

NEGOTIATING ROMA IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY URBAN ROMANIA:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

Radhika Gajjala, Advisor

This dissertation is a critical ethnography of the Roma ethnic minority in post-communist Romania within the socio-economic and political context of the country's post-accession to the European Union. The focus broadly is on the identity negotiation of the Roma minority in Romanian urban space. To this end, I explore Roma communicative practices in capital city of Bucharest. I examine the urban intercultural contact zones that represent Roma-non Roma relations and interactions. I draw on the productive "travelling" postcolonial theories and translate them into an examination of the Roma minority in Romanian physical space. My ethnography is informed by postcolonial theoretical frameworks that challenge the seemingly dichotomous colonizer/colonized relation. I look at discursive practices among Roma individuals suggesting alternative epistememes to allow for a nuanced understanding of the Roma-non Roma encounter. My methods include in-depth interviews, participant observation, and direct observation. The personal narratives of the 35 participants involved in this study emphasize a range of identity negotiation patterns. These reveal in turn complex, interrelated configurations of internalized oppression, passing, and hybridity that make possible both resistance and conformity to the dominant cultural production of the Gypsy Other. This research is an attempt to produce a constructive impact on policy and practice and therefore addresses the urgent need for critical, responsible inquiry that explores the diversity of Romani experience.

For Lia, whose unconditional love and prayers are always companions during my  
Journey.

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## Negotiating Roma Identity in Contemporary Urban Romania:

### An Ethnographic Study

#### INTRODUCTION

Throughout my teenage years in Bucharest, I remember how each time I would see *Gypsies*<sup>1</sup> on the buses, metro or trams I got on, in the shops I entered, at the secondary school I attended, at the farmer's market, at our parish's church, or simply on the streets I walked on, I would look at them differently than I would look at any other Romanian passers-by. I would look at them by either automatically activating a sort of defensive perception mechanism or simply by ignoring their presence in the landscape, sometimes three or four feet near me. However, I subsequently realized that the ignoring mechanism was just another "self-protective" device that would reassure against any possible interaction with them in the first place. I was not fully aware of, and better said, at that time I had no urgent need to ask myself how I had acquired such ways of seeing, of looking at, *Gypsies*. Looking back critically, I became aware that these mechanisms of interacting with Roma<sup>2</sup> were an outcome of the Roma identity representations delineated by the discursive practices among mainstream Romanian population groups and by Romanian social institutions. My research endeavor is an attempt to unlearn these privileged ways of seeing the Roma and, above all, a humble attempt of reverse mirroring, of seeing myself through their ways of seeing me, of perceiving our interactions through their ways of negotiating Roma versus non-Roma relationships and interactions.

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<sup>1</sup>The term "Roma" is generally preferred by Roma activists as ethnic identity designation in opposition to "Gypsy," which is the generally pejorative or exoticizing label used by the dominant outgroup populations (Vermeersch, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> There are two different spellings of the term "Roma," namely "Roma" and "Rroma" (with two r's); for the sake of consistency, I will use the former throughout the study.



The ambitious prospect of the European Union enlargement became a significant part of the whirling global transformation of our world, where individuals are increasingly facing the encounter of numerous cultural differences. As such, cultural, national, ethnic, religious identities are not any longer static entities but complex, protean discursive constructs, continuously open to reconstruction, renegotiation, and even contestation. In 1994, the well-known anti-communist dissident, public intellectual and former president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel (1995), eloquently traced the political tasks and prospects lying before a world that had witnessed major historical events in the second half of the twentieth century, most notably the collapse of the colonial hegemony and of communism:

In today's multicultural world, the truly reliable path to coexistence, to peaceful coexistence and creative cooperation, must start from what is at the root of all cultures and what lies infinitely deeper in human hearts and minds than political opinion, convictions, antipathies, or sympathies: it must be rooted in self-transcendence. Transcendence as a hand reached out to those close to us, to foreigners, to the human community, to all living creatures, to nature, to the universe; transcendence as a deeply and joyously experienced need to be in harmony even with what we ourselves are not, what we do not understand, what seems distant from us in time and space, but with which we are nevertheless mysteriously linked because, together with us, all this constitutes a single world.

Transcendence as the only real alternative to extinction. (p. 49)

This sought after intercultural identity project is, however, still in an incipient, almost ideal, state as the phenomenon of the European Union extension turns out to be more

complex than expected. This status quo is mainly prompted by the challenge of the rising nationalism and ethnic clashes within the European Union newer member states pertaining to the former communist block, such as Romania and Bulgaria. In addition, the boundaries of cultural or ethnic identities have transcended the domestic background of these countries to represent real challenges within the larger economic, political, and social context of the established member states, such as France and Italy.

The particular geo-political condition embodied by the idea of the European Union enlargement (which also implies readjustments or major shifts in dominant systems of belief of the newer member states) constitutes a particularly challenging research context for the critical exploration of social identity markers, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and class. The construction, negotiation, and contestation of these identity markers are generally known to be influenced by political and economic decisions, value systems, goals, and needs of ideologies in power.

Informed mainly by feminist postcolonial scholarship, and relying on the methodological frameworks of critical ethnography, this research addresses the knowledge production and, more specifically, the discursive formations of identity of Roma ethnic minority in contemporary Romania. At the same time, the engagement with the intricacies of such forms of knowledge production is to be necessarily anchored in the larger and complex geographical, geopolitical, and historical specificities of global power and culture of current modernities, namely, the European Union enlargement. The scope of this study is thus to address critically Roma communicative practices mirroring their negotiation of identity in urban areas of Romania, where there is a higher incidence of Roma- Gadjo (*Gadjo* translates as Non-Roma: Romanian) relations and interactions, and

where presence of Roma individuals is expectedly more heterogeneous. The objectives of the present study are informed by two main research questions:

- 1) *What are the specificities of the way Roma people in urban zones in Romania negotiate their identity within the context of their interactions with the dominant population?*
- 2) *What are the discursively resistance mechanisms employed by Roma individuals against Roma identity representations circulated within dominant/mainstream discourse?*

Why would Roma minority in contemporary Romania, a South-Eastern European country, be deemed as particular for critical analysis? One must not forget, in this sense, that, despite Roma diasporic presence in the United States, Canada, and Australia, the largest numbers of Roma people are present within the borders of the enlarged Europe, and particularly within Central and South Eastern European countries. These countries are the newest members of the European Union. More specifically, Romania includes the largest Roma ethnic minority compared to the rest of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Within an increasing globalized context, major geopolitical shifts are more likely to affect already subaltern populations than dominant groups. During the last ten to fifteen years, Roma from Central and Eastern Europe, regarded as “a Third World people shut out from the European affluence that surrounds them,” have been subjected to an unusually high degree of attention by Western European countries (Scheffel, 2004, p. 6). The reason for this scrutiny is that this minority living in large numbers in the newer member countries is representing an alarming “source of post-enlargement immigration” to these Western European countries (p. 6). Roma are also an exceptional case because of

their distinctive marginality, “the central theme in the Romani experience” (Barany, 2002, p. 2). The uniqueness of the Roma is motivated by the fact that they are viewed as a “transnational, non-territorially based people who do not have a home state to provide a haven or extended protection to them” (p. 2). The status of Roma people – a nationless minority in the world – is generally perceived as inherently diasporic, continuously in dispersion. Several aspects of Roma people, which Strand and Marsh (2005) summed up as lack of a nation state, a territory, a holy book, or of a religion of “their own,” complicate the discursive cultural boundaries constructed around the conception of an immovable and immutable (ethnic) identity. This calls for particularly challenging critical engagement with the negotiation of Romani identity and thus for theoretical frameworks, which are ready to question and deconstruct such discursive boundaries that are breeding grounds for marginalization, exclusion, and discrimination.

## CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Re-Presenting the Roma*

A plethora of academic literature has been written about Roma people, from the beginnings of the Romani Studies by the creation of the Gypsy Lore Society in Liverpool at the end of the nineteenth century to the present day research— many of which pertain to the social sciences realm. With no pretense of an exhaustive overview of scholarly works on Romani culture, I will briefly underscore some of the aspects common and recurrent within research on Roma that several scholars warn against (Guy, 2001; Incirlioglu, 2006; Kende, 2000; Marsh, 2007; Olomofofe, 2007; Strand & Marsh, 2006; Tebbutt & Saul, 2004). These aspects ultimately foster the emergence of negative perceptions of Romani identity and perpetuate prejudiced scholarship.

A major problem confronting the research on Roma is the essentializing manner in which Roma cultural differences are perceived as a given, independent from various contingencies, and thus as a barrier against the creative and enriching co-habitation of Roma and non-Roma individuals. Referring to the issue of “cultural boundaries,” often brought to attention within scholarly writings aiming at understanding Romani existence, Incirlioglu (2006) argues that, though it is logical to assert that cultural differences create boundaries between Roma and non-Roma, it is nevertheless misleading and even dangerous to consider cultural boundaries in isolation:

There is an unfortunate tendency to read cultural “lightly” as ideological, voluntary or elective on the part of the Gypsies, somehow detached from economic, political and legal conditions, and outside historical context. [...] if it is

Gypsies' culture that causes their troubles, then they are to be blamed for their conditions. (p. 195)

Marsh (2007) points to two phenomena appearing in research on the Roma people. The first is the construction of *Gypsies* in the imagination of the observer/ researcher, which is analogous to the expression "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." The second phenomenon is the consistent recurrence, more or less explicit, in the research findings of a set of behavioral attributes of the Roma, which are presented under the guise of ethnic or cultural terms, and which help maintain a biased, essentialized outsider-like image of Romani identity. Unfortunately, this recurrence becomes an a priori set of expectations and criteria to identify and understand Gypsies, which contaminate subsequent studies.

Perceived through the biased and uncritical lens of social inclusion and citizenship paradigm (Acton, 2006; Marsh, 2007), which is visibly informed by dominant socio-cultural and political context, the Roma people under scrutiny in these scholarly works are labeled as "social problem" or "challenges." More than often, such research stresses the urgency for implementation of policies aimed at integrating Roma into the main society and changing them to fit the dominant matrix, with the seemingly humanistic objective to put an end to their social exclusion.

In this sense, Acton (2006), referring specifically to post-communist Eastern and Central Europe, reveals and criticizes the enduring stereotypical and racist knowledge paradigms present in works of apparently empirically-based social science. One such example is the 2002 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report "Avoiding the Dependency Trap." The report was based on random sample surveys of Roma individuals and it employed a rather uncritical and unconvincing thesis according to which "Roma

are caught in a ‘dependency trap,’” since they are ”over-reliant on state benefits, which sap their will to stand on their own two feet” (Acton, 2006, p. 31). The report also claims that the official use of Romani language as well as Romani political and religious movements are irrelevant and proposes in the end some obviously prejudiced recommendations (e.g., providing the Roma population with food stamps and vouchers instead of paying social security and child benefits in cash, so that they will not waste the money on alcohol and cigarettes).

Acton’s (2006) epistemological analysis clearly points to the restraining and prescriptive nation-state ideology as the underpinning for such racist knowledge and, in particular, to the nationalist discourses that ignore the construction of nations by arbitrary territorial ethnic *majorities*. The danger represented by such biased scholarship, which is informed by conventional ideology perpetuating misconceptions about the Roma, is that this can be easily perceived as “a foundational part of the international knowledge base for years to come,” and it could consequently have disastrous impacts on the way Roma-related policies are designed (p. 30). Challenging such conventional wisdom calls for empirical and historical investigation, which reflects the lived experience of Roma peoples and leads to an understanding of the social processes shaping Roma: non-Roma relations.

To the extent that academic research has a decisive impact on policy and practice, this study aims at addressing the urgent need for critical, responsible inquiry that explores the diversity of the Romani experience in various regional contexts, and helps dismantle the homogenized, oversimplified representation of Roma identity and experience that only further marginalizes and discriminates against Roma in Europe. The study can be

beneficial because it represents a critical research resource that has the capacity to help develop genuinely informed European policy-making about the Roma that is not generalized, but takes into consideration the particular contexts of member countries. Individual identity narratives and individual perceptions about the dynamics of social interaction with dominant Romanian population, expressed by participants in this study, may be a welcome addition to future political projects in Romania.

*In Search for Answers*

Why my own interest in this research? Of particular relevance to my quest for answers in the ethnography of Roma identity production, and in particular to my location as ethnographer, is the extrapolation I would like to make of some of the considerations of feminist epistemology and philosophy of science in relation to the role of values and interests in scientific inquiry.

Since sciences are generally regarded as the final arbiters of knowledge about all aspects of society (including matters of women's issues, gender, class, race, technology, and so forth) there is the justifiable need for feminist science scholars to explain the way moral and social values influence the knowledge produced by the sciences (Potter, 2006). In contrast to views that social values and interests (understood as biases) would spoil the content of good scientific research, such as the stage of hypothesis testing, and that science is value-free, feminists attempt to demonstrate that social values and interests can "enter the 'content' of good scientific work – also referred to as 'the context of justification'" (Potter, 2006, p. 7). To better understand this, one should draw clear distinctions among the context of discovery, the context of justification, and the social uses of the findings of scientific work. While the social uses of scientific results can be



dictated by a range of values and interests, and while the context of discovery presupposes the actual circumstances (including personal, commercial, and social values and interests) underpinning the construction of hypothesis, the context of justification represents the procedures that confirm or disconfirm a hypothesis (Potter, 2006).

Feminists offer analyses of objectivity that constitute good scientific work and are as well “compatible with feminist values” (p. 8), and it is in this sense that social values and interests can operate at the level of the context of justification.

At the same time, feminists argue that knowledge is socially produced, it is not created in epistemic isolation by individuals, but it is “situated”- produced and maintained by epistemic communities (“collections of knowing individuals, each depending upon the others in many ways,” Potter, 2006, p. 15). Consequently, knowers learn, hold, and share, tacitly and explicitly, the values, beliefs, and interests of the social and epistemic communities to which they belong. Feminists thus aim to investigate how and when social assumptions about gender, race, class or other socio-political categories that are widely held within these communities, influence the context of justification.

Wylie (cited by Potter, 2006) argues that particular social locations and standpoints that knowers/scientists hold can provide them with an epistemic advantage in dealing with different contexts of justification; utilizing a gender lens in a domain informed by gender assumptions can help to identify the assumptions about gender that could jeopardize the objectivity of hypotheses. And, of course, sometimes, the same gender lens might prove epistemologically irrelevant to other domains.

Before translating these considerations to the focus of my research, it is also necessary to review the distinction made by Potter (2006), drawing on Wylie and

Harding's theoretical work, between social location and standpoint. Social locations are determined by how society orders the relations among people (which are informed by socio-political categories such as gender, race, economic status or class, religion, national origin, and so forth). In this sense, sub-categories or intersections of these socio-political categories, for example, "gay," or "Irish Catholic," stand for social locations. Standpoint is, on the other hand, the outcome of analysis by a group of people who have a particular social location in common, and it occurs specifically when individuals from a subordinate social location "analyze the conditions of their lives and engage in political struggle to change them" (p. 26).

Feminists argue that employing more democratic knowledge procedures is a must in revealing the generally shared assumptions that traditional standards of objectivity fail to identify, and it is the standpoints of marginalized social locations that can genuinely enhance the objectivity of scientific work. For instance, standpoints that scrutinize "dominant accounts of nature and of the social world" can spot "hidden androcentric, Eurocentric, or class-based assumptions" (Potter, 2006, p. 28). Also, the experiences and lives of marginalized social locations represent enriching research projects, for they provide different scientific problems and research agendas from those circulated within the dominant framework. Consequently, these particular conditions informing the context of discovery and the context of justification will lead to less distorted science.

I must admit that it is dangerously easy to fall prey to widely held assumptions about different socio-political categories that are inscribed by structures of power informing the dominant discourse at a certain time in a given social community. These assumptions are sometimes so deeply seated in our collective memory that they operate at

the unconscious level of perception, and turn our research agenda into mere reiteration of epistemologies accepted and promoted by dominant framework.

I can now trace back the beginning point of my research journey into the negotiation of Roma identity to the genuine personal need to learn more about the Roma current culture and Roma standpoints (at that time I was, of course, using the term “activism”). Why the personal need to learn more? Because of my own experience of self-identity formation in Romania, a country where the Roma people represent the second ethnic/national minority and also have been continuously facing marginalization and social, political and economic discrimination. It is also because I belong to the dominant population. When I looked further into feminist cultural studies works with which I became familiar during my graduate studies, I began to realize, gradually but surely, that I had been very often taking for granted, or worse, I had been simply indifferent or numbed to the normalizing discursive practices within Romanian society that presupposed a rhetoric of othering the Roma minority, on which relies partly my own/ Romanian identity construction.

In analyzing the complex relationship between feminism and social transformation, Butler (2004) problematizes the category of the subject in relation to the feminist researcher who seeks social transformation by the means of her research projects. Butler gives the example of Gloria Anzaldua who faces multiple subjectivities, both within dominant and marginalized groups, and who argues that the source of our capacity for social transformation is located in “our capacity to mediate between worlds, to engage in cultural translation, and to undergo, through the experience of language and

community, the diverse set of cultural connections that make us who we are” (Butler, 2004, p. 228). In this sense, the category of subject should be rather multiple than unitary.

Moreover, Butler echoes Anzaldua’s advice that we should “stay at the edge of what we know, to put our own epistemological certainties into question, and through that risk and openness to another way of knowing and of living in the world to expand our capacity to imagine the human” (p. 228). Drawing also on Spivak’s notion of fractured rather than multiple subjects, Butler underscores the delicate delineation between listening to the voices of the disenfranchised and representing those voice in one’s work. This presumed demarcation is likely to usher in the danger of assuming the voicelessness of subaltern subjects, and appropriating and colonizing their position.

Spivak (1994) criticizes the assimilation of the Subaltern Other by way of researchers’ ethnocentrism so that, eventually, the Subaltern’s voice, despite the opportunity to be heard, runs the risk of being filtered through the dominant discourse. She thus warns against the danger of establishing an ethnocentric Subject by “selectively defining an Other” (p. 87). Considering this critical scholarship on the researcher’s subjectivity, I must be inquisitive whether my own assumptions in representing the Roma perspectives and also the transformative goal of my research may be closely linked to the dominant paternalistic discourse of the “enlightenment” of the Roma that calls for “our” efforts to help the Roma integrate into mainstream, dominant society.

*From Online Ethnography to Offline Engagement with Roma Identity*

My research endeavor related to the Roma people initially started with an intercultural communication ethnographic study aiming at investigating Roma online presence, more specifically Roma community and identity in a Yahoo! Group discussion

forum. The Yahoo! Group included self-ascribed Roma individuals as well as several non-Roma persons. The discussion content showed that a significant number of members were from Central and Eastern Europe, or originally from Eastern Europe but living in Western Europe, The United States, or Australia. The main rationale of the study was the need to acknowledge Roma groups/individuals and their diverse voices, and hopefully to contribute to a more coherent and demystified international perception of the Roma minority. Even though the starting point seemed to me helpful in fostering the opportunity for a research project addressing the perspectives of marginalized Roma groups and their experiences, other assumptions surfaced, which could have easily hijacked my research plan. These assumptions were related to the role of my own range of social locations and standpoints in this research endeavor.

In order to start investigating the negotiation of subject formation among the Roma people in contemporary Romania, I first needed to critically consider the way I negotiate my own subjectivity formation in the context of this research. I was given the chance to spot some cracks in my own epistemological certainties, though not under the most desired of circumstances, during a Q&A session at a conference, where I presented the intercultural communication study on the Roma online community mentioned earlier. I easily assumed that, through my ethnographic study, I was to represent the voice of a segment of the Roma population, namely the Yahoo! group whose postings I analyzed.

My activism along with the equally assumed empowering nature of the Internet would lead to the uncritical, erroneously comfortable conclusion that the Internet unquestionably provides venues for the construction of an empowered diasporic Roma identity. Although I acknowledged the digital divide, I argued that critical scholarship has

to recognize nevertheless the increasing diasporic Romani presence (activist-oriented, network, community-oriented and so on), like many other marginalized groups in online spaces.

In my context of discovery, I was simply ignoring a whole system of power relations in which access to cultural and economic capital makes all the difference between the privileged versus underprivileged among subaltern groups. At the same time, I was inclined to emphasize an uncritical conflation of actual identitarian diversity of Roma peoples as an essentializing and homogenizing ethnicity-based diasporic community, which seemed to be empowering for the Roma. However, in so doing, I may have overlooked the voices of those who do not have access to the Internet and who do not necessarily agree with or have never thought about such an imagined diasporic community project.

In her postcolonial feminist ethnography of diasporic South-Asian women e-spaces, Gajjala (2004) takes on the discussion about the offline contexts of access and hegemony that inform and shape online practices. As a critical researcher, one has to be cautious about the “various celebratory discourses about ‘ICTs’ as empowering to all” (p. 2). Given the fact that the electronic revolution is circumscribed to a significant degree by imperialist knowledge production, one must not assume that the virtual communities created by postcolonials represent necessarily “communities of resistance to hegemonic structures of westernization and modernity” (Gajjala, 2004, p. 14). Drawing attention to the hegemonizing/ colonizing conditions of the use of Internet communication, Gajjala warns that hegemony is not simply monological discourse but works by means of inoculation of contradictions precisely towards their neutralization. She further urges that

politics of enunciation in diasporic e-spaces (such as issues of appropriation and silencing, marginalization, and othering based on race, gender, class, geographical location) should be more critically dealt with. The author refers specifically to the elite or relatively privileged diasporic postcolonials (for example the diasporic South Asian women within the virtual postcolonial spaces) who, even as the “Other” of the Western world, are themselves part of the hegemonic sphere. Their voices may be easily and deceptively labeled as representative of the subaltern populations located within the physical boundaries of the Third World. Hence there exists the risk of appropriating and silencing the counter-narratives of outsiders who do not belong to bourgeois westernized postcolonial locations.

By the same token, Nakamura (2002), joining scholars who critically assess the Internet potential for social transformation and the way race gets articulated online, considers the Internet as a postcolonial discursive practice informed by the Western global capitalistic project. In this practice, stable raced images of the Other are to be understood as “necessary symptoms of the postcolonial condition,” as well as solutions that satisfy the need and desire of Western users for the “native” in modern times, i.e. familiar images stuck “in a different time and a different place” (Nakamura, p. 7). For example, Gajjala, Zhang and Dako-Gyeke (2010) underscore how easily colonial discourses about oppressed third-world women are reinstated by the sites of activism online, embedded in discourses of development, through marketing techniques that provide a venue for products made by third-world women to be sold online. These techniques rely on producing a third-world oppressed Other liberated by “the acts of

consumption of the urbanized Global and Multicultural Self,” which actually reproduce “racist and westernized patriarchies” (p. 71).

In this sense, Nakamura (2002) employs the concept of cybertype which describes “the distinctive ways that the Internet propagates, disseminates, and commodifies images of race and racism” (p. 3). The purportedly posthuman, fragmentary, fluid selves hyped by the internet discourse may too easily and uncritically create a liberating and empowering paradigm. Nakamura ironically draws attention back to the more disquieting circumstances of the offline already fluid, fragmentary selves represented by “actual marginalized peoples, which is not nearly so romantic a formulation” (p. xvi). She argues in this sense that, representing just a shift from actual to virtual realm, these online fluid identities “are no less subject to cultural hegemonies, rules of conduct, and regulating cultural norms than they are ‘solid’” (p. 4).

As Miller and Slater (2000) explain, freedom online, like off-line, is always normative and constructed, and it is not wise to think that the internet produces liberated, new, and fluid identities. It is thus of fundamental importance to understand how intricate everyday practices and socio-cultural hierarchies contribute to the shaping of online identities, hierarchies, and processes of inclusion and exclusion (gendered, raced, classed online subjectivities). It is precisely for this reason that, as Nakamura (2002) advises, in order to start envisaging a possibility for a liberating virtual ‘posthuman,’ we must “ground critique in the lived realities of the human, in all their particularity and specificity” (p. 7). Likewise, connecting these arguments to my own research interest, I consider necessary a critical ethnographic engagement with Romani identity in an offline environment before a subsequent investigation of Romani presence online.



*The Roma in Central Eastern Europe*

Before presenting the theoretical foundations that inform this research endeavor and the methodological tools they entail, it is necessary to consider several socio-historical and political-economic aspects that have a determinant character in circumscribing the current situation of Roma people, with particular reference to the context of the enlarged European Union. Kymlicka (2000) points to the frequent conceptualization of the Roma in Eastern and Central Europe as a mixture between an immigrant minority and a national minority, due to the lack of a connection to an external homeland.

Since their arrival in Europe in the 14th century from north-western India (mainly motivated by war and economic hardships), this forcibly nomadic people has been continuously “politically, socially, culturally, and economically” marginalized by the dominant populations in the region (Barany, 2002, p. 2). As the most numerous ethnic minority in Eastern and Central Europe, the Roma represent a highly heterogeneous population that can be classified according to a range of criteria like “their language, lifestyle, boundaries of endogamy, professional specialization, duration of settlement in their respective countries, and so on” (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001, p. 36).

However, while, as tokens of identity, as a whole, these categories make up a “full picture of the current state of the wider Roma community,” this picture is more likely a “snapshot, valid at the time it was taken but not necessarily true of the past and likely to change in future as conditions alter over generations” (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001, p. 36). For instance, while the main models found within the multitude of Roma groups in Romania have been defined by “the former division of Gypsies into different categories

during their period of slavery in the Danubian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia,” more specifically into slaves of the crown (Layashi), who, in exchange of an annual tax were allowed to travel and maintain thus a nomadic status, and slaves of the monasteries and boyars (Vatrashi), who were settled, domestic slaves, the Vatrashi lost, in time, their determining attributes as a group and “have merged into a large metagroup community where regional or occupational traits are still noticeable” (p. 37).

Discussing the history of the treatment policies assigned to the Gypsy minority by Central and Eastern European states, Csepeli and Simon (2004), draw on Barany’s (2002) four-stage model, and underline four political systems that impacted Gypsies’ existence in Europe: “the policies of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century empires, the policies of the authoritarian nation-states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the policies of the socialist states; and the policies of the democracies following the political changes of 1989” (p. 130).

Guy (2001) acknowledges ethnicity as a consequence of a social process and stresses the overlapping ethnic and social aspects of population segments in society. In this sense, he emphasizes the fluctuation between social and ethnic dimensions of the Romani identity in relation to the direction of Roma-related policies and the perception of the Roma by majority non-Roma people during different historical periods. It is thus argued that the social rather than the ethnic aspect (most specifically, the role of their labor power) was largely the measure which delineated the nature of Roma identity and out-group treatment of the Roma within the different socio-economic and political contexts of eighteenth century Western and Eastern Europe:

The underlying difference in determining state policy towards Roma was the structural demands of the host economies in which they lived and the extent and manner in which their labor power was required. Consequently, the development of capitalism in West, where Roma were regarded as ‘unproductive vagrants’, led to legislation ‘to limit their numbers’ or expel them, while to the contrary in the East, there were attempts to settle Roma in order to make better use of them. (p. 7)

Throughout the more recent history of the twentieth century, there have been three shifts in the approaches to the Roma identity— from an emphasis on the ethnic identity before and during the World War II, to a social dimension of identity under the communist regimes in Europe, and back to the ethnic dimension during the post-communist transition to market economy (Guy, 2001). Thus, while the primary emphasis on the ethnic dimension of their identity led to the extermination of half a million Roma in the Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War, the identification of the Roma as a social group by the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe turned them into a vast pool of unskilled labor force much needed in the state enterprises:

In spite of the theoretical trappings of Marxism-Leninism, this policy resembled that of the Habsburg monarchs two centuries earlier in attempting to assimilate Roma in order to turn them into productive workers. [...] The program of rapid industrialization at the heart of the Soviet-inspired command economies required an almost unlimited supply of unskilled manual labor to fuel it. (p. 9)

The communist regimes in Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe engaged in a consistent policy of forced assimilation of the Roma minority. This was done as a main

measure in the ambitious goal of the party to modernize and change the life of all backward groups who, according to the party, had been exploited during the previous capitalist systems. As a result, efforts were made to improve levels of education and qualification of Roma people, among other ethnic groups, since the communist governments viewed school as the main socialization agent. It was this push for education that some Roma undertook that made possible the creation of Roma intelligentsia and leadership (Guy, 2001, p. 11). Among the incentive measures for schooling, the state provided Roma children with free teaching materials, meals, and clothing. As a matter of fact, during this political period, the rate of unemployment in the Roma communities decreased (Csepeli & Simon, 2004).

Though such communist policies brought about, to a certain limited extent, social integration and education prospects for the Roma, the reverse side of this social shift was the gradual downplay and, in many cases, the abandonment of Roma identity, which also encompassed their traditional craftwork-related occupational categories and divisions (such as Rudars, craftsmen making wooden objects; Silversmiths, working with precious and semiprecious metals; Caldarars, craftsmen dealing with the processing of copper; Ceaunari, craftsmen who process nonferrous metals such as aluminum and iron and make pots, pans, cauldrons or other containers for cooking). Therefore, many Roma craftsmen lost their independence as small-scale crafts producers and traders, and, at the same time, this shift led in time to the deskilling of many craftsmen (Guy, 2001).

The social and political measures meant to sedentarize and quickly integrate the Roma into society (e.g., confiscating horses and carts in order to settle the nomadic members of the Roma community; closing down Gypsy theatres, banning the use of

Romani language and other expressions of ethnic identity), and “the attempts to reduce differences in social, educational and cultural status between Roma and non-Roma by coercion” (Csepeli & Simon, 2004, p. 132) triggered negative results relative to the outside perception of the Roma, along with the in-group cultural identity devaluation. The expensive price that the Roma people had to pay for educational and social success was therefore the very loss of ethnic identity and separation from community.

One of the reasons non-Roma increasingly began to disdain and disrespect Roma communities was the majority population’s perception of a supposed tendency of Roma individuals to develop “dysfunctional strategies of coping such as ‘learned helplessness’ and strive for instant gratification” (Csepeli & Simon, 2004, p. 132). Viewed as a threat to the future development of society, the Roma high birth rate was also a starting point for the negative perception of the Roma community.

The post-communist transition to liberal democracy and market economy, characterized, among others, by high levels of unemployment of the unskilled workers and by the gradual absolution of the state from its social policy obligations and responsibilities towards citizens, signaled a third shift in the approach to the Roma identity, i.e. from the former emphasis on the Romani social identity to a stress on their ethnic identity (Guy, 2001).

Unfortunately, as Kende (2000) explains: “the stereotype of the pampered but unworthy Gypsy took root in the best days of socialism and has recurred ever since” (p. 194). After the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe and during the transition to a market economy, prejudice against Gypsies turned into strong anti-Roma attitudes that manifested in waves of collective violence against Roma communities

during the early 1990's (Barany, 2002; Csepeli & Simon, 2004; Kende, 2000; Report of Human Rights Abuse of Roma in Eastern Europe, 2001). The harsh socio-economic transition triggered significantly lower rates of primary education among Roma children and higher rates of unemployment among Roma unskilled workers compared to the rest of the society (Report of Human Rights Abuse of Roma in Eastern Europe, 2001).

Discrimination resulting from the representation of their ethnicity is the main cause of Roma marginalization and extreme poverty, and can be identified in particular areas such as the field of housing. Romani settlements often lack basic utilities such as electricity and running water, and Roma people have poor access to medical care, employment, goods and services – they are often banned from entering shops, restaurants and other public spaces (Report of Human Rights Abuse of Roma in Eastern Europe, 2001). The existence of racially segregated schools and classes constitute a suggestive example as to the breadth of discriminatory practices within Eastern Europe.

The determinant factors that made segregated schooling possible are the deep-seated anti-Romani racism, the indifference of the educational systems to cultural diversity, and the lack of effective protections against discrimination and equal opportunity policies (“Stigmata”–Report on Segregated Schooling of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, 2004). Simply said, Roma were the primary “losers of the subsequent transition” (Kende, 2000, p. 198).

A relatively positive perspective is offered during the transition by the gradual appearance of civil society and nongovernmental organizations for the protection of the rights for self-assertion of ethnic minorities (Kende, 2000, Stroschein, 2002). However, according to the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) reports on Roma minority in

Eastern Europe, the present situation of the Roma community remains dire within a “society itself corrupted by racism” (2002).

*Roma Identity Politics in an Enlarged European Union*

In the larger context of the increasing importance of ethnicity in the politics of Central and Eastern Europe, Vermeersch (2003) argues that the discursive dimensions of politics exert a strong impact on the process of Romani identity formation. Transposing the conceptualization of group identity as the product of “group making projects” or collective action from social movement theory to the area of ethnicity research, he underscores the role of activists, organizations, and political institutions in maintaining ethnic groups and, more specifically, the role of Roma ethnic leaders in the production of Roma ethnic identity.

Whereas Barany(2002) presents the poor mobilization of the Roma as the outcome of a lack of a strong Roma ethnic identity, Vermeersch (2003), on the contrary, argues that the ethnic heterogeneity of the Roma, and for that matter competing understandings of Romani identity, are caused by a “failing ethnic mobilization” (p. 881). Conceptualization and promotion of Romani identity is thus also conditioned by factors of political organization. Referring to the geographical context of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Vermeersch identifies three distinct group identities framed by Roma activists. The first frame advances the conceptualization of the Roma as a non-territorial nation, and activists who subscribe to this definition reclaim a common history and origin. As a result, they argue that Romani communities throughout Europe, though not connected through territory, are linked through blood ties, common culture, and history. This first frame is highly informed by the transnational discourse and the practice of human rights

protection, and though it has been successful in raising awareness about problems facing the Roma communities, it did not actually attract the Romani population due to the gap between the international level and local needs of the Roma.

Informed by the discourse of national minority rights, the second definition frames Romani identity as a national identity, and in this case Roma activists anticipate increased support and collaboration with other national minorities and non-Romani activists for minority rights. However, the main issue with this framing is that it is not an outcome of a genuine concern for the status of the Roma but is rather more relevant for the context of the negotiation of the relationships between the European Union and candidate countries, or the newly accepted members.

Finally, the third frame defines Roma identity as an ethno-class, which underscores the similarity between an ethnic group and a class situated in a very low position in the economic and social hierarchy. In this third case, the activists downplay the association with the Roma ethnic identity, and place more emphasis on the poor social conditions of the Roma. Unfortunately, their attempts of achieving solidarity with the non-Roma low class population often fail. Vermeersch's study points thus to the fact that, besides external institutional and cultural representations of Romani identity, one also has to take into consideration the strategies for Roma identity production employed by Roma elites, and in this sense whether Romani political mobilization has a real impact upon the public self-definition of the Roma.

The imperative mission of making policies on minority issues in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe represents one of the most salient concerns the European Union has to tackle. In this sense, the EU has attempted to change the former communist



European states' policies related to minorities by "explicitly linking normative pressure with membership conditionality" (Vermeersch, 2002, p. 83). It thus underscored the importance for the protection of ethnic and national minorities as a "norm and as a political precondition" for the accession of central European candidate member states and, most importantly, assumed that the introduction of comprehensive conditions for EU membership "will incite prospective members to align their policies with the standards set by the EU" (p. 83).

However, there is much controversy regarding the usefulness of the conditionality of the accession and the overall implications of applying specific measures for minority protection (Checkel, 2000; Liebich, 1998; Memedova, 2004; Scheffel, 2004; Stroschein, 2002; Vermeersch, 2002). There is the suspicion that the post-communist countries' concern for developing minority policies is related more to enhancing the countries' standing in the international community than with "remedying domestic social marginalization" (Vermeersch, 2002, p. 83). Moreover, the contradicting legislative amendments restraining the right to asylum in Western states demonstrates the fact that discrimination against the Roma reached a pan-European dimension, and also questions the determination of the EU to fight intolerance and discrimination (Barany, 2002; Scheffel, 2004).

As recommended by the European Commission's "Report on the Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union" (2004), the European Commission "should establish a coordinated structure on Roma issues to ensure the improved coherence and efficacy of its policies" (p. 3). Most importantly, the report underscores the necessity to

provide guidance to newer and prospective member states to collect data “on aspects of race and ethnicity of relevance to social inclusion” (p.3).

The relevance of Romani identity issues to governmental, NGO’s, and overall international anti-discrimination policy, is also thought to be tangible only if it is echoed by human rights activities on an everyday basis interaction with Roma (Petrova, 2005):

We have developed an expertise on the RIGHTS of Roma...but we have not developed an expertise, not even a consistent position, on ROMA: who are they, are they the same people most of the world still recognizes as “Gypsies,” what is specific about their culture, which groups are comprised in the Romani identity, what are the chief characteristics of this identity? (p. 1)

#### *A Postcolonial Theoretical Lens*

As mentioned in the rationale stated earlier, postcolonial feminism is the main theoretical framework guiding this study. This section begins with an overview of the main characteristics of postcolonial studies, next it extends the relevance of postcolonial theoretical frameworks to this research, and finally proceeds with the discussion of some of the key postcolonial theoretical concepts on which this ethnographic study draws.

As Shome and Hegde (2002) describe, postcolonial studies is positioned within the broader critical realm of cultural studies, Marxist feminist, and postmodern theory, among others. It is an interdisciplinary field whose main objective is to theorize the problematic nature of colonization and decolonization and, most importantly, the genealogies of colonial conditions and the possibility to undo or redo them.

Postcolonial cultural critique reconsiders the violent history of colonialism symbolically begun in 1492 and included slavery, oppression, millions of deaths, forced

migration and diaspora, deterritorialisation, institutionalization of racism and ethnic discrimination, destruction of local cultures and assimilation to dominant cultures. Most importantly, this history is analyzed from the perspectives of those affected by it, in an attempt to reveal its contemporary social and cultural impact, and the way it determined the configurations and power structures still circumscribing the present (Young, 2001).

Indeed, postcolonial theory came into being as colonized peoples started reflecting on both the tensioned and powerful mixture of the dominant, colonizing culture and the local experience, which turned into hybrid processes of counter-colonial resistance aiming at eroding the dominant cultural knowledge (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995). The beginnings of postcolonial critique are strongly attached to the historical fact of (Anglo)European colonialism, and postcolonial studies emerged in the aftermath of the decolonization movements after the World War II and the ensuing migrations that formed the diasporas of colonized people in metropolitan centers of colonial powers.

Nevertheless, as Shome (2002) points out, there are other forms of colonial contexts, colonialisms, and national modernities that are historically and geographically distinct, and also other diasporas (ex: American neocolonial relations with Mexico, and the Mexican diasporas in the United States) which have been acknowledged by postcolonial scholarship and which emphasize the heterogeneity of postcolonial theories.

By the same token, Young (2001) enumerates comparable struggles that lend themselves to postcolonial critique, such as the struggle of “disadvantaged ethnic minorities and impoverished classes in most countries of the world” (p. 4). This assertion

strengthens the argument that the Roma experience is also available for investigation through a postcolonial lens.

In a historicist approach to the Romani Studies tradition, Lee (2004) argues that Orientalism underpins the methodology of the Gypsyorists – scholars researching Gypsy history and culture within the Gypsy Lore Society, which was founded at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Liverpool. He shows how Gypsies /Roma are themselves constituted as subjects of the epistemic control of Gypsyorist discursive formations, (e.g., the selective amnesia about Romani history), by Gypsyorist scholars. He underscores the chance provided by postcolonial theorizing to “uncover and re-present amnesiac discourses embedded in Gypsyorism” (p. 31).

Lee’s (2004) argument about the constitution of Roma people as colonial subjects has a high relevance to my current study. Though there has been no empire involved in the occupation of a colonial land in the case of the Roma in the sense that they have never been colonized the same way as peoples in colonial territories, the Roma can still be seen as colonial subjects, without a colony, being “victims of imposed discursive (mis)representations and structural inequalities, marginalized, patronized, exploited, stripped of language, culture, dignity” (p. 32).

Further making the case for employing a postcolonial theoretical lens when analyzing Romani experience, Lee (2004) brings into discussion Edward Said’s initial notion of “travelling theory,” the danger that theories, when transferred and applied to other times and circumstances, might lose their original force. Said eventually reconsidered this as “transgressive theory”: the whole point of theory and criticism is to travel and move beyond its borders, in the sense that theoretical dislocations allow a

theory the possibility of different sites and circumstances without the danger of a simplistic universalism and in ways that highlight the theory's own intrinsic tensions. To the extent that theory and criticism can be transposed to different contexts and similarly to Lee's usage of a postcolonial framework in analyzing the Roma constitution as subjects within the dominant discourse of history discipline, I believe and argue that postcolonial theory can connect different disciplinary areas. I, therefore, consider possible and welcome, in accordance to the meaning of the "transgressive theory" notion, the translation of postcolonial framework to the time and situation addressed in this study.

The commitment and attempt to "undo (and redo) the historical structures of knowledge production that are rooted in various histories and geographies of modernity" (Shome and Hegde, 2002, p. 250) provide the transformative, activist stance to postcolonial scholarship. In this sense, postcolonial studies are not a mere intellectual enterprise, since, as Schwarz (2000) cited by Shome and Hegde (2002) argues, "Western intellectual enterprise itself is fundamentally dependent on Europe's conquest and exploitation of the colonial world" (p. 4).

The aforementioned affirmation might be understood better if one considers Spivak's (1994) critique of both Foucault and Deleuze's theorizing and exposing of the power/knowledge function that constituted institutionalized epistemes and the sovereign rational subject in the West. Thus, in Foucault and Deleuze's very critique of the sovereign subject, though emphasizing the heterogeneity of power/desire/interest networks and the need for intellectuals to disclose and know the discourse of society's

Other, they “systematically ignore the question of ideology and their own implication in intellectual and economic history” (p. 66).

Postcolonial critical enterprise takes a step further than critical scholarship of poststructuralism and postmodernism, or of poststructuralist and postmodern feminism, in that it seeks to demonstrate the contingency of institutionalized knowledge, and thus to reveal how dominant, universalized epistemes are actually circumscribed by the influences of international histories, geopolitics, and colonial modernities. Postcolonial scholarship is crucial to the theorization of cultural conditions of contemporary society, since it “theorizes the geographical, geopolitical, and historical specificities of modernities within which other forms of power- such as race, sexuality, culture, class, and gender- are located” (Shome & Hegde, 2002, p. 253).

Thus, a postcolonial feminist perspective would argue, similarly to Mohanty (1984) and Spivak (1994), that issues of the dominance of the masculine subject of modernity and of the essentializing gender categories must be set against the larger international histories, geopolitics, and colonial modernities. Mohanty (1984) questions the homogeneity of Western feminisms that too often elide specific cultural differences and essentialize all women’s oppression by patriarchy as “one size fits all” European models.

The same kind of critique can be applied to the ways Roma identity is represented through essentializing discursive mechanisms, most usually as a monolithic ethnicity, whereas heterogeneity and multiplicity of Romani identity, accounted for by specific socio-cultural contexts, are dismissed. Furthermore, objecting the binary national-international and the disregard of the global in critical scholarship, postcolonial theory

locates the nation within the wider context of global power and culture. Shome (2006) underscores the need to acknowledge that “unequal global relations (of culture and economy) continually articulate the politics of gender in any local contest, and local relations are always at work in macro global processes” (p. 255). Again, this acknowledgement is valid when connecting Romani regional experiences to the wider European power structures, which inform policies and the significance of ethnic/national minorities.

The use of an interdisciplinary methodological perspective is characteristic for postcolonial research since, while embarking in postcolonial theory, one must always consider the social context from where the questions to be answered emerge. It is important to underscore the fact that postcolonial scholars engage in methodological reflexivity, given the history and legacies of established methods — methods that are themselves a part of the colonial context under critical scrutiny (Shome & Hegde, 2002). Methodological reflexivity is particularly significant in my research engagement with the discursive production and negotiation of Romani identity, given my own location as a researcher as well as a non-Roma individual.

Postcolonial scholars critically address and problematize aspects and outcomes of colonialism that extended into and also described the intricate fabric of modernity, such as national identity, Diaspora, transnationalism, marginality, resistance, race, gender, ethnicity, globalization, and so forth. The most important point is that all these experiences are studied from both the framework of dominance and resistance. I therefore consider that a postcolonial lens on these experiences can best inform the conceptual base

of the present study and thus guide the analysis of the body of data collected during fieldwork.

Theorization of identity within a postcolonial framework takes into consideration conditions such as transnationalism and international migration that prompts scholars to deconstruct and contest essentialist or universalist conceptualizations of identity. Therefore, one has to acknowledge the impossibility of separate and distinct identities, given that identities stand for multiple, relational, incomplete entities. In this sense, several figures/notions such as hybridity and diaspora, among others, form a continuum of images of spatiality that symbolize the way subaltern, marginalized identities unfold (Grossberg, 1996).

A powerful concept helping scholars to understand identities within the context of postcolonial globalization is hybridity, which emphasizes the “conflicted and multiple affiliations of diasporic groups” (Shome & Hegde, 2002, p. 266). The notion of hybridity helps us understand the subaltern identity as existing between competing identities. Grossberg (1996) overviews three figures of hybridity that postcolonial authors write about. Whereas the image of a *third space*, employed by Bhabha (1994), views subaltern identity as “unique third term literally defining an ‘in-between’ place inhabited by the subaltern (in-between the colonizer and the colonized),” images of liminality underscore the border existence of subaltern lives (Grossberg, 1996, p. 91).

Bhabha (1994) underscores the productive capacities of the condition of the third space as it makes possible the conceptualization of an international culture which does not imply “the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures,” but instead articulates the hybridity of culture (p. 38). As he explains, when exploring the third space,



we “may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves” (p. 39).

Thirdly, the image of border crossing emphasizes a postcolonial condition of continuous between-ness or border crossing characterized by mobility, uncertainty and multiplicity.

Related to hybridity, and more specifically to the condition of border crossing, the figure of diaspora signifies transnationality and emphasizes the articulation of identity to “structures of historical movements (whether forced or chosen, necessary or desired)” (Grossberg, 1996, p. 92). What is interesting about this figure is that it can be theorized as both an effect of colonialism as well as a mode of resistance to colonialism (identity is articulated through structures of affiliations and modes of belonging) (Grossberg, 1996; Shome & Hegde, 2002).

The complex nature and practice of resistance to the essentializing, monolithic representation of the colonized subject, performed through the discursive practices of the colonial power, and the possibility to achieve agency for the subaltern/post-colonial subject constitute the object of central theoretical debates among postcolonial scholars. Said’s (1978) critical work is fundamental in understanding how a non-European subject was captured within European colonialist frameworks, which defined the subject of Other and its difference, in terms of terror or lack. His concept of Orientalism, “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (p. 1), helps to explain the process by which the discursive formation of the Other emerges.

Said (1978) takes over the Foucauldian notion of disciplining discourse and equates it to Orientalism, given its power to produce, maintain and reproduce a unique version of the Orient. The Orient (the Other) exists and is discursively constituted by, and

in relation to, the Western consciousness to the extent that the West employs it as a mirror representation of whatever seems inferior and unfamiliar to itself. The author shows how, through such a discursive enterprise, Europeans greatly took advantage of the Orient/Occident dichotomy in their own identity building process.

In his overview on the rhetoric of othering, Riggins (1997) explains the different stages in the evolution of the terminology of the term Other. He points to Plato's understanding of the Other as a category of speculative thought, employed to underline the relationship between the observer/observed, but also to the modern social sciences' more restricted sense that underscores the distinction between Self/Other. Other is an integral part within discourses generated by people for the very goal of acquiring their own self-identities. It becomes a necessity in developing one's own identity, and thus it is to be considered as "a range of positions within a system of difference" (p. 4).

Likewise, the normalized discursive practices within Romanian society targeting the ethnic minorities are informed by a rhetoric of othering the Roma minority as a means for dominant groups to acquire their own self-identity. It is a convenient system of differences since "Gypsiness" becomes the repository for all kinds of negative and demeaning attributes unwanted by dominant groups. Thus, mainstream discourse would assume that Gypsies steal, are baby-snatchers, are uncivilized, lazy, dirty, and the list may continue.

At the same time, discourses of minority often reflect the negative representations assigned to minority by the dominant groups; internalized oppression is identifiable in the feelings of shame, self-blaming, or powerlessness. For instance, Rimstead's (1997) analysis of the autobiographic discourse of poor and working-class women points to a

representation of self both shameful and defiant, since it is accompanied “by the shame of being made visible and of admitting powerlessness” (pg. 249). She describes how, in their discourse, poor and working classes women might use a shameful “I” as a sign of “powerlessness and muting in the face of internalized negative definitions”, or a collective “we” that subverts the negative identity (pg. 257).

Furthermore, Fanon (1966, 1967) makes an in-depth scientific analysis of the devastating psychological impact of the colonizers’ discursive production of the Other on the colonized, showing how the colonized individuals depend on the definition given by the colonizers to the point where they begin to live in order to fulfill that definition. In a way, they become desensitized about being subjected to the colonizer’s generalized norm and also alienated from their own consciousness.

The question of agency and resistance available for the colonized subject is addressed in distinct ways by postcolonial critics. There are some who advance the possibility of a representation of the subaltern subject which appropriates agency and there are others who, on the contrary, contend that the exercise of recovering/rescuing the subaltern subject’s voice, instead of being subversive, is rather a subtler version of the colonizing discourse.

Spivak (1988) problematizes the sensitive issues of agency and of representing or giving voice to the subaltern, and argues that enterprises of recovery of the subaltern voice are impossible without turning into essentialist forms of representing the subaltern (a constructed category of the subaltern goes against the heterogeneous condition of subaltern identity). Whereas Spivak’s (1994) theorizing about the Sovereign Self and the Subjected Other is rather circumspect regarding the chances for genuine subaltern voices,

Bhabha (1994) instead argues for the existence of a resisting, transgressive position for the colonized within the very confines of the colonial discourse. He identifies this transgressive position in the re-articulation and interrogation by the native of the colonialist discourse thus denigrating its authority, in the parodical act of autocolonization performed by the native. Also, by identifying the wide range of stereotypes (the major discursive strategy in the ideological construction of otherness in the colonial discourse) assigned to the colonized, Bhabha rearticulates the colonial identity, opposing it to its inscription as the colonizer's monolithic Other.

Finally, also related to the issue of agency, is the problematic and ambivalent condition of the subject of being constructed within structures of domination and finding spaces of exerting agency — of finding ways to resist from a marginalized position. Using her own experience of struggling to maintain marginality even when living and working at the center to avoid alienation, assimilation and cooption, hooks (1990) argues that marginality, the lived experience of marginality is a “site of radical possibility,” is a space of resistance which is sustained by the remembrance of the past, a location for producing a counter-hegemonic discourse. Speaking about resistance and marginality, Minh-Ha (1990) opposes the notion of resistance that is established on immutable binaries such as center/margin or self/other, and theorizes a way of resistance by displacement, a continuous negotiation between center and margin, and a questioning of both the center and margin.

## CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

### *Decoding the Ethnographic Outlook*

In order to apply and substantiate the critical approach to identity and resistance represented by postcolonial theoretical concepts addressed in the previous chapter and thus to better grasp the complex continuum on which Roma identity is produced and negotiated, this study was grounded by qualitative inquiry. More specifically, critical ethnography constituted the methodological process that assisted me in looking at Roma personal narratives relative to the dynamics of social interaction with the dominant Romanian population.

Ethnography usually encompasses “a holistic description of cultural membership,” and it is also “textual in the dual sense that (a)writing is a key activity in all phases of field research, and (b)writing fixes cultural analysis within the dialectic of field relations worked out between researcher and cultural members” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.17). Coined by Geertz (1973), the “thick description” is the fundamental aspect of ethnography- “a process of sorting out the structures of significance and determining their social ground and import” (p. 9).

Ethnographic research explores social phenomena through the lenses of those directly involved in particular social and cultural scenes, mainly based on the interpretive perspective and also having acquired influences from Marxist, Freudian, feminist thought, critical race theory, and postcolonial ideology, among others. It is the objective of ethnographers to interpret the cultural events, patterns, symbols and meaning production of social groups, by paying attention to the temporal and spatial context in which each group is situated.

In close correspondence with the theoretical framework, this critical ethnography enterprise provided me with the appropriate methodological tools that enabled me to become a constitutive part of the environment under scrutiny and therefore to critically engage Romani experience and discourse that might collide or, on the contrary, be aligned with the established institutionalized knowledge production.

Defining the role of qualitative researchers, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) highlight “the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (p. 10). Though these have already been addressed in an earlier section, I believe that it is never enough to highlight the crucial aspect of researcher- researched relationship.

Prompted by an ethical responsibility to address and challenge conditions of inequality in a particular social realm, the critical ethnographer is contributing to “emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice” (Madison, 2005, p.5). Nevertheless, the emphasis on political aims must be complemented by the stress on ethnographer’s self-reflexivity (Gay y Blasco & Wardle, 2007; Khan, 2001; Lengel, 1998; Madison, 2005; Naples, 2000; Parameswaran, 2001; Patai, 1994).

When adopting a self-reflexive stance, which comprises, among others, researchers’ moral accountability in relation to representation and interpretation, to their position of authority, and to their methods and possible outcomes, ethnographers consider how their own research activity represents at the same time acts of oppression and domination over the subject of study (Madison, 2005; Patai, 1994). Madison (2005) argues for a shift in ethnography’s goals from simply politics to politics of positionality, because this “forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we

are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects” (p. 7). Moreover, one should understand positionality as the researcher’s subjectivity in dialogical relation to the Other so that the reciprocal engagement, debate, and negotiation may lead to “substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in the Other’s world” (p.9).

In justifying my choice for a critical ethnography, I would first stress the fact that this methodological enterprise answers the urgent call enunciated by critical scholars referring to research on the Roma for empirical investigation. This call is rooted in questions from the lived experience of Romani people and opens up the possibility for addressing the heterogeneity and intricacies of local cultural contexts (in this case, the urban environment in Romania) that shape in diverse ways the production and negotiation of Romani subjectivities.

At the same time, to the extent to which ethnography entails a “continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view” (Geertz, 1983, p. 68), this specific regional ethnographic study may assist in revealing the ways in which local, country-specific cultural practices mirror the larger international, European context of political and ideological frameworks impacting Romani existence. In this sense, the ethnography links up to postcolonial theory which locates the local/nation in the wider context of global power and culture.

Furthermore, given the colonialist nature of traditional ethnographic work, where power balance between researcher and researched blatantly inclines towards the former, and where the researcher/Other binary is thus maintained, postcolonial theory is all the more connected to (critical) ethnography as a method of inquiry. Postcolonial theory not

only provides the researcher an interpretive and analytical tool for the data under scrutiny, but it also keeps the researcher alert to constantly question the aspect of agency and ethics in the researcher-researched relationship.

Though, as shown above, theory is the guiding principle for the method- as method becomes the performance of theory, one should pay distinct attention to the methodological process- the guidelines and techniques required by this performance (Madison, 2005). The following sections deal with several key points of my research design, namely the ethnographical setting, the participants/informants, and the description of the interview process, including the stages of the field work, which resulted in the materialization of the written analysis.

### *The Setting*

I carried out the fieldwork in Bucharest, the capital city of Romania. My choice of the research site was in accordance with the scope of the study, namely the context defined by the everyday social relations and interactions between Roma and Romanian population. In this sense, I believe that a metropolitan environment, which by its own nature stands for a conglomeration of diverse socio-economic population strata and ethnicities, allows for a wider and more complex range of discursive possibilities relative to Romani identity production and negotiation. Compared to another research choice, namely the enclave-like, more hermetic society represented by some villages or even some peripheral suburbs of cities inhabited by Roma communities, the city represents both a physical/geographical and a socio-cultural space that highlights further the intricacies of Roma- non Roma communication. At the same time, the city space offers a more heterogeneous representation of Roma population itself- Romani individuals from a



wide range of Roma groups established historically by way of occupation (such as florists and flower sellers, musicians, coppersmiths, and so forth). Compared to rural areas, the capital city environment is more synchronous and thus more reflective of the current socio-political and economic shifts following the official accession of the country to the European Union in January 2007. Therefore the study also looks at the ways the post-integration context influences discursive negotiations of identity among the Roma.

Addressing the relationship between the ethnography and the context in which it is written, Gay y Blasco and Wardle (2007) argue that the two are inseparable. Given the social and culturally situated nature of ethnographers, the context is “always part of the text’s very fabric” (p. 118). More importantly, they underscore how this context is never singular, showing how ethnographers “live within at least two worlds, ‘home’ and ‘the field’,” which are themselves “fragmented and multiple” (p. 118). I would argue that in my case the two worlds of “home” and “field” were virtually collapsed in one: my research field was at the same time my home.

The city space was my fieldwork setting and indeed it constituted an easier entry point for me given the fact that I was born and I live in Bucharest, hence the expected familiarity with the setting. However, this is an aspect of my own personal history and background, a social context that, like other different contexts influencing my personal and intellectual trajectory, helped shape a particular worldview (in part, a middle-class way of intellectualizing the world) that is not necessarily one shared by everyone else. In saying this, I was aware of the fact that being comfortable in the first place with the setting was not enough reason for me to either claim the insight of an insider, or, so much

the less, to claim omniscience whereby, in taking for granted my predetermined cultural assumptions about the setting, I would present ethnographic knowledge as self-evident.

My location called therefore for a constant exercise in defamiliarization, by questioning my knowledge and, implicitly, my ethnographic agency. Also important is the fact that ethnographic knowledge is relational, in that it is “the product of multiple cross-cutting conversations across diverse contexts,” among which is the essential dialogue between researcher and informants (Gay y Blasco & Wardle, 2007, p. 141). The final sections address the other two aspects of the fieldwork, namely the process of selecting the participants in the study and the interview process.

#### *My Quest for Participants*

The participants in the study were Romani women and men, between the ages of 18-65, living or working in Bucharest. For the fieldwork I carried throughout a period of 4 months during the summers of 2009 and 2010, I recruited a range of informants in an effort to cover as much as possible the complex spectrum of socio-economic locations extant in the urban environment- from unskilled workers to administrative clerks and higher education employees. The wide range of participants was relevant for the purpose of my study as it revealed the overlaps and discrepancies in the ways Romani identity is negotiated from different generational and socio-economic venues.

Participants were recruited through snowballing and a short recruitment/pre-interview questionnaire conducted in the Romanian language, which contained a brief introduction of myself and the study, and pre-established questions asking for name, age range, ethnicity, national minority, occupation, gender and contact information of potential participants. I clearly mentioned that participation in the research was voluntary.

When the recruitment questionnaire confirmed eligibility of the respondents, and if they expressed their availability and agreement to participate further in the research, I then officially called for their participation by handing them a prepared consent form, also in Romanian. The appendix to the dissertation includes both the recruitment questionnaire and the consent form. A copy of the consent form signed by participants having agreed to voluntarily take part in the study remained in their possession. I had also expected instances where signing the consent would be waived. More specifically, I did not ask participants to physically sign the consent form if, despite their willingness and availability to take part in the study, they were reluctant to physically sign the consent form for reasons such as fear of discrimination resulting from having their ethnic identity ascertained in a written document.

In addition to the short introduction of myself and my research objective, the consent form highlighted the voluntary nature of the participation, underscored the benefits and the risks related to the study, and asked participants' permission to audio-tape the research interviews. It also assured the confidentiality and protection of participants by exclusive use in the final report of pseudonyms attributed to real names of participants and locations, and by special measures regarding the handling of the entire body of data collected during fieldwork that guaranteed my exclusive access to all data and the destruction of all consent and recruitment forms and audio-taped material, three years after the written report (dissertation) would be completed. The ethical completion of the fieldwork was guaranteed by means of complying with the guidelines required by the Bowling Green State University Human Subject Review Board, who overviewed the terms of both recruitment and consent forms and granted their approval.

In anticipation of my fieldwork, I had already established contacts with Bucharest-based official associations for Roma minority affairs and non-profit organizations representing Romani interests that were likely to assist me by intermediating rapport with potential Romani participants. Apart from recruiting participants through snowballing, I also engaged with other potential participants at public places such as open air markets and bus stations, approaching only persons who manifestly wore traditional Romani clothing. A majority of these individuals belong to several Roma subgroups, among which flower sellers, Gabors (a subgroup living mainly in Transylvania, a region in the center part of Romania), and Caldarari (the term *caldare* signifies *cauldron* in Romanian and therefore this group's name refers to its traditional occupation- copper cauldrons crafting). It is worth mentioning that the recruitment questionnaire was administered to persons approached by myself at communal places as well as to persons contacted through the assistance of the above mentioned associations.

#### *Decoding the Interviewing Process*

During the fieldwork I conducted in-depth interviews along with participant observation and direct observation. More specifically, in addition to observations jotted down in my field journal during the actual interviews in order to complement information that audio-taping could not render, I was also a participant observer by witnessing, whenever participants agreed and where circumstances allowed, participants' normal daily activities, such as spending time at Roma florists' flower shops throughout a usual work day, at the offices of Romani non-profit organizations, at the church where one of the respondents was a priest, at the work place of a couple of participants who were a part of the custodial staff, and so forth. As I had anticipated, my involvement with

participants' daily aspects assumed a relatively low active role in the sense of a guest. However, despite the lesser degree of involvement, the unstructured interviewing and observation resulting from these daily interactions became as important for the analysis as the data based on the structured interviews.

I opted for the ethnographic technique of interviewing since, as Madison (2005) argues, this “opens realms of meaning that permeates beyond rote information or finding the ‘truth of the matter’,” beyond “the need for verifiable facts and information” (pp. 25-26). This approach makes possible a dialogic partnership between researcher and participants, where the interviewee becomes “a subject with agency, history, and his or her own idiosyncretic command of a story,” and meanings and experience are constructed communally (p. 25).

Approximately 35 individuals participated in in-depth interviews. Once the potential participants had read and signed the consent forms, we next decided on the actual interview date, time and place, depending on their availability and, most importantly, their feeling comfortable with the venue of the interview. Consequently, the interviews were carried out in places where participants felt most at ease and safe. On average, the interviews lasted for one-two sessions with each session of about 60 minutes. As was the case sometimes, second sessions ensued as follow-ups of the first ones. The interviews included overlappings of personal narratives, oral histories, and topical narratives (i.e., participants' perspectives on particular subjects). I also used different kinds of question formulas (such as experience questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, background questions, descriptive questions), according to the particular situation defining a given interview, and mainly guided by the theoretical

framework. At the same time, the conversations Roma participants engaged in were constantly located within the wider context of their interactions with the non-Roma majority population. Each interview section was tape recorded, and all interviews were conducted in the Romanian language.

Finally, the qualitative interpretive analysis was based on my ongoing attempt to make sense of what I was observing at that time, so that I am now fully aware of the possibility of revisiting and reconsidering old ideas and interpretations. However, though I perceive the act of analysis and interpretive inquiry to go on concurrently with the process of participant observations and interviewing, I made an effort, during the post-fieldwork stage, to select and order the data collected by identifying particular themes. I then proceeded with the interpretation of their structures of signification, always being alert to possible connections between theoretical concepts and data categories that surfaced during the coding.

### CHAPTER III: ROMA DIASPORA: COMPETING PARADIGMS

#### *Taking Ethnography from Cyberscapes into Romanian Urbanscapes*

I first took interest in researching the self-representation and identity negotiation of subaltern Roma people by carrying out an online ethnography that drew on an intercultural communication theoretical perspective (namely, Michael Hecht's communication theory of identity) and looked at Roma interactions in Internet discussion boards. I also approached this subject by means of textual analysis employing organizational communication theoretical lenses upon Roma identity production within Roma NGO websites.

In both cases, though the intercultural and organizational communication theoretical perspectives were undoubtedly relevant to the particular cases I was exploring, I was likely to address the developing Roma presence online in a rather utopian, uncomplicating fashion. Using such an approach, I overgeneralized the genuine constitution of a Roma digital diaspora that implies questions of representativity. I overlooked the potentially negative or indifferent attitude of the non-academic Roma individuals toward the Roma diasporic paradigm envisaged and promoted by Roma academics and activists. Furthermore, I neglected the distinction between diasporic practices and transnationalism. In what follows I would like to discuss several of the previously enumerated aspects and the scholarly polemics surrounding them. It was an increased awareness of these competing discourses that prompted my decision to develop my initial research into a feminist critical ethnography in the offline mode.

*Producing Roma Diaspora*

Along with necessary theoretical considerations underlying differing conceptualizations of Roma diaspora, the promotion and understanding of competing discursive constructions, negotiations, and, for that matter, (im)possibilities for Roma diaspora, offline and online, take place against a backdrop of profound political, socio-economic, and cultural changes. There are a few changes that are worth mentioning in this account. The first is the post-communist harsh transition in Central and Eastern Europe (where the greatest number of Roma live) towards democratization and economic liberalization (and the ensuing increased poverty along with ethnic tensions, and discrimination against ethnic minorities). The second is the expansion of Western neoliberal ideology and the promotion of human rights discourse in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe. The third is the extension of the European Union in recent years to include several post-socialist countries (and the resulting Western anxieties about people mobility and migration from East to West). Finally, a fourth important change is the increased presence of ICTs for communication and political mobilization. The intertwinement of these conditions becomes visible in the research on Roma diaspora that will be discussed in the following pages.

The Roma would make for a particular diasporic typology, if we were to compare this category against the characteristics of the conventional paradigm of diaspora. Sheffer's (2003) broad political science perspective on diaspora is, I believe, a helpful starting point for the present critical overview in that diaspora dimensions considered here have been, individually, the object/scope of scrutiny and thoroughly addressed through sociological, anthropological, and critical studies lenses, as it will be shown



further during this discussion. In an attempt to further develop an analytical perspective on contemporary diasporas, Sheffer (2003) highlights the need for a multifaceted profile of ethno-national diasporas by applying necessary criteria that would allow a more situated and inclusive definition of diasporas, such as the status of their respective homelands (stateless — unable to establish their own independent states, and state-linked diasporas), and their age (historical/classical, recent/modern, and incipient diasporas).

In order to provide a comprehensive perspective on the increasing expansion and persistence of ethno-national diasporism, the political science scholar argues for a “careful combination,” a synthesis of several major approaches to ethno-genesis and ethnic identity. He highlights thus a combination of the primordialist/essentialist approach (where emphasis is placed on biological and cultural attributes); the instrumentalist approach (where emphasis is placed on practical individual or group goals of diaspora affiliation); the psychological and the ethno-symbolic and mythical approaches (where emphasis is placed on psychological factors and attachment to symbols and myths); and the constructionist approach (where nations and nationalism are viewed as modern social and cultural artifacts, which began to appear at the end of the eighteenth century onward, and are created mainly by elites, as emphasized by Benedict Anderson’s (1991) definition of nation as “imagined political community”) (pp.18-19).

Sheffer (2003) challenges, for instance, the applicability of the constructionist approach to the persistence of the ethno-national diaspora phenomenon as “rather than being reflective of recent construction and discontinuity, it seems that some of those entities [ethno-national diasporas] reveal ancient origins and continuity” (p. 19). He equates the term “ethno-national” with specific attributes of diasporas, whose members

perceive themselves as “participants in nations that have common ethnic and national traits, identities, and affinities” (p. 11). The most important attribute in Sheffer’s opinion is the sense of belonging to the same ethnic nation. Furthermore, Sheffer makes a conceptual clarification of the term “diaspora,” and warns against its indiscriminating use as this has become a traveling concept. He proposes the usage of the prefacing hyphenated expression “ethno-national,” in particular to make a necessary distinction from a range of transnational formations promoting deterritorialized identities, such as members of transnational groups espousing certain ideologies, members of pan-diasporas like Muslims or Asian-Americans worldwide, transnational religious denominations, groups of people speaking the same language such as the Francophone, global youth, and so forth. He therefore argues that the concept of diaspora has been erroneously employed to include transnational groups whose “hybrid identities, orientations, and loyalties are not connected to any given territory that is regarded as their exclusive homeland” (p. 10).

Drawing on the theoretical framework highlighted above, Sheffer contends that, exceptionally, the Roma (“the Gypsies”) “are still affiliated with a cohesive ethno-national entity,” despite the fact that their entire nation is dispersed in many host countries (p. 11). The Roma are therefore considered a complex case of stateless ethno-national diaspora, since they cannot define clearly a physical homeland — a similar situation to the case of African Americans — and lack the “wish, power, and resources” to establish a national state (p. 74). They represent an incipient diaspora, where increasing efforts of their elites (“better educated” Roma) to become political actors in their host countries help promote their distinct ethnic entity and thus their interests. The validity of a Gypsy global diaspora, albeit incipient for the moment, is clearly

acknowledged by Sheffer. This is precisely thanks to emerging Roma leaders' efforts toward "more ambitious "national" projects, such as reshaping and clarifying perceptions of the Roma identity, introducing new patterns of organization, and establishing comprehensive trans-state networks" (p. 140) and thus approaching regional and international organizations, like NGOs and IGOs.

From a developmental theoretical perspective, Sheffer considers the different phases that transform incipient diasporas into mature ones. Among those, the establishment of associations among co-ethnics that would replace initial dependence on other organizations and host-countries' governments represents a decisive step toward the formation of organized diaspora. According to Sheffer, several theoretical implications arise from the nature and development of diasporas; contrary to Anderson's constructivist approach, diasporas "are neither "imagined" nor "invented" communities," but social and political formations that rely rather on "a combination of primordial, instrumental, and psychological/symbolic factors" (pp. 145-146). Also, both elites and ordinary people play an equally crucial role in the mobilization and functioning of diasporas as this calls for "spontaneous grassroots decisions and readiness to implement those decisions on the part of the rank and file" (p. 146). In this sense, he draws attention to the divided opinions among Romani individuals and groups regarding the self-ascription/ acknowledgement of their diasporic status/identity—a "lack of consensus among the members[...]regarding the application of the diaspora concept to their own situations" given "a very long tradition of perceiving themselves as indigenous ethnic minorities in their host countries" (p. 156).

Legitimization among Romani individuals of an inherent and universal Romani diasporic condition actually represents a particularly contentious topic within scholarship addressing Romani identity (Kovats, 2001; Gay y Blasco, 2002; Toninato, 2009; Rovid, 2011; & al.) from more or less critical perspectives.

Toninato (2009), for instance, makes the case for the rise of valid Roma diaspora discursive and political practices even as she acknowledges that the Romani diasporic pattern does not fulfill fundamental features of the classical diaspora paradigm, namely “an emphasis on the link between a group and a particular territory, a homeland, and a reliance on an essentialist identity paradigm of the nation-state” (Toninato, 2009, p. 2). By the same token, she highlights the common attributes that Roma diaspora easily share with classical diaspora paradigms (see Safran, 1991, Cohen, 1996). In this sense, she emphasizes the fact that they represent a widely dispersed group across the globe, and that Roma communities find themselves in difficult relationship with dominant populations in their host countries.

In comparison to a primordialist definition of diaspora, to which, as she contends, subscribe even postmodern theorists like Hall, Gilroy, or Brah in that even their definitions circumscribe diasporic identity to “the idea of roots and notions of ethnic and national belonging, [...] a particular *Weltanschauung* and attitude towards space and territoriality typical of sedentary Western societies” (p. 2), Toninato rather favors a constructionist theoretical framework to explain Romani diaspora, drawing on Brubaker’s (2005) interpretation of diaspora as category of practice and Sokefeld’s (2006) description of diasporas as imagined communities discursively constructed. Though through differing theoretical lenses—mainly primordialist, and, respectively,

constructionist, both Sheffer and Toninato argue for the idea of a worldwide Romani diaspora in the making.

Toninato supports a conceptualization of Romani diaspora as social practice, which emphasizes “the constitutive factors of diaspora making,” the “functions and main actors in developing a diasporic political discourse,” and the particular actions leading to identity building (Toninato, 2009, p. 1). Worth noticing is the fact that Toninato’s argument for a counter-essentialist, non-static notion of Roma diaspora is not necessarily in sync with the rather essentializing representation of the Roma being created by the main actors, the Roma intelligentsia, operating and supervising the development of such diasporic identity building project.

In Toninato’s view, diaspora should be understood as an ongoing, active process rather than an already attained objective (p. 6). As she advances a constructionist diasporic pattern that informs Romani existence, she also exposes the shortcomings of the traditional prescriptive approach to diaspora. She criticizes its failure to theorize “deterritorialized and spatially unbounded culture of Gypsies,” to thus problematize the seemingly natural, fixed association state-nation-territory, and, last but not least, to properly acknowledge and explain the growing Gypsy diasporic practices, notably the increasingly synchronized international movement by Romani elites and their efforts to “adopt the language of diaspora to give voice to their people’s claims” (pp. 3-5).

There are elements that, according to scholars like Toninato, successfully inform a transnational diasporic existence of the Roma. These are, for instance, the mosaic-like diversity and dispersion of the Roma throughout the world, along with an understanding of diaspora as “the result of a dynamic process of continuous making and remaking of

diaspora with no fixed membership,” and the increasing diffusion of a Romani transnational diaspora discourse by Romani elites and activists (p. 6). However, the same elements become, in other scholars’ opinion, weak, unproductive conditions for the establishment of a universal, strong common diasporic consciousness that all Romani groups or individuals would genuinely subscribe to, claim, and share (Gay y Blasco, 2002, 2001).

Gay y Blasco (2002) underlines that the unity (or lack thereof) among the Roma was a persistent research issue mainly within non-Roma scholarship as early as nineteenth century that attempted to theorize models of “Gypsiness.” This concern with the unity of the Roma has now become increasingly the priority of the Roma intelligentsia and activists since it is considered an essential argument for the idea of a transnational, global Roma diaspora. However, the author argues that the dominant Western models of ethnicity and identity borrowed by the Roma international political activism can hardly find grass support among Roma people, since

[...]few so-called Gypsy groups display any interest in bringing about imaginative or practical cohesion with each other. [...] the Gypsy diaspora has been characterised by its extreme political and structural fragmentation, and by the weakness or even absence of any overarching Gypsy imagined community. (p. 173)

In her comprehensive ethnographic engagement with Spanish Gypsies/ Gitanos from Jarana, a peripheral neighborhood of Madrid, Spain, during the 1990s, Gay y Blasco (2002) looks at the “imaginative and practical links” that these make with other Gitanos and Gypsies worldwide. The Gitanos from Jarana are “representative of many other, poor

urban Gitanos throughout Spain,” so this study represents a useful addition to the critical scholarship addressing the topic of competing Roma diasporic modalities (pp. 173-4). At the same time, by its exclusive focus on urban Roma/Gypsy in Spain, it does not claim some generalizing findings about this population segment that would be implicitly valid for other countries in Europe or elsewhere.

In an attempt to further examine the interdependence between the “imagined community” and its underpinning social and political relations, Gay y Blasco (2002) compares Jarana Gitanos’ positioning against contemporary models of “Gypsiness.” These contemporary models are argued to be “succumbing to the ravages of globalization,” because they draw heavily on Western hegemonic discourses of identity. More specifically, Gitano Pentecostal converts from Jarana are a reflection of North-American Christian fundamentalism, and Roma activists are influenced by international human rights and identity politics (p. 174).

The way of constructing Gypsiness manifest among the Gitanos in Jarana has several core characteristics, such as: the lack of the will for an overarching political entity that would mobilize significant numbers of Gitanos “either on their own or with other Gypsies;” social interactions described by “avoidance of unrelated Gitanos;” a type of Gypsiness that, compared to citizenship or nationality, “is not imposed from above or from the centre, but rather is dependent on the performances of particular Gitano persons;” lack of concern with “the size or location of other Gitano or Gypsy communities elsewhere;” disregard of the past “as a source of shared identity;” and “a strong egalitarian ethos” (Gay y Blasco, 2002, p. 179).

It is worth noting that the disregard of the past emphasized by Gay y Blasco in relation to the Gitanos in Jarana should not be confused with the orientalist representation, dating back to the nineteenth century European romanticism, of Roma/Gypsy inherently casual, worry-free attitude towards time and space. The ethnographer does not stereotypically interpret the Gitanos' lack of interest in the past as a token of their temperament/character, but argues that downplaying and disregarding the past represent the Gitanos' strategies to survive "in the midst of an aggressive non-Gypsy society," and thus to resist the "pressures to dissolve into the majority" (2001, pp. 632, 642).

The intentional obliteration of past events as well as people from the communal imagination and the homogenization of a depersonalized past helps place the emphasis in the present on the moral correspondence among Gitanos living by the Gitano laws. This constitutes the main premise for the imagined community of "the Gitano people" that are "similarly positioned vis-à-vis the rest of the world" (p. 640). As Gay y Blasco points out,

The ideal of the group thus revolves around the ideal of the ordinary Gypsy person, and the two are metonymically related: the notion of 'the Gitano people' effectively grows out of Gitanos' awareness of each other as moral beings.

Divisions and fragmentations are not seen as impediments to the realization of this entity, and there is no sense that they must be bridged in order for the sense of moral commonality to exist. (p. 642)

For example, the memorialization of the departed Jarana Gitanos and their life events is a practice among their relatives only, inasmuch as it allows for a process of mimesis that helps them "reach out to each other," and makes possible their "mutual recognition in the



midst of a hostile world” (p. 643). Having this understanding, the Gitanos’ references to the past and the dead do not aim to “legitimate hierarchies or inequalities in the present,” since they “do not easily fit the standard anthropological picture of the past being a manipulable resource, used to support claims to power or status” (p. 643). The Gitanos’ particular management of the past further destabilizes the idea of the past as a source of shared identity fundamental for the dominant Western ethnicity/nationalism paradigm, “the Western notion that images of the past are prerequisite for the construction of imagined communities” (p. 632).

In comparison to the Gitano diasporic modality, Gay y Blasco (2002) describes the Roma diaspora ideal lobbied by growing numbers of Roma NGOs and informed by Western ideals of ethnicity and identity as a project of shared identity that glosses over/dismisses the differences among groups of Gypsies. It is thus in sharp opposition with the prevalent “non-activist practice of acknowledging other Gypsy groups as non-Gypsies while refusing to place them in the same moral slot as ego” (p. 180).

This diasporic modality is strongly politicized and its main objectives are international acknowledgment of the Roma as a minority, Roma-related policy within the human rights framework, and Roma political unity. Most importantly, Gay y Blasco views skeptically the conflation of the Roma as a global diaspora, as it is produced by a Roma transnational activist movement which relies extensively, for both ideological and practical purposes, on non-Gypsy political modalities and institutions. This movement is more likely to transform the Gypsiness, the “Roma,” into nothing more than an empty signifier, ready to contain understandings of identity dictated by non-Gypsy values and interests. An unfortunate result is thus anticipated:

The radical ethnocentrism of the Gitanos is abandoned and the Roma become a 'persecuted ethnic minority' which must be accommodated within the political structures of a unified Europe. Gitano distinctiveness becomes 'the Gitano culture' and replaces the clear awareness of Gitano superiority that drives the lives of the people of Jarana and their particular forms of resistance to encapsulation into the dominant population. (p. 186)

At the same time, an adamant emphasis on an essentializing, common diasporic consciousness might be argued to have, paradoxically, unintended outcomes in the larger international institutional context regarding the conceptual framework underpinning of Roma-related policy making and implementation. Kovats (2001), for instance, in a study of conceptual documents by the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) and the Council of Europe from 1993, 1995, and 2000, underlies the practical challenges faced by European institutions when addressing the situation of Romani people, in view of the Europeanization of the Roma policy.

Emerging in part as an outcome of the end of the Cold War, which rendered possible a larger picture and a combination of the concerns of the Roma in former communist Eastern European states and the Gypsies/Travelers in Western Europe, the idea of a trans-European Roma/ Gypsy diaspora made way concurrently, within the context of the larger process of the European integration, for the idea of the development of a pan-European policy paradigm regarding Roma. However, this sought after administrative political strategy has been complicated in particular by the far reaching negative impact of the economic and social transition in the former communist Eastern and Central European states on the increasing Roma population (Kovats, 2001, p. 93).

Kovats warns against the conceptualization of all Roma people as “essentially similar,” all the more in the public policies realm, thus highlighting the wide socio-economic-cultural spectrum to which Roma/Gypsy groups and individuals belong:

Many policy considerations must differ in respect of individuals and families from clan-based itinerant communities and those of people “settled” in camps or other confined areas on the peripheries of cities, as well as in relation to large urban Roma populations and those living in small rural communities. [...]

Roma/Gypsy can be found in a range of social circumstances and at many points along a spectrum from close integration, with, through to extreme isolation from, mainstream society. There is a great deal of difference in the life of Roma people across the different regions of Europe, as well as between countries and even within countries. (p. 97)

Unfortunately, against the backdrop of a significantly diverse reality of Romani people and their situations throughout Europe and worldwide, European institutions are more likely to promote an erroneously homogenized, monolithic image of Roma and of their conditions, and also to “dislocate Roma issues from wider social, political, economic, and cultural contexts” (Kovats, 2001, p. 94), which can trigger results at odds with the expected policy goals. For instance, the analysis of these policy reports by the OSCE the Council of Europe reveals the insistent definition of Roma issues in “cultural” terms and the unwillingness to explore economic aspects underpinning Roma experience, hence the failure to consider the “fundamental interconnection between poverty and problems in other policy areas such as health, education, and housing” (p. 99). Similarly, the tendency to explain the increasing influx of Eastern European Roma asylum seekers/migrants

toward Western Europe in cultural terms, more specifically as a matter of Roma inherent nomadism, disregards its structural, economic causes to be addressed (p. 100).

In a study having the larger scope to address the policy-related institutional documents about Gypsy, Travelers, and Roma by both The European Community, in the 1970s and 1980s, and the European Union during the more recent time period of the European Union enlargement process, Simhandl (2006) traces the role of language and processes of naming/ labeling in the construction of “Gypsies”/”Roma” as an essentialist, taken for granted category of the discourse.

Simhandl’s (2006) discourse analysis highlights the boundaries “drawn around human beings to turn them into political objects” within the EU discourse (p. 110). Like Kovats, she points to the questionable use of the category of Roma or Gypsies –perceived in an unspoken agreement as an objective category– as a starting point for the creation and implementation of policies. Echoing Wittgenstein’s (1921) famous statement, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world,” Simhandl warns against the seemingly neutral character of scientific terminology and policy discourse, and thus demonstrates how Gypsies/ Roma “are written out of the discourse as potential partners” in the process of their constitution as political objects by the EU institutions (p. 102).

She spotlights two essential interpretative patterns which have guided the emergence of the discourse about Roma through the European institutional lenses from the 1970s onwards. The first, nomadism, which also marked the emerging interest and attention of EU institutions (in Western Europe) in relation to the “discovery” of the matter of Roma in the 1970s, helped universalize the unquestioned assumption that all Gypsies travel, and was promoted as “the most prominent particularity of Gypsies –

something that distinguishes them from the rest of the population” (Simhandl, 2006, p. 105).

A revealing sentence from the European Parliament Explanatory Statement from 1984, is provided by the author in order to better understand how nomadism is essentially transformed into a constant of the Gypsy identity “*It determines not just the conditions in which they live but also their way of thinking and way of life*” (Simhandl, 2006, p. 105). The second interpretive pattern, represented by the term “Roma” with the often accompanying characterization “minority,” became prevalent during the 1990s, within the political climate of the European Union enlargement preparation, notably in the European Commission progress reports targeting the ex-communist Central Eastern European state candidates. In comparison to the exonym “Gypsy,” the term “Roma” represents an endonym denoting *men* or *human beings* in the Romani language, and, as such, it is being used as a political correct designation. However, Simhandl argues that it is promoted as an objective definition, where, similarly to the case of the term “Gypsies,” the EU discourse doesn’t provide any criteria to either explicate the basis of the definition or to delineate the boundary between “Roma” and “Non-Roma.” In consequence, Roma are marked once again as a non-negotiable contained category of discourse so that “heterogeneities within the group and homogeneities with outsiders are written off” (p. 107).

Very importantly, the discourse succeeds in associating Roma issues exclusively with the geographical limits of Eastern Europe, hence the discursive separation of “Eastern Roma,” represented as the challenge for the civilizing EU enlargement project and for the Eastern European societies, and “Western Gypsies and Travelers,” whose

situation is thus readily downplayed once the second interpretative pattern takes the spotlight. Roma are also made an ever present dimension of the increasingly prevalent EU discourse shaping the category of “minorities,” in relation to the diversity policy implementation required from the candidate states as a mandatory EU accession precondition. Paradoxically, the discourse prevalently constructs the category of Roma in a dichotomous relation to other national minorities, through recurrent formulations like “national minorities and the Roma,” providing no explanation of the conceptual differentiation between the terms of the binary (Simhandl, 2006, p. 109).

One can argue that the discursive construction of Roma in the conceptual documents of the EU institutions summarized previously constitutes one instantiation of what Ang and St. Louis (2005) term “the predicament of difference,” that is the unintended, ambiguous consequences brought about by the “theoretical and political valorization of difference” (p. 293).

Aware that “difference has become a doxa, a magic word of theory and politics with redemptive meanings” (Felski, 1997, cited in Ang & St. Louis, 2005, p.293), Ang and St. Louis (2005) call for caution in regard with the ways “the doxa of difference is played out in particular instances of the cultural politics of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity,’ once it is taken as a social and political given” (p. 293).

In this sense, discursive spaces provided by diversity politics may very well work against and downplay initial goals and concerns of diversity politics, becoming thus the negotiating terrain of what Lentin and Titley (2008) call a differentiated notion of the “politics of diversity.” Under this notion, diversity becomes a “fluid phenomenon, flowing through interlocking networks of money, symbolic and material power, and

political agency," and is notably present in the "socio-political work of international institutions such as the UN, EU and the Council of Europe, of globally networked NGO's (particularly in the field of Human Rights and interculturalism), and of transnational corporations" (p. 12).

Though officially framed by a diversity politics meant to address difference "by situating it in relation to social legitimacy" (Ang & St. Louis, 2005, p. 296), and thus meant to guide and help the EU candidate countries fulfill the important criterion of "respect for and protection of minorities," the discursive category of Roma, as showed in Simhandl's (2006) analysis, is rather suggestive of an exercise in epistemic violence by containing, disciplining, and controlling diversity, while, at the same time, it helps perpetuate an essentialist representation of the Other.

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## CHAPTER IV: FIELDWORK ANALYSIS

The time I spent doing fieldwork in different areas of Bucharest, observing, conversing and listening to Roma individuals that belong to different socio-economic conditions- running the gamut from street flower sellers, grave diggers, custodial staff, to engineers, journalists, university professors, and activists, yielded a specific output in the form of jotted down observations and audio recordings. I subsequently reread and re-listened to these materials, and this admittedly subjective meaning making exercise helped me uncover several recurring themes that I will discuss in the following pages.

*Power Geometry Disrupted? Flower Sellers and the Negotiation of the City Center Space*

“We want to work, and not to beg!,” “Give us back our stalls!,” “NO to discrimination! We want to sell flowers!,” “This is our job!” These were some of the slogans carried and shouted by several hundreds of flower sellers gathered in August 2007 in the heart of Bucharest, the capital city of Romania, for a peaceful manifestation against city municipality, and namely against their sudden and abusive action of tearing down Roma flower sellers’ stalls in one of the city sectors. Not only did I incidentally find out about this event mentioned in the Romanian online media at that time, but several flower sellers with whom I spent many hours talking during my fieldwork in Bucharest the following years, also told me, with pride, about their guild demonstration.

In trying to critically engage with the heterogeneously lived urban spaces by the Roma, where spaces are understood as socially produced through often tensioned intersections of spatial practices, individual experiences, socioeconomic and political structures and thus power relations, my ethnographic attention was particularly drawn to the presence and activity of the flower sellers in the city. Their daily social interactions



prompted by their very occupation, alongside the city physical spaces they use daily, flower sellers have become by far, compared to other groups of Roma, the most “visible” interface between the dominant population and the Roma others.

In analyzing the fieldwork instances engaging the flower sellers in the city I paid particular attention to the spatial articulations of power that allowed for a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which flower sellers’ identities are produced and communicated in the seemingly cosmopolitan context of the city capital. This approach answers at the same time the need expressed by critical communication scholars to address “the very real and material ways in which space constitutes a site and a medium for the enactment of cultural power that has important implications for rethinking[...] identity and agency” (Shome, 2003, p. 40).

In his approach to the modes of objectification that transform human beings into subjects, Foucault (1982) stresses the need to conceptualize the notion of power beyond the legal and institutional models of understanding it, and thus to first look at the patterns of resistance/ oppositions against different forms of power (ex: opposition to the power of psychiatry over the mentally ill). Such resistances, which are not specific only to a particular political or economic form of government but can also pertain to the immediacy dimension of existence, unravel a form of power that transform individuals into subjects- “to someone else by control and dependence,” and to their own identities “by a conscience or self-knowledge” (p. 781).

Foucault (1982) emphasizes the dynamic nature of power, in that power only occurs when certain actions modify others. A relation of power necessarily presupposes the presence and action of the one over whom the power is exerted and consequently

opens up a whole field of possible reactions, responses and invention. Through this lens, power acquires a positive character: it is both enabling and limiting (p. 790).

Massey's (2009) theorization of space marks the close intertwinement of space and power, and therefore she insists on the link between definition of space and the conceptualization of power. Unlike Foucault however, who relegated space "to the realm of the already given," Massey advances a definition that brings space alive (p. 17). In brief, space is "the product of power relations, [...] from the intimate level of our daily lives to the global level of financial corporations, or of counter-hegemonic political activists;" it is "the dimension of multiplicity [...] (in the sense of the simultaneous coexistence of more than one thing);" and it is "always in the process of being made" in the sense that there are always "relations which are still to be made, or unmade, or re-made" (pp. 16-17).

At the same time, the social geographer proposes the composite notion of "power-geometries," in order to suggest that "not only is space utterly imbued with and a product of relations of power, but power itself has a geography" (Massey, 2009, p. 18). Most importantly, this two-sided conceptualization allows for "the challenge, the pleasure and the responsibility of the existence of «others», and of our relationship to them" (p. 18).

While an expected power geometry is rather straightforwardly implied in the binary city center/ city slums (margins), where the peripheral quarters of the city are easily associated with low-income population, in particular Roma minority, the presence of the Roma flower sellers, their commercial activity, and thus their lived experience in the city reveals an ongoing negotiation of space and power. This can sometimes be

translated into instances of counter-hegemonic alterity space, and sometimes into moments of contained, disciplined diversity within the city center-scape.

A brief historical overview of the Roma flower sellers in Romania helps demonstrate the different changes in their socio-economic status and the continuously negotiated relation of dominance and subalternity during different political and economic frameworks. This also supports the argument that the Central and Eastern European Roma “should not be regarded simply as the passive object of experiments in social engineering throughout different historical periods” (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001. p. 47).

Flower sellers are considered the most homogenous and relatively recently constituted among Roma groups living on the Romanian territory. Though some of the flower sellers I interviewed call themselves “Boldeni,” from the name of the village Bold, near the capital city, where flower sellers live predominantly, there are flower sellers that live and deal with the flower commerce in many other areas of the country.

Some Roma sociologists argue that their present day occupation, the flower commerce, is historically linked to the ancient Indian garland makers (*malakara*) guild. This craft adapted to the socio-cultural contexts of the historical territory of Romania, and survived, for instance, in the duties fulfilled by the Vatrasi (*vatra* signifies fireplace in Romanian)/ domestic/settled Roma slaves of the boyars or the crown: Vatrasi men were taking care of the boyars’ and princes’ flower gardens, and the Vatrasi women were decorating their masters’ rooms and tables with flowers for various parties and ceremonies (Burtea, 2002).

Much closer to our times, they began to form as a legally free Roma group around 1900 and became increasingly noticed during the interwar period., when the capitalist economy made its presence progressively at the end of the First World War, the Roma flower sellers' activity, and thus their settlement closer or even within some areas of the capital city, filled a particular commerce niche as a result of the increasing commodity value flowers represented for the social life of the city. Most importantly, their presence as street traders in the city space was thus a response to the increasing demand for flowers.

Different political-economic systems obviously influenced flower sellers' commercial activity differently, like in the case of all other small business entrepreneurs. For instance, this occupation was initiated and practiced mainly by the wives of the Roma masons living near Bucharest, but later on, as the flower commerce became more profitable, their husbands also joined them in this street commerce. On the contrary, during socialist, state-owned economy, the flower commerce turned out to be insufficient as the family sole income source so that flower sellers' husbands reoriented towards state sector, industrial occupations. Burtea (2002) even argues that state employment of some of the flower sellers' family members was safeguarding the street flower commerce and therefore the flower sellers' tradition, as the communist administration could label at any time their occupation as "potentially generating social parasitism" (p. 89). It becomes clearer how a complexity of structures and connections, operating at macro-political, economic, and micro-social levels, have been continuously shaping and reshaping the space reclaimed by Roma flower sellers.

Despite these historical, economic fluctuations that impacted the entire Romanian population, the perceived image of the flower sellers is that they are a financially privileged Roma group. Indeed, there are flower sellers far better off than other citizens, Roma and non-Roma alike, and thus I do not wish to argue that all the Roma Others—of the majority Romanian population— selling flowers in the city implicitly represent the subaltern Other.

The problem is not that flower sellers are financially privileged or not, though this is the aspect which renders the othering process more complicated, but the fact that the lasting generalized image of the enriched Roma flower sellers is easily and often combined with their representation as profiteering merchants, which is in turn fed on by lasting stereotypes of the thief and lazy Gypsy. So it should come as no surprise that headlines in the mass media such as “The All Souls’ Day (All Saints’ Day) is profitable for the flower sellers,” or “How flower sellers rip off the state budget” are read and internalized as generalizing statements that describe flower sellers.

At the same time, the exacerbated media framing allows for a more immediate, tangible explanation for unlawful practices delineating the Romanian socio-economic context, while downplaying ampler cases of corruption of administration officials, and thus for a more cognoscible target of the general population’s frustrations regarding their increasingly precarious living standards. Furthermore, through an inductive logic, the image of the Roma flower sellers often comes in handy, given their relatively higher visibility, as a metonymical device to think indistinctively about all other Roma individuals.

Emphasizing not only the understanding of social space as “a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another,” but also the mutual relationships and the interconnections among different spaces, Foucault (1986, p. 23) addresses the otherness of certain sites/ spaces when he conceptualizes heterotopias –real places in comparison to utopias– as:

[...]being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect[...] something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and in-verted. (p. 24)

Tonkiss (2005) argues that the power of Foucault’s notion of heterotopias to evoke spatial difference or otherness, notably to signify the idea of “counter-sites,” can bring about “a wider engagement with how existing spaces can be altered”: “Such counter-spaces resist the dominant organization of space around the requirements of political order or the interests of economic accumulation” (p. 134). By providing the example of protests and demonstrations, she extends Foucault’s notion of heterotopias to include the potential role of spatial practice in remaking space, often in ways subversive to an established spatial order (p. 135).

It is in this light that spatial practices of flower sellers, in contrast to regular flower shops, can be viewed as micro-heterotopias within the capital cityscape. The unique geography of resistance of the flower sellers is produced by their ongoing spatial practices that attempt to challenge the dominant social order through the spatial strategy of using a certain physical space that had been intended to represent the domain of the

economically privileged non-Roma. By the same token, the flower sellers' street demonstration in the heart of the capital city could also be understood as a kind of singular moment of invention that Roma flower sellers perform in order to reclaim a space which has been so forcefully interwoven with their daily lives.

At the same time, perceived from a non-Roma perspective, the flower sellers' spaces constitute heterotopias in that they are pockets of a certain "nonmodern" paradigmatic form of the "outside" transposed within a different, modern, more rigid, more tamed paradigmatic form of the "outside" that is represented by the city, and, more specifically, by the city center.

In making this observation, I find similarities and thus attempt to draw an analogy between the symbolic functions of open air markets in Romania—as opposed to Westernized supermarket spaces—and Chakrabarty's (2001) structuralist exploration of the Indian bazaar as "a paradigmatic form of the outside" (p. 71) within his larger discussion of the Indian "nonmodern" "cultural practices productive of boundary markers" (p. 72), and of the insider/outsider spatial division of identity.

As the "outside," the bazaar has several attributes: It embodies "that unenclosed, exposed, and interstitial outside that acts as the meeting point of several communities;" "unlike the modern marketplace, is geared to the production of social life [...], it privileges speech" (Chakrabarty, 2001, pp. 72-3). It is a place where one encounters "strangers" or "outsiders" that are "always suspect and potentially dangerous;" therefore themes of "familiarity/ unfamiliarity and trust/ mistrust" are marking the various economic transactions enacted in the bazaar setting (p. 72).

Usually, the bazaar-like ambiance is expected in Romanian open air markets, where, alongside various other merchants, Roma flower sellers are also carrying out their flower business. However, a distinct atmosphere takes shape when social interactions occur in the “outside”/ flower sellers’ spaces interspersed in the “outside”/ city. I observed many times such interactions taking place at flower sellers’ stalls, between prospective customers and Roma flower sellers. It is very revealing to hear how, in the center side of the city, passers-by, maybe getting off the bus, exiting the underground train station, or exiting stores or office buildings, switch to a particular speech register when approaching the flower sellers, a communication strategy mostly expected to be used in the open air markets/ bazaars.

Exacerbated by the otherness of the physical presence and difference of the Roma—many older flower sellers are wearing the traditional outfit represented in particular by long, colored skirts, aprons, and headscarves—the “mistrust” theme is often punctuated by the use of the second person singular pronoun by the passers-by in their dialogues with the flower sellers. In Romanian, this grammatical form is different from the second person plural pronoun, and suggests lack of respect or a condescending attitude when striking a conversation with a stranger. Similarly, condescending and at times suspicious looks are reinforced by directions given by the customers to the flower sellers upon putting together the flowers in the ordered bouquets. Needless to say that when these passers-by enter a store a few feet away or, for that matter, a flower shop, will swiftly readjust their communication patterns to be “in synch” with the seemingly less hostile, more transparent “outside”— the city space.



However, the physical spaces where the flower sellers carry out their activity have become increasingly regulated and standardized. Among other measures, their previous stalls/stands have been forcibly replaced with more sophisticated kiosks in order to “match” the requirements of the urban planning and modernization projects, which are not always necessarily prompted by altruistic visions for the wellbeing of the city space and dwellers, since they have often been linked to bid rigging practices, and thus to the illegal enrichment of some city sectors’ mayors.

*A Newly Found Sense of Pride: Roma Activists and the Production of Empowered Ethnic Identity*

It is a pride for us to assume the Roma identity. More than just assuming it, we are proud to be Roma: some of us. I would nuance further my statement: few of us. Here where we are (at the NGO location), we are very proud of our work. As a matter of fact, you have in front of you a minority within a minority. For, according to research studies and different surveys, there are about two million Roma, whereas according to the censuses, there are around 530.000 only. The truth is that we are far more than that. In a nutshell, Roma individuals do not want to assume their identity. (Mircea, activist)

This was the first statement one of the Roma activists expressed when we started the two hour conversation. His lines are also fairly representative of the discourse of all the other five Roma activists, women and men, I met and spoke with. Apart from their declared activist status, they are also higher education graduates, running the gamut from Sociology, Foreign Languages, to International Relations and Accounting. They are members of two NGOs that, from slightly different perspectives, one notably through

human rights advocacy, and the other through more culture-based identity politics, seek to protect the rights of the Roma minority in Romania.

Most importantly, these activists take part in a process of Romani ethnogenesis, defined by Gheorghe (1997) as the transcendence by a social group of its formerly “despised and inferior position” towards “some kind of respectability with a sort of equality with other social groups in the hierarchy of social stratification on the basis of a revised perception of their identity” (p. 158). So, while one NGO subscribes to a more political dimension of the Roma ethnogenesis (e.g., attention to legal protection against discrimination of Roma), the activities of the second one highlight a more cultural character of this process of ethnogenesis (e.g., development of cultural-educational projects for various Roma communities).

My interlocutors were very precise in underlining their view on activists’ representativeness in relation to the wide range of Roma groups in the country:

I don’t think we can represent all the opinions, wishes and needs of all the Roma that do not have the opportunity to voice them. It would be absurd to state we do. I do however believe that we make an effort to fulfill some of their expressed needs. (Cosmin, activist)

Another respondent explained that:

We have specific projects that target specific numbers of direct beneficiaries. For instance, we are currently assisting 600 Roma individuals from Bucharest to better qualify and be thus inserted in the labor market. That being said, we do represent a voice for these persons. However, the rhetoric asserting that an NGO represents the Roma people is false, since representativeness is earned only in the

electoral realm of politics, and since that an NGO is not a party, it cannot therefore have a constituency of 2 million individuals. (Sorin, activist)

A distinctive feature emerged from the activists' personal narratives, namely a common type of coping mechanisms against racism that they have been exposed to throughout time. This pattern is common to all my activist interlocutors in that it is the outcome of a progressive path from manifest frustration and rage to consciously, strategically practiced reactions. Riggins (1997) underscores that discourses of identity by majority groups are univocal/monologic, when compared to discourses of identity by subordinate minorities, which are more complex, contradictory and ironic. The interviewees' examples instantiate this process:

I am long past the rage/revolt stage. That phase was happening during the 1990s, during my first years of Roma activism. Sometimes, I express my Roma identity in a quite demonstrative fashion. For instance, during a trip to Italy with my husband and two daughters, we were approached while at the airport by a Romanian tourist, who must have heard us speaking Romanian, and asked us for some information about a train station near the airport. Looking at hearing our daughters talking to each other in English, she admiringly said: "What a nice family you have, with two well educated daughters! Are you by any chance Armenian?" (she must have thought that because our darker looking skin...) I replied to her straightforwardly: "No, Madam, we are *Gypsies!*" She went on saying: "Oh, my God, I am sorry I wouldn't have thought!" To which I continued: Pardon me, Madam, what wouldn't you have thought? That there might exist Gypsies of this kind, of our kind?" So, you see, nowadays, in such instances

where I experience or am exposed to racist attitudes, I use my identity playfully, creatively in order to challenge others to change their stereotypes and prejudiced ideas. In such events or dialogues I make use of a combination of irony and pedagogy. I believe I have inherited this manifest expression of identity from my parents, who assumed their Roma identity as Romanian citizens belonging to the middle class segment of population even during the communist regime. (Ama, activist)

Referring to his everyday public transportation experience, Dan, another activist, explained his gradual change in attitude towards the racist behavior of the non Roma passengers. In the beginning, he used to react quite cholericly when, many times, suspicious looks were targeted at him during his usual six station ride with the bus to his work place: “I would feel so hurt, so hurt deep down, I would feel my self-esteem and pride completely crushed, when passengers standing next to me would suddenly watch their handbags by manifestly protecting them, keeping them closer to their body.”

However, in time he realized that reacting with anger would not improve significantly his situation: “On the contrary, I would have to bear for another three, four bus stations the looks of more bus passengers having witnessed my enraged reaction. Eventually, this would further reinforce the general stereotypes.” Consequently, he taught himself to react differently in such instances — calmly, with irony and condescence: “I would say to the passenger standing next to me and displaying such defensive attitude: “Do not worry, Sir/ Madam, I am making sure I keep both hands on the handrail...”

Integration is differently viewed by members of the two NGOs I contacted during my fieldwork. While for some integration is perceived negatively, as another term for assimilation into the majority population, for others, in particular the human rights-based NGO activists, integration means a process of adaptation, a development of a Roma identity that could function in the contemporary world.

One activist explained what integration is not currently, by offering an ideal positive instance of multiculturalism. He thus made reference to one particular sentence of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech "I Have A Dream," and adapted it to the national context of the Roma situation, underlining the utmost importance of the respect for different cultures, and for other-orientedness. So, his version of the Martin Luther King Jr.'s statement, "I have a dream that one day [...], little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers," was: "I have a dream that one day, Romanian little girls will sit at school next to Roma little girls who wear long skirts and two long braids, and that Romanian pupils will also know and understand some words and phrases in the Romani language" (Mircea, activist).

From a perspective that clearly emphasizes cultural/collective rights and the promotion of a distinctive Roma ethnic identity, this segment of Roma activists gear their efforts towards actions and projects such as the introduction of the Romani as an optional language in school, the revision of history textbooks to include subaltern history of the Roma, especially to make known the slavery experience of the Roma that historically was exclusively enforced on the territory of Romania as well as the revival and promotion of the memory of the persecution of Roma during the Second World War Holocaust. This is

in the spirit of respect for rediscovered cultural roles and traditional values that have been previously repressed both externally and internally.

On the other hand, the perspective emphasizing on the human rights and political components rather than a strategic essentialist ethnic construction of Roma identity, which characterizes the discourse of the second NGO activists I interviewed, added further complicating nuances to the discussion about integration, all the more since one of my interlocutors is also a feminist.

The question of the practice of arranged child marriages among some Roma groups was brought about during our discussion about the integration of the Roma. The feminist Roma activist explained such practices with reference to ancient Indian culture roots and to the pressures exerted on women by a strongly patriarchal social system. This explanation was indeed very different from the historically contextual explanation for the practice, offered by the cultural activists. This latter explanation considers the custom that is still current within some Roma communities as an echo of medieval times, when it is said to have been practiced as a defense measure among Roma slaves against the so-called “*jus primae noctis*” — the lord’s right in medieval times to take the virginity of his serfs’ maiden daughters. The feminist Roma activist describe to me the challenging situation which she must face as both a Roma activist and as a feminist activist. At the same time, addressing this topic further shed light on the complex identity negotiation processes that a Roma feminist activist must undertake:

Certainly, the arranged child marriages practiced by some Roma traditional groups is against the state and European laws, though I see that the Romanian legal authorities tolerate and turn a blind eye to such unlawful cases. Certainly,

the representation and coverage of such negative cases occurring in some Roma communities by the mainstream media is made in a blatantly racist fashion. You know, as a feminist, it is very hard for me, since I must always carefully negotiate my own discourse: when I make an effort toward the eradication of such negative cultural practices, Romanian nationalists are using my discourse to promote ethnic discrimination, and, at the same time, I am being quite resentfully viewed in the traditional conservative Roma communities, I am being perceived as an outsider. (Ama, activist)

Finally, Ama assigned a more positive meaning to the concept of integration, in comparison to the more critical view of the activists I had interviewed previously, as she believed that integration entails a reinvention of the Roma identity in sync with the modern world. She also clearly expressed her awareness that at the same time, the negative customs the activists strive to erase must be replaced with something that would represent a much more modern construction of the Roma identity than the previous one: “And there have been and there are ongoing efforts to fulfill this objective — a written Romani language, history books, museums, I mean identity landmarks” (Ama, activist).

*Negotiating Roma Identity Everyday: Narratives of Internalized Oppression, Passing, and Hybridity*

The Roma identity negotiated by Roma activists that was presented in the previous accounts delineated only one approach among several other dimensions of self-identification that became apparent during my fieldwork. The large socio-economic spectrum to which my Roma interlocutors belonged and the urban context itself made possible the emergence of a range of patterns of identity negotiation. These, in turn,

revealed complex configurations and relations between concepts like internalized oppression, passing, and hybridity.

I will now turn to the personal narratives of people I met and spent time with and provide a close reading of how they made meaning of their social interactions with the majority non-Roma and other Roma individuals, and thus how they managed and assumed different positionalities contextually. I will focus on various interviewees' speech acts and their corresponding communication contexts concurrently in order to shed light on the connections and disconnections among the experiences of Roma individuals occupying distinct positions within the socio-economic spectrum.

Gina, the Roma flower seller in her early forties, who had her flower stall at equal distance between the tram station and the entrance to the small market place close to my mother's house, was the first person I approached for the interviewing purpose. As she was about to start talking about herself, her family and her flower business, Gina mentioned, accompanying her utterances with hand gestures one uses as if to justify one's spoken words, that the flower sellers kin she belongs to is a special group of Roma, "apart from all the other Roma groups," as they are civilized and have a different mentality and upbringing from other Roma. Interestingly, Gina, like many other Roma individuals I interviewed (except, understandably, the Roma activists), employed the Romanian adjective "românizați" – defined by the dictionary as having adopted the language, culture and customs of Romanian people, thus having become similar to Romanians – to refer to the quality of being civilized, as she clarified when I asked her what she meant by that term: "Românizați means that we are civilized." At one point, she stressed that, in her family, none are from the countryside, but from Lacul Tei, one of the



quarters of Bucharest. She was also quick to point to the fact that in the families of flower sellers, there is no such thing as child marriage, and that this is practiced by other Roma people, giving the example of the Roma Caldarari. She chose to share with me some memory snapshots about her childhood:

When we moved to our street, we were the only Roma. On the same street lived also Macedonians, Armenians, Romanians, two Hungarian families [...] We were eight children plus two nieces that our mother raised...so ten kids [...] Three Romanian families had their houses in the same courtyard where our house was, so we shared the courtyard with three Romanian families. They had no children and one of them, a widow of a priest, was very fond of us. She told us she had never seen such beautiful Gypsy, blond, with blue eyes and clean. She said she had seen many Gypsies, both in Bucharest and Brasov, but they were not civilized, and were not clean... You see, as I was explaining to you earlier, there are different Roma groups, and some of them are not clean. Now, if there is one who is bad, then all are considered bad, even if just one did a bad thing. We should not lump together different people.... if one steals and kills, does it mean that all Roma steal and kill? (Gina, flower seller)

However, these childhood memories were counterbalanced by other instances of daily life that she shared with me in a way that revealed her feelings of frustration and sheer confusion regarding interactions with non-Roma in the public space. One of these instances is reproduced below:

When we went with our children in the park, we could hear sometimes other grandparents warning their grandchildren: "Stay here, don't approach them, they

are gypsies, do not play with them or touch them!” And our children are blond, white, beautiful, and very clean; they took modern dance lessons, they even posed for pictures at a cultural event held by the City Hall! (Gina, flower seller)

Besides the biographical dimension, what Gina’s discourse revealed to me was an implicit sense of self-pride occasioned by the exceptionally positive impression that her non-Roma neighbors acquired about her family. Although the meaning of her lines is not generalizable to the cases of all the other Roma persons I met during my fieldwork, I found it to be common in a number of cases of Roma interlocutors from quite distinct socio-economic strata. I will reproduce below just three of them:

My grandfather was a blacksmith, well-off compared to others in his village. I’ve never concealed my origin, but, of course, neither have I bragged loudly about it. And let me tell you that I feel proud that, from being a Roma, I became an army colonel engineer in nuclear physics, after I had graduated from the military academy and nuclear physics. Moreover, I worked for six more years beyond my retirement starting date since they needed me. Being educated, with a good job, the emphasis was not placed on the fact that I was a Gypsy. People would avoid making Gypsy-related jokes in our presence, out of respect for our value. And all my family members are blond; my sisters have fairer skin than you...(Toma, retired army colonel engineer)

Yes, I’m Gypsy, but not like the most wretched one... not like that guy on the tram stop ready to get on in order to steal. I’m part of the Roma that are more polished, more emancipated, more educated. We know how to live in society, and

so my way of being has been influenced by the fact that I lived longer among the Romanians. (Victor, cemetery supervisor)

Let me tell you that I have constant customers, who are not Gypsy, who buy flowers from me, and who even bring me sometimes a cup of coffee or a chocolate bar. You know, they even kiss me on the cheeks – my female customers who are not Gypsy. They like me because here is clean and I talk nicely to them.

We talk with each other better than with my own relatives. (Maria, flower seller)

At a first reading, one might be inclined to argue that Gina's and the other four statements highlight no more and no less than an attitude of pride embedded in the self-presentation acts of each interlocutor. However, when considered against the backdrop of ethnic discrimination deep-seated within the Romanian society, these biographical accounts point to more than just the expression of feelings of self-pride.

Their lines are testimonials of a particular state of exception that had been granted to them by the majority – an exception from the racialized Gypsy subject always already certified as Other/Uncivilized through a regional hegemonic cultural production that borrowed from the epistemic violence of the West in its orientalist knowledge production. Their feelings of pride are conditioned by the opinions of the non-Roma. Their degree of self-worth is thus being determined by the degree of their positive acknowledgement and acceptance by the majority. As such, I argue that these statements are, above all, subtle symptoms of internalized oppression (racism).

An analogy between the struggle of the Roma in negotiating their identity within the context of social interactions with non-Roma (and other Roma) and the phenomenon

of “epidermalization” identified by Frantz Fanon (1967) in his psychological and philosophical analysis of the state of being a black (colonized) man in a white (colonizer) world can help further clarify my argument. According to Fanon, given the lack of the black man’s “ontological resistance” from the perspective of the white man, he is expected not only to be black, but to “be black in relation to the white man” (p. 90). It is this condition that cultivates an inferiority complex for the black man and Fanon highlights in particular the subsequent process of internalization or “epidermalization” of this inferiority complex.

Fanon (1967) traces one of the main causes that triggers this alienating process in which the black man denies and loses gradually his own self and self-worth, imitates and follows the white man who stands for the measure of all things. He thus points to the collective unconscious of the colonized (and of the colonizer for that matter) that is itself a result of the “unreflected imposition of a culture” – namely, a socialization that promotes a racist view of the world, where the white/colonizer occupies the top position in the social hierarchy (p. 147). In this sense, Fanon shows how the cultural imposition is internalized by the colonized in the case of the Antilleans:

In the collective unconscious of *homo occidentalis*, the Negro — or, if one prefers, the color black — symbolizes evil, sin, wretchedness, death, war, famine. [...] [T]he Antillean partakes of the same collective unconscious as the European. [...] It is normal for the Antillean to be anti-Negro. Through the collective unconscious the Antillean has taken over all the archetypes belonging to the European. [...] There is no help for it: I am a white man. For unconsciously I distrust what is black in me, that is, the whole of my being. [...] When I disobey,

when I make too much noise, I am told to “stop acting like a nigger.” [...] In order to achieve morality, it is essential that the black, the dark, the Negro vanish from consciousness. Hence a Negro is forever in combat with his own image. (pp. 147-150)

Similarly, there are cases where the Roma go through a process of internalization of the racialized and ethnicized projection of the “Gypsy” – a repository of various stereotypical attributes of otherness that in turn helps further emphasize and legitimize the Romanian cultural identity. As I will show in the next examples, signs of this process of epidermalization can be noticed in the way several Roma interviewees employed the negatively-loaded “Gypsy” signifier, thus perpetuating and conforming to its stereotypical usage within the dominant discourse.

Ina and her sister-in-law, Marga, employed as janitors for the offices of the national television station, shared with me their experiences of their first weeks on the job. They remembered how the TV station employees working in the respective offices put them to the test in order to see whether they would be tempted to steal from their offices. They would intentionally leave their cellphones or handbags wide open on their desks in order to find out Ina’s and Marga’s reactions. Expressing her discontent and frustration regarding this humiliating testing practice, Ina employed, however, the term “Gypsy” only to further confirm its negative meaning from the perspective of a non Roma: “We do our job efficiently when we enter an office and then we just leave the office- end of story! How could they think that we might steal? God forbid! I myself hate to bug people and become a nuisance like a Gypsy!” Victoria, a vendor at a public transportation ticket kiosk, described her reaction when, while waiting with her child in

line for a visit at the doctor's office, another parent made racist statements about her child: "Why do you call my child Gypsy? My child is cleaner than your children! Look better at your children: it is them who actually look like Gypsies! My child instead looks like a Romanian!" In a similar context, Dora, a flower seller, reacted as follows: "Why must you tell my daughter that she's Gypsy? Don't I know she is Gypsy? And what can I do? You really had to call her Gypsy?"

However, these accounts about the various dimensions of internalized oppression should not necessarily be perceived as a proof of a clear-cut demarcation between dominant and subaltern positionalities or of an unambiguous dominant/subaltern relationship. Underlining the nuances in the colonizer/colonized relation explored in "Black Skin, White Masks" by Fanon (1967), Homi Bhabha (2008) calls for "an understanding of the *process of identification* in the analytic of desire," which helps reveal "the deep psychic uncertainty of the colonial relation itself" (pp. xxvii-xxviii). According to Bhabha,

The very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting. The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master's place while keeping his place in the slave's *avenging* anger. "Black skins, white masks" is not, for example, a neat division; it is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once which makes it impossible for the devalued, insatiable *evolué* to accept the colonizer's invitation to identity. (p. xxviii)

In this sense, Bhabha argues for the possibility of a strategy of subversion to emerge precisely from such ambivalent identification: "It is a form of power that is exercised at

the very limits of identity and authority, in the mocking spirit of mask and image” (p. xxxiv).

It is the acknowledgement of a rather ambiguous relationship between the dominant and the subaltern subjects that helps explain the contradictions in the discourses of my Roma interlocutors. For instance, the same accounts and narratives that mirrored internalized racism and the desire to become non-Roma were also revealing a reverse, almost ethnographic gaze cast by the Roma on the dominant population. This was the case of various instances of othering discourses produced by the Roma individuals I interacted with.

Hooks (1995) describes, for example, the representation of whiteness in the black imagination as terrorizing, not in the sense of a simplistic essentialist Us versus Them dichotomy, but as a genuine response to the “traumatic pain and anguish” representing one of the major consequences of white racist domination. At the same time, black people maintain representations of the Others (white people) which emerge in reaction to white stereotypes of blackness (pg. 38).

Similarly, in the case of the Roma interviewees, the othering discourses underline the representation of the dominant non-Roma in the Roma imaginary and may be understood as inverted stereotypes as well as consequences of personal experiences of the Roma. I will next refer to a few examples. Though some of Ina’s (the janitor mentioned earlier) statements revealed a particular degree of internalized racism, she was clearly aware and highly critical of the racist attitudes of the dominant population in the workplace. She explained to me what happened to her sister-in-law when she was trying to find a job:

They surely had available positions, but the former boss did not want to hire my sister-in-law only because she is Gypsy...Finally, when this boss left the company, my sister-in-law got the job. Unfortunately, they treated her badly, they were visibly mean to her, they could not stand her, they had her clean only the restrooms...but I helped her to move and work in the same department I work for.

(Ina, janitor)

Gina, the flower seller, expressed her opinion about the dominant population: “Of course there are Romanians who are dirtier than some of the Roma.” By the same token, Victor, the cemetery supervisor, provided a negative portrayal of the non-Roma: “You know, there are Romanians who are doing worse things than our Roma people.”

Finally, some of the narratives represented experiences of passing as non-Roma that, in turn, revealed different forms of hybridity. Some of the interlocutors experienced hybridity as transgression. Others, who lived hybridity contextually, as a way to escape discrimination, emphasized its disempowering dimension. Imelda, a social worker, of both Roma and non-Roma origin, told me her story of passing and of living in-between two worlds — that of her Roma family, and that of her former husband’s family. She managed to hide her Romani origin, but only two months after their wedding, when her husband watched a recorded video from the wedding party, he heard some guests speaking the Romani language. This led to the end of their marriage. In a different situation, Cristina, a Television reporter, found out that she has Roma origins during high-school, and she embarked on a journey of reverse passing, where she became an active supporter of Roma rights and a promoter of Romani culture within the non-Roma space.



## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

I began my ethnographic journey with the aim to understand the negotiation of the Roma identity within the intercultural contact zones of the urban space in Romania and at the same time with a personal quest to problematize my own positionality as a non Roma individual within the context of unequal power relations between the Roma and non Roma population. My direct engagement with the socio-interactional contexts – which involved the interviewing process and observation – in the urban space that was made possible by the embodied practice and situatedness of ethnography (Conquergood, 1991, Madison, 2005), continuously enriched and challenged my own exercise into self-reflexivity. The goal of this exercise is to ideally recognize the mechanisms which maintain the non Roma as the main point of reference in the Romanian social hierarchy, similarly to what hooks (1995) referred to as a repositioning process that helps “understand the way in which [white people’s] cultural practice reinscribes white supremacy without promoting paralyzing guilt or denial” (p. 49).

In my critical exploration of Roma identity negotiation, I drew on the “travelling” postcolonial theory, on a translation of postcolonial scholarship into the Romanian space in relation to the situation of Roma minority and, most specifically, on a standpoint which is analogous to the postcolonial theories’ concern to deconstruct the traditional dichotomous perceptions of the colonizer-colonized relations. I made an attempt at exploring various discursive practices of Roma individuals that may be potentially suggestive of alternative epistemologies, which would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the Roma subaltern- non-Roma dominant encounter.

The ethnographic fieldwork, through the socio-economic heterogeneity of the respondents' demographics, revealed several distinct tendencies regarding Roma identity negotiation. The interviews highlighted a range of identity formations strongly linked to diverse contexts of everyday social interactions with the non-Roma and other Roma alike. In many cases, the interviewees shared personal narratives of internalized oppression, and of both disempowering and resistant instances of hybridity and passing. In some of the narratives, passing highlighted dramatic denouements that led to the further othering of the Roma individuals passing as non Roma. These instances were in opposition to the transgressive value of hybridity celebrated by some postcolonial theorists, such as Bhabha (1994), for whom hybridity allows for an opportunity

to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural difference. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (p. 2)

In other cases of unintentional passing, where the Roma individuals found later in life about their Roma origin, a form of reverse passing became the means to discover a previously unknown identity (the Roma identity) and a way to re-signify the past and to gain a unique standpoint that is crucial in understanding how power works within a racialized social system. Also, as Sara Ahmed (1999) described a similar case of passing (an Aboriginal woman unintentionally passing as white), the act of reverse passing becomes a story “not of truth but of love” (p. 103). The Roma individuals in such

instances thus developed a strong link to the Roma community, learned its history, and genuinely cherished its values.

Other narratives exposed unsettling patterns of internalized oppression that strikingly echo Fanon's (1967) analysis of the successful subjectifying techniques used by the colonizers to discipline the Other into believing in their own inferiority and into self-hating. Fanon's (1967) lines about the internalization of racist stereotypes, "The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly" (p. 93), can easily match real lines that I often heard uttered by a number of my respondents (e.g., "I am Gypsy, but I don't like Gypsies"). This trend among several of my respondents demonstrates that minority discourses carry often the traces of the negative representations assigned to minority by the dominant groups like the persisting aspects of feelings of shame, self-blaming, passivity, or powerlessness. hooks (1995), for instance, explains how systems of domination like racism "coerce black folks to internalize negative perceptions of blackness, to be self-hating" (p. 32).

At the same time, some of the personal narratives also highlighted ambiguities and nuanced understandings of the Roma- non Roma encounter that allow for individual resistance to the dominant cultural production of the Gypsy Other. Such were the instances where the Roma turned a critical, ethnographic look back at the non Roma. Likewise, in other cases, the Roma individuals displayed a negotiation of identity that revealed instances of transgressive hybridity that did not simply mean a blending of cultural elements (Roma and non Roma) but rather a displacement and undermining of the idea of a pure (Romanian) culture and of formerly taken-for-granted constructs (the Gypsy Other).

Viewed on a continuum of identity locations, the activist interviewees displayed the most positive approach to their identity, in that they noticeably and proudly embraced the Roma identity. However, few of the respondents that I met without the mediation of Roma NGOs expressed familiarity with the objectives, let alone existence, of the activist groups and their projects. Most importantly, I realized that each interview, each experience was fundamentally unique, and my fieldwork emphasized the continuous need for highly contextualized research that is conducive to transformative scholarship.

To this end, I envisage an improved continuation of my ethnographic exploration, where I plan to include a critical communicative methodology (CCM) defined as a “methodological response to the dialogic turn of societies and sciences” (Gómez, Puigvert, & Flecha, 2011, p.235). More specifically, the critical communicative methodology strives for an egalitarian dialogue among researchers and the people being studied, where “researched subjects contribute knowledge from their lifeworlds” (p. 235).

In this sense, the CCM draws on the principle of cultural intelligence and thus challenges the traditional view that “those groups most excluded from society do not have the necessary ability to participate in academic activities” (p. 237). Most importantly, it has been proved through research that cultural minority groups and economically marginalized people can contribute to research “from the design to the analysis and dissemination of main findings” (p. 237). According to Munte, Serradell, and Sorde (2011), who carried out research involving the Roma people as members of the research teams, the CCM assists in a better collaboration between “the academy, the policy makers, and minority cultural groups” (p. 264). Referring to the results of their study, they argue that “the creation of opportunities for the Roma to engage actively in

research has changed both the attitudes that some Roma hold toward research and the ways their participation has been tackled in various domains, especially in politics” (p. 264).

Being aware of the limitations of the current research, I envision the next step of my ethnographic project where the critical communicative methodology will foster a dialogic relation between theory and practice and at the same time will allow for further critical engagement with the issue of unequal power relations between researcher and participants. It will continue to address the urgent need for responsible inquiry aimed at dismantling the homogenized, oversimplified representations of the Roma identity and experience which constantly reinforce discriminatory practices against the Roma in Europe and beyond Europe’s borders. Finally, to the extent that academic research has a decisive impact on policy and practice, the next stage of this scholarship will aim to contribute to the efforts in the European Union for conflict resolution and understanding of variations in the administration of justice for the Roma, and other oppressed communities and populations.

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### Consent Form

My name is Anca Birzescu, and I am PhD student in the School of Media and Communication, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio. The research I am conducting addresses Roma identity in Romanian urban areas in the context of everyday life. I am inviting you to participate in in-depth interviews. Participation to interviews is voluntary. I will be seeking the help of approximately 45 adults like you to volunteer to participate in in-depth interviews, at times and places convenient to you, lasting for approximately one-two sessions with each session of about 60 minutes, and where the second session might take place as a continuation of the first one. All participants will be in the age group of 18-65 years living or working in the urban areas of Romania, mainly Bucharest. The risks associated with this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

During the interviews, we will engage in a conversation where you will share your ideas and opinions about your interactions and relationships with non-Roma people, taken from your daily life experience, at your choice. With your permission, the interview will be audio-taped. I will retain the audio-tapes for future research. Also, note that all information that you give to me will be confidential. To ensure confidentiality, I will use a pseudonym when I am quoting you in my report. No one other than me will have access to this information. Information will be locked in drawers. All electronic information will be password protected. If you agree to participate, you do not have to answer any question that you are not comfortable with. You may also choose to withdraw from the interview at any time.

The information you give during the interview could help guide European Roma policy-making. Please know that the activities I observe during my meetings and your responses to interview questions are for my educational purposes. You have the right to have all questions concerning the study answered by me.

You will be provided with a copy of this consent document for your records. I am also providing you with my contact information so that you can ask me any questions regarding your rights as a research participant at any time. My personal e-mail address is [abirzes@bgsu.edu](mailto:abirzes@bgsu.edu). You can also reach me by phone at 610-79-60 or at (01)419-353-2441, in the U.S.A., after June 27th 2011. In case you have further questions about the conduct of this study please contact the chair of Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, (01)419-372-7716 or [hsrb@bgsu.edu](mailto:hsrb@bgsu.edu). You might contact my academic advisor, Dr. Radhika Gajjala, at [radhik@bgnet.bgsu.edu](mailto:radhik@bgnet.bgsu.edu). Please indicate if you grant permission for me to audio-tape the interview by checking one of the choices mentioned below.

#### Check One

Yes, you may audio-tape the interviews

No, you cannot audio-tape the interview

Signature-----

Date-----

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## Consimtamant

Ma numesc Anca Birzescu si sunt student doctorand in cadrul Scolii de Media si Comunicare a Universitatii Bowling Green, orasul Bowling Green, Ohio, S.U.A.. Studiul pe care il fac in prezent abordeaza identitatea roma in zonele urbane ale Romaniei, in contextual vietii de zi cu zi. Va invit sa participati, in mod voluntar, la niste interviuri-conversatii in cadrul acestui studiu. As avea nevoie de ajutorul a aproximativ 45 de persoane adulte care, in mod benevol, sa ia parte, in locuri si la ore stabilite cu voia dumneavoastra, la interviuri ce vor include aproximativ una- doua parti, cate 60 min fiecare, unde cea de-a doua parte posibila s-ar putea desfasura ca o continuare a primei parti a interviului. Toti participantii la interviuri apartin grupului cu varste cuprinse intre 18-65 ani si traiesc sau isi desfasoara activitatea profesionala in zonele urbane ale Romaniei, in general in Bucuresti. Riscurile asociate cu acest studiu nu sunt mai mari decat acelea intalnite in viata de zi cu zi.

In timpul interviurilor va avea loc o conversatie-dialog, in care va veti impartasi ideile si opiniile dumneavoastra cu privire la interactiunile si relatiile sociale pe care le aveti cu persoanele de alta etnie decat cea roma, din experienta vietii dumneavoastra de zi cu zi, la alegerea dumneavoastra. Cu permisiunea dumneavoastra, interviurile vor fi inregistrate audio. Voi pastra aceste inregistrari pentru studiu ulterior. De asemenea, va rog sa luati in considerare faptul ca toate informatiile pe care mi le veti oferi vor fi confidentiale. Pentru a asigura confidentialitatea, voi folosi un pseudonim de fiecare data cand voi folosi, in raportul de studiu, citate din interviuri. Nimeni in afara de mine nu va avea acces la aceste informatii. Informatiile vor fi puse sub cheie si toate informatiile electronice vor fi parolate. In cazul in care decideti sa participati, veti raspunde doar la intrebarile la care doriti sa raspundeti. De asemenea, va puteti retrage din aceste interviuri oricand doriti.

Informatiile pe care le veti oferi in timpul interviurilor ar putea fi de ajutor in cadrul legislatiei pentru europenii de etnie roma. Va rog sa luati in considerare, de asemenea, faptul ca activitatile si informatiile din timpul intalnirilor si interviurilor sunt baza obiectivelor mele educationale. Aveti dreptul de a-mi adresa orice intrebare - si deci, de a primi raspuns la intrebari- in legatura cu acest studiu.

Veti primi o copie dupa aceasta forma de consimtamant. Gasiti mai jos informatiile mele de contact pentru a-mi putea adresa orice intrebare cu privire la drepturile dumneavoastra de participant in acest studio, in orice moment. Adresa mea electronica este: [abirzes@bgsu.edu](mailto:abirzes@bgsu.edu). Puteti, de asemenea, sa ma contactati la numarul de telefon: 610-79-60 sau la: (01)419-353-2441, in Statele Unite, dupa 27 iunie 2011. In cazul in care aveti alte intrebari despre acest studiu, va rog sa contactati directorul Oficiului de Supraveghere a Cercetarii Efectuate asupra Subiectilor Umani, din cadrul Universitatii Bowling Green, la numarul de telefon: (01)419-372-7716, sau la adresa electronic: [hsrb@bgsu.edu](mailto:hsrb@bgsu.edu). Mai puteti contacta coordonatorul meu academic, Dr. Radhika Gajjala, la: [radhik@bgsu.edu](mailto:radhik@bgsu.edu). Va rog sa indicati daca imi acordati permisiunea de a inregistra audio interviul, incercuind una din optiunile mentionate mai jos.

### Incercuiți o singura optiune:

Da, puteti inregistra audio interviurile

Nu, nu puteti inregistra audio interviurile

Semnatura-----

Data-----

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Bowling Green, OH 43403 USA  
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## APPENDIX B

Recruitment Questionnaire

My name is Anca Birzescu, and I am a doctoral student in the School of Communication Studies, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio. I am conducting research about Roma identity in the context of everyday life. Can you spend 5 minutes with me whilst I go through this recruitment form with you? I want to know if you will be eligible to participate. Participation to this research is voluntary.

Date:

Name:

Ethnicity (if you consider you represent any):

National minority (if you consider you belong to any):

Gender:

Age (Circle One):      (1) 18-25      (2) 26-35      (3) 36-49      (4) 50-65

Occupation:

Contact Information:

Appointment Date, Time and Place (time and place convenient to you):



Interview Sample Questions

Do you recall having had any positive experiences when interacting with non-Roma individuals?  
If yes, please describe.

Do you recall having had any negative experiences when interacting with non-Roma individuals?  
If yes, please describe.

Do you have non-Roma friends? If yes, do you think there is any difference between your friendships with non-Roma and those with other Roma?

What do you think about the way non-Roma people interact with you in different situations, for example in a market, at the job place, at the doctor's, etc.?