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**"WE ARE GYPSIES, NOT ROMA!"
Ethnic Identity Constructions
and Ethnic Stereotypes – an example
from a Gypsy Community in Central
Romania**

STUDII DE ATELIER. CERCETAREA MINORITĂȚILOR NAȚIONALE DIN ROMÂNIA
WORKING PAPERS IN ROMANIAN MINORITY STUDIES
MŰHELYTANULMÁNYOK A ROMÁNIAI KISEBBSÉGEKRŐL

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Titlu: *"We are Gypsies, not Roma!"*
Ethnic Identity Constructions and Ethnic Stereotypes – an example from a Gypsy Community in Central Romania

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Abstract

■ The author of this paper proposes to open a discussion about the terms 'Gypsy' and 'Roma'. The analysis follows the idea that the terms as they are mostly used today in several fields, have a simplifying and homogenising tendency. Based on a two-month research in a Gypsy community in the Brasov area the author argues that the use of the terms in everyday life varies greatly and their meaning depends on the person and on the situation. The definitions offered by the interviewees rarely correspond to the use of the terms in political and official discourses. Interviews with Gadje and Gypsies revealed the fact that there is a great complexity behind these terms. The paper demonstrates the role of stereotypes and prejudices in defining ethnicity and the everyday strategies of fighting against these stereotypes are also presented.
Key-words: ethnicity, ethnic identity, ethnic stereotypes, Gypsies, Gadje

Rezumat

■ Autoarea studiului îşi propune o discuţie asupra termenilor de „ţigan" şi „roma". Articolul înaintează ideea că aceşti termeni, aşa cum sunt utilizaţi în anumite domenii, sunt simplificaţi, ca urmare a tendinţei de omogenizare a acestora. Prin studiul de teren efectuat pe parcursul a două luni într-o comunitate de ţigani din zona Braşovului, autoarea arată că utilizarea acestor termeni în viaţa cotidiană variază şi depinde în mare măsură de persoana care îi utilizează precum şi de situaţia în care sunt utilizaţi. Rareori, definiţiile pe care le dau intervievaţii/informanţii corespund înţelesului pe care îl au termenii atunci când sunt utilizaţi în discursul politic sau în discursurile oficiale, în general. Interviurile cu gadje şi cu ţigani relevă faptul că în spatele acestor termeni se ascunde o mare complexitate. Studiul subliniază rolul pe care îl joacă stereotipurile şi prejudecăţile în definirea etnicităţii şi totodată, care sunt strategiile cotidiene de luptă împotriva acestora.
Cuvinte cheie: etnicitate, identitate etnică, stereotipuri etnice, ţigani, gadje

Cuprins

"WE ARE GYPSIES, NOT ROMA!" Ethnic Identity Constructions and Ethnic Stereotypes – an example from a Gypsy Community in Central Romania

1. Introduction

■ Roma are nowadays often defined as an ethnic group which could have well-defined criteria of ethnic membership. It seems that there exists an implicit approval about who and how Roma are (Simhandl 2007:164). In public discourses – at the EU-level, by the different NGOs or in the media - Roma are often presented as a homogenous, transnational minority group which is objectively measurable (Simhandl 2007:91). Roma are defined in multiple ways – as targets of aid programs, as victims of discrimination, as poor citizens, or as persons with a particular lifestyle – however, too little is revealed about their heterogeneity.

This paper argues that the all often presumed homogeneity of the Roma/Gypsies and the struggle towards a unity as one ethnic group or even nation,[1] has little or no relevance in the daily life of the people I have studied. I am describing here the relations within the community and between minority (Roma/Gypsies) and majority (Gadje) which are guided by the 'Gypsy' ethnic label.

I want to emphasise that throughout this paper, I will use the term 'Gypsy'. This is because interviewees called themselves with this name. The term is not intended to be in any way negatively connoted or discriminating. Moreover, the term 'Gypsy' avoids the strong political connotation the term 'Roma' implies, because it has been used as a tool for nation-building by Roma elites. My research demonstrates that most of these struggles have failed – Gypsies do not consider themselves one single homogenous group; more than that, they do not consider themselves Roma, as the results of my research indicates.

This paper should be read as a summary of the research results. I do not intend to universalize these results. Therefore this analysis should be read as a regional study that could be the starting point for a more comprehensive research project concerning discourses on ethnicity and ethnic identity among the Gypsies.

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1   In this respect, the struggles on international level since 1971 that have been made by the International Roma Union (IRU) can be considered as an example. At their first meeting in April 1971, the members of the conference regarded the nation building around elements such as language, the term 'Roma', the common history and Indian ancestry and the persecution during Nazi-regimes, as the main target (Schär 2008:206-216).

2. The context of the research

2.1. Identifying the research site

■ One day during my work as a volunteer at the Association 'Atelier Săcelean' in Săcele, Brasov county, while I was playing with some children, one of the girls stood up and embraced me. As a response I kissed her on her cheek. She said: 'You kiss like a Hungarian, my mother tells me that Hungarians kiss like you!' I asked: 'And what are you?' 'I am a Gypsy!' – she said.

The girl lives in Gârcini, a neighborhood of the town Săcele, a small city in the area of Brasov. According to the population census of 2002 the town Săcele had approximately 33.000 inhabitants. All inhabitants seem to be aware that the neighborhood Gârcini is inhabited exclusively by Gypsies. The official numbers in 2007 show that there are 291 Gypsies living in Săcele. The 2002 census recorded about 1291 Gypsies, who were registered as Roma in the official documents - (Directia Judeteana de Statistica Brasov 2002:6). However, there are local voices that say that in Gârcini there live about 8000 inhabitants (an official number has not been provided). Considering the fact that all these inhabitants are regarded unofficially as Gypsies, it can be estimated that the actual number of the Gypsies lies far above the official numbers.

This leads to a paradoxical situation: officially Gârcini cannot be called a Gypsy community, however, in the understanding of daily life, this perspective is crucial. The reasons of the great discrepancy between the figures are multiple; firstly, most persons will not reveal his/her identity as Gypsy/Roma unless they expect some immediate advantages, such as social or/and economical help, because being a Gypsy bears great disadvantages such as social stigma and discrimination (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006:129). Furthermore, the classification through outsider experts leads to a situation where those persons are identified as Gypsies who conform to the stereotypes and prejudices of the majority. Therefore classification through experts is a difficult task, and Gypsies can be seen as a special kind of minority; unlike other minority groups they do not identify themselves through religion, mother tongue or residing area, they are not a homogenous group. They are a national minority, but not a unitary group (Anderl-Motea 2007:71).

There were many factors playing a role in identifying Gârcini as an appropriate research site: I had previous knowledge and experience and information from acquaintances who were inhabitants of Săcele and the identification of Gârcini as a Gypsy neighborhood is widespread in Săcele. Consequently, the ascription from outsiders was the most important criterion of identification of this community. Discussions with Gadje almost always ended up with the statement that the 'real Gypsies' can be found there.

2.2. Description of the field

■ The Gârcini neighborhood presents a series of features characteristic to poor marginalized communities. It is situated at the outskirts of the town and is separated from the rest of the residence areas through a river and it is connected by a bridge. The final station of the public transport line is situated approximately 500 meters away from the entrance into the neighborhood where a new Pentecostal church building can be seen. Only the main road of the neighborhood is asphalted. The other streets are covered in mud, dust or rocks. Most houses in Gârcini were built without official papers. Only a few houses are of concrete, most of them are built out of wood and steel plates.

The neighborhood has its own school and a kindergarten. However, the interviews revealed that the quality of the services provided here are a source of dissatisfaction for most mothers:

"They say that the children here are Gypsies and that they don't know anything anyway… They won't go away from here anyway, they aren't learning, and this is the way it looks like. But if the teachers here took their job seriously, it wouldn't make a difference that the children are Gypsies, they would do their job properly, they would really try to teach them things…but no!" (Sonia, 23 years)

In the centre of the neighborhood there are the two blocks of flats built in the communist era. At the ground floor of the blocks there are some shops where food and other consumable goods are sold. The neighborhood is surrounded by woods and by the waste dump.

Most houses have one or two rooms and do not have running water- or legal electricity connection but in spite of this many houses are equipped with satelite television receivers. Most families live in 3- or more-generation-households. The number of persons living in a household varies between 3 and 15. Sleeping, cooking and living areas usually are not separated inside the house.

The main sources of income for the inhabitants are social benefits and wages from irregular work such as day labour. Economic uncertainty and poverty are perceived as the greatest problems of daily life by the inhabitants of Gârcini:

> "I live with my father, with my brothers, I have two children, I am poor, I have no income, where should I work? Once in a while I am going to Braşov to beg. This is the situation, I cannot do anything about it […] my first husband left me, another one died, my children have different fathers, I have no light (electricity), we are poor, we have no wood, we are a poor family, we are not rich […]" (Monica, 25 years old)

The town officials estimate that about 60% of the employable persons in Gârcini live on social benefits. This does not mean that the rest of the population are employed in regular work. Some of them do not fulfil the conditions for social benefits, as they lack any documents, such as birth certificates or evidence of their employment history. This leads to the situation that some of the poorest persons in Săcele live in Gârcini. State aids often facilitate a living under the minimum existence rate. The high rate of poverty generates a low education level, reduced chances on the labour market and prevents the inhabitants to access any kind of resources. The drop-off rates are very high in the school, as many children start to work in an early age in order to contribute to the family income. However, the interviews revealed two other factors that increase drop-off rates: the lack of motivation and early marriages.

The poor education and the territorial marginalization generate discrimination in many areas. Gypsies in Gârcini are viewed as criminals by the outsiders. Police raids are not rare in this area. Interviewees described the raids as violent; policemen scaring the children, fingerprinting the men and controlling their identification papers and houses.

Gârcini corresponds to the model of a poor Roma-community in Romania having a bad infra-structure, difficult accessibility, and inhabitants having very low income (Sandu 2005:10).

Outsiders view the people living in Gârcini that they stick together but this perceived solidarity of the community is far from the reality. Conflicts are often and take place between 'the rich' who live on the main street, and 'the Poor'. There is a hierarchic structure within Gârcini, 'the poor' being double marginalized: by Gadje and by members of their own community. This situation leads to a practical impossibility of solidarity in order to get funds or common benefits for the community.

2.3. Methodological approach

■ My fieldwork stretched over a period of 2 months in September and October 2009. The field was not Gârcini only but whole of Săcele. Interviews and participatory observation have been conducted in two schools, in the hospital, in one NGO and at the social aid department of the town hall. I conducted interviews with Gypsies and Gadje as well interviewing 10 Gadje and 11 Gypsies. The number of interviews does not correspond to the number of persons interviewed. The number of persons taking part in one interview varies from 1 to 8. The maximum age of the interviewed was 26 years. Young people often have more extreme opinions and were eager to express them honestly.

I developed an interview guide - however this research tool was not necessary in most cases. Most interviews turned into open conversations and most areas of interest, i.e. ethnic identity, stereotypes, prejudice and the management of these, have been discussed without having to ask directly about these topics. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

I encountered some problems during the research. First of all it has been extremely difficult to gain access to the community in Gârcini. Despite the fact that I had been working for years with Gypsy families and that I had Gypsy acquaintances in Săcele nobody seemed to be eager to talk to me about

ethnic identity and the problems related to it in daily life. Some of my friends talked to me about the dangers of a walk through Gârcini on my own in search of persons to do interviews. They always told me a 'Gypsy story' (Barany 1994:330), stressing the dangerous situation I would enter. I had to search for an insider who could function as a gatekeeper and enforce my credibility in front of the inhabitants. This person was Ş.G., an unofficial leader of the community. Ş.G. was known for his good relations with the Gadje and for his function as a communication bridge between Gypsies and the Gadje in Săcele.

Despite the fact that my association with Ş.G. offered me credibility I identified two disadvantages while I was walking through Gârcini with him: first, his presence at the interviews, even if he was not actively involved in them, might have influenced the discussions in certain directions. Second, Ş.G. chose the families I could visit. I did not have the opportunity to talk to a person who for example had been in prison or who is known for criminal activities – Ş.G. presented me only the 'good' families. However, with the help of a person working at the social service department at the town-hall, I got into contact with numerous Gypsies and got to talk to them without Ş.G. being present.

To sum up, this approach has had advantages and disadvantages: through participant observation and interviews I have gathered a lot of information and I have observed the interaction between Gypsies and also their encounters with the Gadje. However, I was not given the opportunity to verify some of the information through repeated visits. Moreover, some of the interviewed persons have been carefully chosen according to a certain profile Ş.G wanted to present me.

3. The context of the research

■ The results show that it is particularly difficult, if not impossible to talk about the Gypsy or the Roma in general. This turn reveals the fact that a collective identity as promoted by many activists and Roma elites has no relevance and cannot be practiced in the everyday life for many of the Gypsies.

It seems to be a widespread knowledge in Romania about who the Gypsies are and what they usually do. Nearly everybody (or most Gadje) can identify a Gypsy. However, when asked about who the Gypsies are and what characterizes them as Gypsies, many different definitions are given. These definitions vary from case to case - they depend on the situation and the interests of the interviewee.

In the following section, I will summarize the different 'types' of Gypsies as they were presented to me during the interviews.

3.1. The gaze of the Gadje – a typology

3.1.1. The Ţigan-Ţigan/Gypsy-Gypsy

■ Most definitions of Gypsies coming from Gadje comprise the idea of their pathologic or negative identity (Haupt 2006:38). This view could be sensed in every conducted interview and generally gives birth to the image of the delinquent, dangerous Gypsy.

This type has been presented as the first definition of a Gypsy in 8 out of the 10 interviews with Gadje. I will summarise this image here.Interviewees stated that the Gypsy-Gypsy can be identified by his behaviour. The persons I interviewed emphasised that: a Gypsy is usually aggressive, he is a thief, he argues, and he is vulgar, usually spitting in public places. Moreover, the Gypsy-Gypsy is usually an alcoholic; he wears dirty clothes, has no discipline and always engages in all sorts of criminal activities. He might even possess a gun. He has no education and, being lazy, does not want to work 'honestly'. The Gypsy-Gypsy is therefore the "trash of the society" (Katy, 17 years old).

The repeating of the word Ţigan can be interpreted as a stress on the fact that this is the real Gypsy, the one who incorporates all characteristics Gadje think a Gypsy could have or even has. It will be shown further that those Gypsies who do not correspond to this image are often seen as non-Gypsies, or perceived as Gypsies who somehow lost the 'Gypsy way of life' and do not deserve to be named

Gypsies. Furthermore, through this definition it can be seen that most characteristics attributed to the Gypsy-Gypsy are of social and behavioural nature and not of primordial ethnic nature.[2]

These have been 'ethnicised' in time, and then "the «different» characteristics acquired a primordial role: it has produced a new situational ethnicity." (Péter 2006:116)

It is obvious that the characteristics presented correspond to a negative stereotype image many Gadje have about Gypsies. In order to support these stereotypes most interviewees chose to tell stories they had heard or witnessed, where Gypsies robbed, beat, were aggressive and attacked other people.

This view on the Gypsies as aggressive and dangerous offers opportunity to the Gadje to construct a contrast between "them" and "us" in order to reinforce the differences between the members of the two groups.

3.1.2 . The Gypsy/Ţigan

■ The second category of the Gypsy presented to me describes a type of person also identified by their behaviour. In contrast to the first type this category of Gypsy conforms to what most Gadje call the 'social norm'. This means that those persons called simply Gypsies resemble to the majority society, the Romanians. These Gypsies are also called "good Gypsies", 'Romanianised' Gypsies or even "exceptional-Gypsies".

For most of my Gadje interviewees these Gypsies are persons who are 'good' and hard working. They live a 'normal' lifestyle, show respect, they are clean, and they care about their children. They recognise the value of education.

The territoriality plays a very important role in this respect. Gypsies do not live in the "Ţigănie", but in mixed neighbourhoods together with Romanians and Hungarians.

Most Gadje tend to believe that these Gypsies, as defined here, should not be called Gypsies. They may have some primordial characteristics, such as skin color, descendance or name, but these elements lost their relevance. The fact that they do not behave according to the stereotypic way Romanians expect Gypsies to behave, makes them Non-Gypsies in the eyes of the most Gadje. Therefore, they do not deserve the ethnic label of the Gypsies. Calling them this way seems to most Gadje an insult. Olomoofe (n.y.: n.n.) stresses this aspect stating that "In many cases I have observed people explicitly «denying» the Romani person standing in front of them by claiming that these people are not really Roma and that they are unrepresentative of Romani people generally."

This view does not mean that Gadje do not hold a stereotypic view on Gypsies. More than this, this image of the "good Gypsy" actually enhances the negative view. Recognizing that there are other 'types' of Gypsies than the ones who are perceived as criminal and dangerous, there is an attempt to acknowledge heterogeneity. However, by stating that these persons cannot be seen as "real Gypsies", interviewees demonstrate that this mode of thought is stereotypic and only encourages discrimination and marginalization. The ethnic nature of the term Gypsy is mostly replaced by a social behaviour. In other terms, to be a Gypsy does not mean only to have a certain membership in a group, but to behave in a particular way. Therefore, it can be assumed that by behaving in 'anti-social' way, as perceived by the Gadje, every person can be turned into a Gypsy - regardless of their ethnic membership. And this relationship functions as well in the reverse direction.

3.1.3. Other conceptions of Gypsies

■ During the interviews with Gadje other views on Gypsies have also been presented. Most of these reveal the stereotypes Romanians have on the Gypsies.

The Gypsy as a danger for the future – this widespread view holds that Gypsies will outnumber the Romanians in few years and leads to a tension and to a certain fear of the future. The person who holds this view can also express thoughts that he/she wishes to emigrate from Romania. An important function

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2   For an overview on theories of ethnicity, consult for example Barth (1969), Eriksen (2002), Péter (2006) Orywal/Hackstein (1993).

of this stereotype is to offer an opportunity for the Gadje to explain and justify the marginalization and "defence" practices used against Gypsies and to reinforce the separation lines between the groups.

The Gypsy as 'negative publicity' for Romanians – this view mainly refers to those Romanian Gypsies who emigrated and engage in criminal activities abroad. Romanians express the feeling that this fact makes it very hard for them to be perceived as honest and hard-working persons in Western European countries. For this they blame the Gypsies; all Gypsies and only the Gypsies.

The poor Gypsies – Gadje did not express only negative views on Gypsies, but romanticizing perceptions can be found as well. Gypsies can also be seen as poor, passive victims of the Romanian social system, who are not given the chance of integration. As a consequence their only chance is to steal and engage in criminal activities, despite the fact that they are persons with a "good heart" (Anne, 14 years old).

3.1.4. Roma or Gypsies?

■ Explaining the meanings of the two terms and the differences between them posed the greatest challenge for most of the interviewed Gadje. The explanations varied remarkably and I will present this variation shortly.

The first explanation given was that the term 'Roma' has the same meaning as the 'Gypsy'. The interviewees emphasised that this does not mean that Roma or Gypsies constitute a homogenous group. 'Roma' is understood here as a term imposed from outside that cannot reflect the local reality and cannot transform the view Gadje have on Roma: "They are one and the same thing. I do not understand why they use the term Roma, because everybody knows them under the term of Gypsies." (Bertil, 15 years old)

Other interviewees explained that there is a very big difference between Roma and Gypsies. However, the differences are situated not in the material-cultural, but in the social and economical sphere: according to this opinion Roma have a higher social and economical status than Gypsies.

A third explanation holds that Gypsies and Roma are the same. However, they are being opposed to the Gypsies-Gypsies as presented in the previous section. This point of view is particularly interesting because both groups are seen as 'authentic'; the Roma are perceived as persons having traditional 'Gypsy' clothing and customs, but acting according to the rules of the majority society (being respectful, having a certain level of education) but they are 'real Gypsies' because of their outer appearance.

Another view explains that Roma are a separate group and cannot be seen as equal either to the Gypsies-Gypsies or to the Gypsies. Therefore, everything that contains the word Gypsy is negative while Roma is perceived more positively. Roma do not necessarily wear 'traditional' clothing but they act "just like the Romanians" (Rodica, 17 years old). They cannot be called Gypsies because this would offend them.

Some interviewees recognized the fact that the actual difference of the terms consists in the connotation they imply. They pointed this out by saying: "When I hear the term Roma I'm thinking of Gypsies who are civilized, who are working and do not steal…and when I hear Gypsy, I'm already thinking about the jailhouse, about the alcoholics and others." (Sorin, 16 years old)

Another view suggests that the difference lies in the fact that the term Roma is being used in the media while in everyday speech most persons use the term Gypsy. Some people even stated that the Roma are a group they do not know or have only seen on television. They are aware that they exist but cannot say what the differences between the Roma and Gypsies are.

I have to note here that the opinions presented here must be understood as abstracted from the interviews and constructed on a theoretical level. In the interactions of everyday life and during the interviews opinions have not been as sharply delimited as I have presented them in this paper. Naming the different types and delimitating the groups varied from person to person and shifted even during an interview. This reflects the complexity of the topic which should be interpreted carefully avoiding abstractions and not reducing the diversity to ONE group with ONE single name.

3.1.5. Difficulties faced when defining groups

■ Interviewees stated that it is extremely difficult to differentiate between the various types of Gypsies. For some of them this even seemed to be an impossible task. Moreover, they seemed confused whether to describe the Gypsies as one group or whether to consider the differences more important than homogeneity.

Much confusion arose and statements that contained contradicting information were not rare. An example for this is the following:

> "Normally, Gypsies are called those who steal, and Roma are those who know, who care about their families and who are well behaved…well, there could be Gypsies who behave as well. Normally, this is the way I have been taught, there are Gypsies, and in Gârcini there are Gypsies-Gypsies, we never use the term Roma […]" (Radu, 17 years old)

Despite the stereotypes that play a great role in defining the Gypsies interviewees seemed to recognize the individuality and the situational construction of ethnicity – this led to the view that some Gypsies do not fit in the scheme in their heads and led to statements such as: "I do not know how to classify these Gypsies from Gârcini." (Coco, 23 years old) Moreover, the situation was complicated by the crosscutting membership in several ethnic groups at the same time which gave birth to new impediments in defining the terms: "They weren't really Gypsies-Gypsies, they were Hungarian, Hungarian Gypsies, but not Gypsies-Gypsies, can you understand?" (Sorin, 16 years old)

What caused a lot of difficulty was the partially unconscious attempt of most interviewees to differentiate the Gypsies as a 'primordial' ethnic group, and Gypsies as a group which is attributed a certain social behaviour. Therefore it can be seen that ethnicity embraces a moral and a so-called objective side (Gog 2008: 69). Trying to separate these two sides led to the confusion about the terms in many cases. Moreover, the attempts of some interviewees to differentiate between the so-called 'traditional' groups, such as Corturari, Căldărari, Fierari etc., prevented them practically from giving an exact definition of the Gypsies.

But this does not mean that Gadje were not able to explain what and who the Gypsies are. They developed other strategies for defining them. In many cases they stressed the differences that exist between 'us' as a group and the 'Gypsies' as the other group. Therefore, they constructed an artificial, and partly dichotomised contrast, with Romanians, who are considered cleaner, more respectful, better educated and more 'civilised', while Gypsies are seen as being more united, showing more solidarity, and more religious than Romanians.

However, all these differences between Gadje and Gypsies gained importance for Gadje only when the behaviour of Gypsies was deviant from what they called 'normality'. Having a 'socially normal' behaviour generated for Gadje the willingness to ignore the 'primordial' ethnic background of the Gypsies.

3.2. Emic (self) definitions of Gypsies

■ Letting Gypsies define for themselves how they conceive their ethnic identity, relieved the complexity of the definition process. It will be shown that in the case of Gypsies the most important criterion of definition is the situation in which they are requested to define themselves and the intention they follow by doing this definition. This places them into an active role and stresses their agency as key actors in the construction of their own identity.

3.2.1. Gypsies as normal persons

■ The description of Gypsies as normal human beings can be understood as a reaction to the mostly negative ascriptions by the Gadje. Gypsies try to combat the image as anti-social criminals by stating that they are not different from their Romanian compatriots: "Gypsies, how should they be? … Humans, what should characterize them as Gypsies; they are Gypsies because people see them as such […]" (Marian, 21 years old)

3.2.2. Gypsies as persons who correspond to the stereotypical view of the Gadje

■ Gypsies sometimes describe themselves similarly to how Gadje drescribe them: according to this perspective the Gypsies "swear, talk dirty, insult, steal, and curse […]" (Florica, 22 years old). When recreating this image, the interviewees construct and reinforce their separation from Gadje. However, the trend towards generalization is not as pronounced as in the case of the Gadje. Presenting the Gypsies as uneducated persons, interviewees always stressed out the fact that only some of the Gypsies correspond to this view.

3.2.3. Gypsies as caring and loving persons

■ The description of Gypsies as good persons aims to deconstruct the negative stereotypes held by Gadje. Gypsies are presented by these narratives as having qualities and characteristics that oppose those ascribed to them by Gadje; they are hard-working, well behaved, intelligent, family loving, never have problems with the authorities, and they help each other. Moreover, they have very tight bonds: "We all have the same blood, Gypsy blood: sweet, and red, and thick, and beautiful." (Bernard, 24 years old)

3.2.4. Gypsies as a group with high social risk

■ The self-definition of Gypsies as persons with a low social rank is seen as a very important element in the process of identity definition. Life in poverty and its implications are seen as key-elements of the life as a Gypsy. As a result, Gypsies in Gârcini often do not ask themselves whether they belong to this group or not, they know that they belong to it. This identity is given to them by the ascription from outside and by territorial residence. The question is not what elements make them Gypsies but what implications this bears for their daily life. As a consequence Gypsies define themselves also through economic and social traits. These determine the relationships in and out of the community and generate marginalization and discrimination in many areas of their life.

From this point of view, the definition of Gypsy bears certain elements such as poverty, low living standards, low education level and a series of emotions which spring out of these elements, such as the feelings of worthlessness or shame.

The ascribed identity as a Gypsy represents for most the starting point of feeling as being discriminated in various domains: in hospitals, banks, shops, on the busses and even on the playgrounds for children. Interviewed Gypsies stated that poverty has had an impact on their lives from an early age; instead of going to school many had to work or remained home with their younger siblings while their parents were gone to work. They explain that this creates a vicious circle: poverty generates low education levels, which in turn generate poverty so their social condition generates marginalization and discrimination from early childhood and continues throughout their whole life.

3.2.5. Roma and the 'Romanianised' Gypsies

■ When asked about the term 'Roma', Gypsies open up a new level of discussion about differentiation: they do not define themselves anymore simply as Gypsies but as 'Romanianised' Gypsies, in contrast to the Roma who are perceived as the 'real' Gypsies.

The most important element of distinction between Gypsies and Roma is for most interviewees from Gârcini the language. Some persons stated that Gypsies and Roma are two different groups that cannot be compared to each other: "The Roma are Roma and the Gypsies are Gypsies. We do not compare the Gypsy with the Roma, they speak another language, and we do not speak other languages except Romanian." (Sonia, 23 years old) Others claimed that "the Gypsy is Romanianised,

the Roma speaks Romani".[3] (Mara, 25 years old) Other interviewees saw in the differentiation from the group of Roma the opportunity to define themselves as Romanians. They argued that Roma are Gypsies, as they speak the "Gypsy language" (Marian, 21 years old), and because the inhabitants of Gârcini do not know this language, and speak Romanian as their mother tongue, they cannot be anything else except Romanians.

Other definitions state that Gypsies and Roma can be differentiated by their social and economic status – Roma engage in certain activities that bring high incomes such as: "selling of gold and carpets […] they celebrate big weddings, they have money and gold, while we do not have that much, we are poor." (Andreea, 19 years old)

Another explanation given was that Roma and Gypsies are terms for the same people but that there are great differences within this group. Differences can be so great that members do not even know the customs of other subgroups, such it was remarked that the "Ţigani Corturari" buy girls with money" (Ovidiu, 20 years old) in contrast to many other subgroups who do not. The distance between the various groups is increased by the fact that usually there exist no regular relationships between members of the different groups; the community in Gârcini is mostly endogamous: "We do not mingle like this, no. In the same kin group,[4] I mean in our village, we build up pairs and relationships between us, not with the others." (Monica, 25 years old)

The Roma ethnicity ascribed from the outside is mostly perceived as coercive and constraining. Most interviewees from Gârcini stressed that they have different customs and speak other language than the Roma, and stated that they could not understand why they are called Roma.

3.3. Situational ethnic identity of Gypsies and identity-management

■ As I already stated, Gypsies define their identity in relation to the goal they follow. During one single interview, persons from Gârcini presented themselves as Gypsies, Romanians, 'Romanianised' Gypsies, Christians or even simply as poor people. They switched their ethnic identity to suit best their wishes and interests at that particular moment. The process of switching generates what Elwert (2002:40) calls "polytactic identities". The Gypsies "developed deflective strategies for identity management […]" (Neculau 2008:39) throughout the years. However, these strategies vary enormously, stretching from posing as a victim to using irony. These will be presented in what follows.

3.3.1. Ethnic identity as a source for discrimination

■ The first strategy I have identified is attributing marginalization and discrimination to the ethnic identity. In this respect, interviewees did not concentrate on the contents of their ethnic identity, but on the consequences that arise from the ascription of their ethnic identity by outsiders. Therefore they recognise the discrimination mostly in the public sphere. The 'otherness', the stereotypes and the marginalization are perceived since early childhood and these perceptions contribute to the strengthening of the border between Gypsies and Gadje. Ethnicity is seen as the cause of all problems between the members of the different groups. When adopting this strategy of identification, Gypsies aim to stress that they are pushed into a role they do not deserve, and they are the victims of the social, political and economic system. They criticize the hierarchical arrangements which lead to the construction of inequalities in power and legitimise the lower rank Gypsies have in Romanian society. The role as a victim is emphasised in many interviews: "In summer we gather fruit from the forest. And they wouldn't let us. They take our fruit away and step on it, and beat us […]" (Maricela, 26 years old). Gypsies state that they are pushed into a vulnerable position with no real opportunity of leaving this. They are treated unjustly without a reason. They state that the stereotypes and prejudices of the Gadje are the real reasons for discrimination. The victim role is emphasised by emotional reactions: "Many feel ashamed that they are Gypsies." (Bernard, 24 years old) Discriminating practices also exist within the community; the richer members of the community tend to show their economical power in terms

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3   The interesting point to be noticed in this respect is the fact that Romani is called 'limba ţigăneasca', 'Gypsy language.'
4   The word used in Romanian for this is 'neam'.

of violence or oppression, they "go and get drunk and they look at you as if you would show off and then they beat you […]" (Teo, 19 years old) Many members of the community are therefore doubly discriminated: by the Gadje and by the richer members of their own community.

3.3.2. Diminishing the relevance of the ethnic identity

■ A second strategy used by Gypsies was the acceptance of one's own ethnicity. However, some Gypsies tried to downplay the relevance of the ethnic identity in their discourse. In order to do this, they took universalizing attitudes, in some cases influenced by religious ideas of tolerance and love: "Whether I am a Gypsy or a Romanian, I am the same person […] If someone comes and asks me whether I love Romanians or Gypsies, I have to answer him that I love them all because they are humans just as I am." (Florica, 22 years old) Ethnicity is therefore viewed as an element that is given and should not be negated but at the same time should not influence or guide the relationships between persons.

3.3.3. Assuming ethnicity and differentiation from 'the others'

■ Another often used strategy is the assuming the identity as a Gypsy. Most inhabitants of Gârcini do not hide this fact, and are aware that most people see them as Gypsies even if they state that they are not. Based on the neighbourhood they live in, their family names, and the colour of their skin most Gadje "know automatically" (Mara, 25 years old) that they are Gypsies. Consequently, it does not make any sense to try to hide this. Gypsies however, developed a strategy that enables them to define their identity in a new form. This is the assumption of the identity as a Gypsy and the differentiation from the Other Gypsies, who are those members of the community who have a socially 'abnormal' behaviour. Some interviewees transposed the stereotypical views of the Gadje on other members of their community and detached themselves from those members:

> "There are enough things happening here, we have enough of it. For example, you heard that some stole the ATM's; so, my family is not such a type, we are a poor family, if we can earn our bread, than it's ok, if not, not; but we do not go around and steal things. […] but these others, you heard what they did, you can imagine. If my brother did something like this, I think I would never talk to him again!" (Monica, 25 years old)

This strategy has one big advantage for the Gypsies: the stereotypes projected on them by outsiders must not be denied, but only directed to some others. It represents a middle way used by many inhabitants from Gârcini: they do not try to fight against the stereotypes and prejudices, but take them and project them on other members of their community. The ethnicity that emerges through this is defined in a new form: they are Gypsies, but they define their identity through positive characteristics such as honesty and reasonability, elements that are commonly used to describe the Gadje in contrast to Gypsies. The persons who use this strategy basically import the stereotypes usually attributed to Gadje, project them on themselves and try to show that they fit in the category of people who correspond to the social norm as defined by these. This logical argument is often sustained by statements of friendship between Gypsies and Gadje in order to claim for themselves a better position in the social hierarchy.

3.3.4. Defence against the outsiders and solidarity within

■ The Gadje-perception which attributes to the Gypies primarily negative characteristics generates a lot of conflicts between the members of the two groups. Moreover, this strengthens the solidarity within the groups. Internal conflicts lose their relevance in this situation, and the only important differentiation remains significant when the confrontation is between Gypsies and Gadje.

Ethnicity is seen as a bonding element particularly in conflicts with the police or other outsiders. A situation has been described to me as an example in which many Gypsies entered into conflict with ethnic Hungarians because their horses often graze on the private fields of the Hungarians. Violent attacks on animals and persons are not rare for this reason. The interesting point here was the fact that

when such an event happens, interviewees relate to their neighbours or relatives as "our Gypsies" (Ioana, 19 years old), and not simply as Gypsies.

Situations in hospital, where Gypsies and Gadje had to share a room, often ended up with the total isolation of the Gypsies from their room-mates. Reasons for this were the discussions of Gadje on the topic of Gypsies, often stigmatizing them. Adreea (19 years old) told me that: "I heard them talking like this, I didn't want to step into their discussion, I simply didn't want to talk to them."
Violent conflicts often happen between teenagers. Two boys from Gârcini told me that they were isolated in school, and their Gadje-classmates would not accept playing football with them. Girls would not even want to sit near them, and no opportunity left for talking to them. These latent conflicts during school program escalate after hours, and end up with verbal and physical abuse. Fights between Gypsy teenagers and Gadje are a real problem and some consider that "you will never be able to reconcile them." (Pavel, 24 years old)

Situations in which one Gypsy is seen favourable by outsiders do not lead to the affiliation of that particular Gypsy with Gadje. It can rather increase the solidarity with the 'own people'. Gabriel (26 years old) told me that he once had to enter the police and the policeman told him that he does not "stink" like others from Gârcini. He did not perceive this as a compliment but rather as an affront to his own people: "What do you think I felt like, how did this suit me? I am a Gypsy too, aren't I?" Solidarity becomes an important element particularly when Gypsies perceive a danger coming from the outside, as Okely (1998:170) also demonstrated.

3.3.5. Pride

■ During my research I identified two kinds of situations in which Gypsies treat their ethnic identity with pride: first, when they see that this does not bring them any disadvantages, or when they want to 'upset' the Gadje. This means that Gypsies often use this strategy especially in situations in which they recognize that they have a lower or disadvantaged position. They react in exactly opposite way Gadje expect them to behave. Gypsy identity is stigmatised, so no one is expected to be proud of their ethnicity. By showing pride Gypsies succeed in building a sort of resistance to the social hierarchy: "I would never want to be a Romanian. I wouldn't like that. I simply don't like it; it's far cooler to be a Gypsy. I am really proud of my 'Gypsyness'." (Bernard, 24 years old) In this situation Gypsies behave as if there were no stigma attached to the ethnicity; they simply ignore it (even if only on the level of discourse), defying all discriminating and marginalizing strategies of the Gadje.

3.3.6. The unchangeable ethnicity

■ Another strategy used is the acceptance of one's own ethnicity and the finding of reasons which make it look unchangeable. Gypsies stated in the interviews that they are as they are, because they were not given the opportunity of a better education and therefore do not know how to behave better. This is an advantageous strategy as it puts Gypsies in the situation saying: You either accept us as we are, or not. We cannot change, because we are not given the chance. The problem is placed in the hands of the Gadje – and Gypsies indirectly state that they are willing to change, but that the society does not offer the necessary support.

3.3.7. Hiding – defining through other elements

■ In cases where the ethnic identity is bound with stigma, Gypsies will try to hide their ethnic membership and to define themselves through other elements. The process of stigmatization and the defending behaviour which results have been labelled as "destroying ethnic identity" by the Human Rights Watch (ERRC 2001:n.p.). Gypsies might define their identity through elements such as religion or social situation. Some interviewees stated that they are Christians or poor persons. Hiding of one's ethnic identity can be interpreted as the attempt to gain one's own respect and dignity back (Cahn 2007:n.p.).

Marian (21 years old) stated that the ethnicity ascribed to him by the Gadje does not correspond to reality: "Țigan! This Țigan is a lie, is it written on my ID-card that I am a Țigan, or what?" Marian considered that he had been 'pushed' into the group of the Gypsies without his acceptance. He feels that he is called a Gypsy without any plausible justification. He is accounted to the so-called group of "obligatory Gypsies" (Achim 2004:213).

3.3.8. Assuming Gypsy ethnicity and projecting the stereotypes on the Gadje

■ Projecting ethnic stereotypes on the Gadje which are traditionally ascribed to Gypsies is another method to turn the situation to be more advantageous. It enables the assumption of one's own ethnicity and at the same time it vilifies the Gadje. Gypsies who use this strategy construct an image which demonstrates that attributing higher social rank to the Gadje on the social hierarchy is a mistake in itself. Some Gypsies stated that the Romanians are not better than them, but actually even more criminal. Maricela (25 years old) told me the following:

> "The rangers and the policemen steal more than a Gypsy! […] Talking about Christmas trees, if only you were here to see, with the cars, Romanians and policemen and rangers, how they come out of the forest with the trees, you couldn't believe it […]"

Some Gypsies attributed to the ethnic Hungarians characteristics such as wildness and barbarity: "I don't get along with Hungarians, they are mean, they are sadistic, they hit you with the scythe, with the pitchfork, with everything." (Bernard, 24 years old)

This strategy can be understood as an indirect critique on the stereotypic images that place the Gadje higher on the social hierarchy. Gypsies want to show that characteristics that are usually ascribed to members of their community can be found in other persons as well and not only among the people of Gârcini. Therefore, they try to counteract the stereotypes and the ethnicised characteristics.

Moreover, Gypsies also have prejudices about Gadje. They are not passive victims of stigmatization but are active in this process and develop attitudes towards other people. By their attitudes towards Gypsies, Gadje generate a certain kind of resistance behaviour; persons in Gârcini are hostile and unfriendly to Gadje in some situations and this can be understood as a defence strategy. Gypsies tell about the Gadje that they are those who are unfriendly and rude and most importantly, not fair. They state that tickets in the bus are being controlled only for Gypsies and that the Gadje may take a ride without paying. They thought that programs for helping the children were cut off only in their community. They also thought that only Gypsies do not get a credit from the bank and that only Gypsies have to do community service in case they receive the social welfare benefit.

3.3.9. Humor, irony and mockery

■ Humour and irony is another identity strategy used by the Gypsies: they often consider their position in the society and their relationships with Gadje from an ironical perspective and this attitude enable them to appear invulnerable.

There are conflicts within the community which sometimes are very serious and end up with violence - these themselves are subjects of irony. One elder of the community sketched this situation in the following words:

> "There are a lot of problems between them, between the inhabitants of the separate streets. Those who live on the main road think that they are better…so these here are called Talibans and the ones up are the Americans! These here are also called miners, because they live from digging into the waste dump. They dig holes and this is why they are called miners, they search for scrap-iron."

Despite their underprivileged social and economic situation, Gypsies tend to take their problems with ease. Regarding the tragic elements of their lives with humour, and laughing about the hardships represent a major strength for the Gypsies.

Irony could be sensed during some of the interviews. One person stated ironically that Gypsies are uncivilized because they do not have a cultural centre in Gârcini, but only bars; therefore Gypsies do not have another option than going and getting drunk. One paradoxical element for an outsider was the fact that most houses in Gârcini had a satellite receiver. During the interviews it was stated that most houses do not have electricity. However, it turned out that most houses do have improvised electricity connection. The financial problems seem to disappear at that moment and the satellite-television rent, costing between 10 and 20 Euros a month, can be paid without problems. While I was taking photos, one person told me ironically not to take pictures of the roofs of the houses with satellite dishes because the compassion of those who will see the photos will be diminished.

Ironical attitudes were not only present within the community but also in the relations to the Gadje. Gypsies sometimes willingly take attitudes that generate agitation and indignation among the Gadje. For instance, Gypsies turn on their cellphones and play manele in the bus, with lyrics that usually contain elements referring to sexual promiscuity or violence. Most Gadje in the bus are ashamed and even shocked but rarely express their feelings towards the Gypsies. The greatest indignation I personally have observed was when one day some Gypsies who worked at the street cleaning department of then town stepped in the bus with their brooms and dustbins. Gadje passengers felt indirectly attacked by this behaviour, but did not criticize directly the Gypsies; only some persons commented on the 'impossibility' of the situation.

Such situations turn the power in social relations to the reverse because the Gadje do not express in public their negative attitude towards the Gypsies. Gadje develop feelings of frustration and irritation which generate even more negative attitudes. However, the indignation of the Gadje is silently celebrated as a success by most Gypsies.

The most striking strategy of irony I have met during my research was taking over the stereotypes that the Gadje usually attribute to Gypsies and stating that those are the normality of everyday-life in the community. Bernard (24 years old) stated laughingly that the habits of people in Gârcini are "going out with the axe and beating each other up." Moreover, he tried to make fun of the whole interview situation by making provocative statements and then pulling them back – all these happening under the constant laughter of the others. One of his favourite topics was violence, a stereotype often attributed to Gypsies:

"B: If I catch one who wants to show off, I beat him, I really beat him up!
I: How many have you beaten until now?
B: Oooooooh, some 150. Romanians, Țigani, Moldavians, Hungarians, everybody.
I: Why did you beat them?
B: I was angry.
I: How did they make you angry?
B: I didn't beat anyone…!"

It is particularly interesting about humour that it is accepted as long as it comes from within the community. If an outsider engages in jokes about Gypsies, they will interpret this as an insult. The handling of the ethnic identity and of the situation of Gypsies with irony and humour enables Gypsies to solve their problems easier. Moreover, this allows them to develop a strategy for criticizing their position in the society and to undermine the hierarchic structures.

4. Conclusion

■ The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how different the strategies for making/defining the ethnic identity can be. Moreover, the analysis showed that Gypsies do not constitute a homogenous group but rather many different groups that differentiate themselves from each other. The discussion about the terms Roma and Gypsies shows that in daily life, political discourses that aim to build a nation lose their relevance. Gypsies in the locality I analysed do not feel that they belong to the Roma and cannot understand why they are called as such.

Moreover, it has been shown that stereotypes play important role in defining Gypsy-ethnicity. However, these vary as well and are even partly paradoxical. When constituting ethnicity, many elements play a role:'primordial' elements, such as territoriality, skin colour or family name, are key-elements when identifying a Gypsy by the local Gadje. However, interviewees proved to adopt constructivist views by stating that behaviour is the decisive element when having to identify someone as a Gypsy. Gypsies also define their ethnic identity through factors such as name or skin colour. However, it is obvious that social factors are vital when they explain their ethnic identity.

As an important conclusion, I would like to emphasise the fact that both Gadje and Gypsies understand the terms 'Roma' and 'Gypsy' as definitions of different groups with different lifestyles. Therefore I regard the substitution of the term 'Gypsy' with the term 'Roma' as it is done in Romanian media and politics as disadvantageous for many groups. Those who do not identify themselves as Roma will not participate in the political and social activities targeted to Roma. This leads to a new splitting of the groups leaving those who identify themselves as Gypsies and not as Roma on the lowest level of the hierarchy making it even harder for them to reach any kind of resources.

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