintain a cultural hegemony favorable to the dominant classes. There are two criticisms of this view. Gramsci's political society is undoubtedly the least open to political stakes. Moreover, his definition of civil society stands only for part of the civil society, which, because of its hegemonic nature, puts a strain on all forms of claim-making within a society. Now, my case study reveals the cracks in the myth of the hegemonic civil society as illustrated by the problematic nature of the relations between the main democratization NGOs, Pro Democrația Association, the Center of Support for Non-Governmental Organizations, on the one hand, and the local Alburnus Maior, on the other. This particular civil society appears to have an amphibological nature. The former loses the monopoly on the claim to represent the society and the latter creates its own place independently of the former.

In this respect, the Romanian case is close to the Georgian one (Jones, 2012). After the "Revolution of Roses", a great number of NGO activists joined the government structures. This coincided with the two terms of Mikheil Saakashvili as President of Georgia (2004-2007, 2008-2013), a period of authoritarian neoliberal policies (Serrano, 2008), and ultimately led to the emergence of a counter civil society, opposed to the government. (Muskhelishvili and Jorjoliani, 2009).

The disjunctions of civil society create a parallax effect in the very concept of civil society. This historical configuration emphasizes the emergence of a counter civil society resulting from the colonization of civil society by neoliberalism. The comparison with another faraway post-communist country will help us understand better why the big Romanian NGOs gradually confine themselves to an ideological straightjacket.

Like Romania, Cambodia is one of the first post-communist countries to have its territory swept by a wave of NGOs in the early 1990s. Following the massacres committed by the Khmers rouges and their defeat by the Vietnamese army (1975-1979), an international embargo was imposed on Cambodia until 1991. In 1992, after the Paris agreements (1991), the United Nations Transitional

Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) is appointed to ensure Cambodia's transition to peace, democracy, and a market economy. From then on, a vast number of NGOs set up camp in Cambodia, most of them funded by multilateral or Western institutions. However, there also emerged a minority wave of fully independent NGOs; among these, the child sponsorship and education NGOs (Trannin, 2005).

Under these circumstances, corruption and all types of trafficking spread like wildfire allowing the authoritarian State to make full use of its means of repression. Phrases like "aid market" (Hughes, 2003) and "NGO economy" (Trannin, 2005) could be heard everywhere. The aid is not coordinated, some sectors are overfunded (health-AIDS), others are overlooked (mental illnesses and psychological counseling for the survivors of the Khmers rouges era). To better control this chaos, the funders create structures for conveying and increasingly strict monitoring of aid: the "umbrella" multilevel structures, with a big NGO placed at the top and several smaller ones under its direction. Each "umbrella" specializes in one aid sector – health, microfinance, education, etc. In this context, one could say that "foreign assistance undermines democracy" and civil society development (Ear, 2012).

This is to say that the Cambodian NGOs are in no way more prone than their Romanian counterparts to increased autonomy. Nonetheless, human rights NGOs such as the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (French acronym ADHOC) or the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (French acronym LICADHO), ever since their creation, have shown an ability to make a common front with the anti-establishment movements in the post-UN history of Cambodia. These social movements will peak again in 2013-2014, with the garment workers' strike. How can one explain the fundamental difference between the Cambodian NGOs and the big Romanian NGOs?

First, the Cambodian NGOs refused the paternalist attitude of the UNTAC from the very beginning and were even having open contentious relations with the latter. This was the first step towards building a form of independence. But this was not enough. These activists, just like some local Buddhist figures, would invent a Cambodian tradition of the rule of law based on the notion of justice (Poulligny, 2007). This fictional appropriation allows them to make independent claims about human rights, rule of law, etc. Finally, these NGOs' actions are aimed at helping the population in their exchanges with the state and the elites. In addition to denouncing corruption, they focus on the victims of state violence whom they provide with legal, medical and financial support. When it comes to the victims of expropriation from their lands and properties, they go as far as to bring them a roof and food provisions. This is a big issue as a surface area of more than 2 million hectares was subject to dispossession by the state since 1993, giving rise to violent conflicts (see this history on interactive maps Great Cambodian Giveaway, Visualizing Land Concessions over Time on the LICADHO website). Several neighborhoods in Phnom Penh are chronically enraged by the elite-led dispossession, while the imprisoned activists receive help from these maverick NGOs.

While, in general, the normalization operated by the NGOs is a type of global and abstract standardization, the Cambodian NGOs are still making local claims. Their agenda is built on local issues. Hence, their integration in the social movements which regularly shake this country. It is in the name of impartiality that the big Romanian NGOs refuse to get involved in social movements. The 'each person has the right to speak' equidistant attitude pairs well with the new advocacy methods. But in a world where power relations are both complex and increasingly inflexible, this position is utopian. Moreover, this position makes difficult even impossible any solidarity with the population.

This detour through the Cambodian case provides many lessons. As opposed to Cambodian NGOs, Romanian organizations claiming to represent the civil society were not able to appropriate

democratization and the rule of law. As for their connections to the social movements, they are only formal if not altogether contentious. Notwithstanding, Romanian history provides its own example of a revolution that succeeded in bringing together the people and part of the bourgeoisie. This was the 1848 revolution, responsible for the birth of Romania as a nation-state. And some of its main figures came from the small village of Roșia Montană.

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