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WORKING PAPERS IN ROMANIAN MINORITY STUDIES
MŰHELYTANULMÁNYOK A ROMÁNIAI KISEBBSÉGEKRŐL

Nr. 41

Plainer Zsuzsa

WHAT TO GIVE IN RETURN?

**Suspicion in a Roma shantytown
from Romania**



INSTITUTUL PENTRU
STUDIAREA PROBLEMELOR
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Titlu: *WHAT TO GIVE IN RETURN? Suspicion in a Roma shantytown from Romania*

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Abstract

■ Contrary to the Mead-controversy where suspicion in fieldwork has been attributed to lack of competence or failure, the present paper considers suspicion as important ethnographic data. Through re-telling the difficulties of a research carried out among the Roma residents of a Romanian shantytown, I try to reveal all the mechanisms that are responsible for both creating suspicion and detaching the researcher from her/his informants. Embedded in Eastern-European social and political changes, mistrust in this field goes back to an initial territorial stigma attached to the locals. My research site, “the Green block of flats” has become a ghetto due to massive unemployment and differences in living conditions, where isolation from the outer world has been enforced by misunderstandings with local institutions. Being “used” by NGOs and subjected to unfulfilled treatment under the label of “helping the Roma”, shantytown-residents could but reject the newcomer researcher who seemed to be one of “them”.

■ Key words: suspicion, fieldwork, Roma, Eastern Europe, ghetto

Abstract

■ Dincolo de controversa Mead, în care suspiciunea ce apare în decursul muncii de teren se atribuie lipsei de competență a cercetătorului, lucrarea de față consideră acest fenomen o informație etnografică importantă. Prin repovestirea dificultăților întâmpinate într-o cercetare, despre locuitorii unui ghetou urban de romi din România, autoarea încercă a revela mecanismele care creează suspiciunea între cercetător și informanții săi. Contextualizată de schimbările sociopolitice est-europene, lipsa de încredere din cercetarea de față se explică prin atașarea localnicilor a unei stigme teritoriale. Locul cercetării, „blocul verde”, a devenit un ghetou datorită disponibilizărilor masive și diferențierilor în condițiile de locuire, izolarea față de lumea exterioară fiind reprodusă de neînțelegerea locuitorilor cu instituțiile locale. Fiind „folosiți” de ONG-uri, care cu pretextul de a „ajuta” romii, locuitorii ghetoului privesc cu suspiciune cercetătorul, care este considerat un membru ce aparține lumii instituțiilor.

■ Cuvinte-cheie: suspiciune, muncă de teren, romi, Europa de Est, ghetou



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WHAT TO GIVE IN RETURN?

Suspicion in a Roma shantytown from Romania

■ The long and controversial afterlife of Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* highlights an important aspect of the anthropological fieldwork: being misled by informants. Beside the industrious myth-making and unmaking, the debate raised by Derek Friedman's critical observation reveals how dozens of anthropologists approach mistrust in the fieldwork. Despite their variety, the arguments, charges and defences brought against and for Margaret Mead are centred on the same cultural logic: suspicion should be the deficiency of the researcher. Meanwhile contra-Mead arguments rely upon her intention to promote a position of the culturally set up character of social life, instead of conducting a scientifically grounded data procession, the Mead-defenders insist upon the remaking of her scientific reputation (Coté 2000, Caton 2000). The present paper proposes to take a different position as it advocates for understanding mistrust in the anthropological field. Suspicion of the informants – in my view – is not a deficiency, ill luck, failure or lack in capacities to conduct a proper fieldwork. Mistrust is integrated, important and telling ethnographic data, as it reveals cultural differences and differently set expectations of either the informants or the researcher.

My “place” of mistrust, the “green block of flats”¹, a Romanian urban ghetto with mostly Roma inhabitants could be a typical image for the Western mass-media portrayal of Romanian poverty: garbage at each step, bad smell, dirt, lousy people gathering on the courtyard and listening *manele* (a typical Balkan shantytown music) at maximum volume all day long. Moreover, the inhabitants were unfriendly and suspicious during my first encounter in 2007 and also on my return in 2008. Taking pictures (i.e. to register the local misery) could result in being kicked out of from neighbourhood; local blokes were teasing me, while women kept repeating they had no information to share about their lives. Fieldwork in 2007, likewise the other in 2008 was about sitting in the dirty courtyard trying to carry on discussions with the locals. Few interviews were done, in fact no properly conducted interviews at all. Only pieces of information had been collected, carefully put together like knobs of an intellectual puzzle. This was the outcome of the two summers’ work; scarce enough to carry out a fieldwork suitable for academic standards but sufficient to sketch a picture on local stories.

True, difficulties occurred when first entering the district, although the site was my choice. To begin with, it was not community-like: the different Roma subgroups were located at geographically distinct places of the district, having nothing in common except the network of institutions linking them. Although recent anthropological theories advocate for rethinking the epistemological priority of groups (see for instance Brubaker, 2004; G. E. Marcus, 1995), my informants were nevertheless anti-group-like; some of them belonged to extended families having family relations with each other, thus a collection of mere life-stories wasn't enough for exploring the potential of the field. Besides, the Galilei street shantytown-residents (one of my four groups) could by no means be fitted into the typical image of the Roma as framed by EU requirements (Sigona–Trehan 2009) or reinforced by research policies (see for instance Ladányi – Szelényi 2006 or Wacquant 2008), inasmuch as my Roma informants were not “proper”

1 All names are fictional.



underclass-members (i.e. living on low incomes, having low educational level, dwelling in segregated areas). Theoretically, the Galilei street inhabitants would fit this image, as they had economically disadvantaged jobs, no schooling, and were living in a ghetto. But underclass theories do not mention small, everyday strategies in handling poverty: being employed at a public sanitation company they spent their small incomes on decorating their one-room apartments with desired commodities like washing machines or, sometimes, big screen TVs and DVDs. Though I understood their strategies, I could not get rid of the underclass framework, so I found myself in a permanent quest for “poor” Roma, as my “subjects” seemed not to be deprived enough.

Overcoming Suspicion

■ My overcoming suspicion has been embedded in a commonly shared belief of the anthropological practice: entering the field is not necessarily the easiest task as researcher and the researched may belong to different worlds and have different interests: “We were intruders” - recalls Clifford Geertz about his entering the Balinese field – “people not part of their life” (Geertz 1973:412).

Two famous monographs on Roma also relay the difficulties of entering the field. In his Hungarian version of *The Time of the Gypsies*, Michael Stewart recalls the perseverance necessary for being accepted by the community of local Roma: in order to show how serious he was about his plans for moving in, he proceeded to build his house in the site, raising understanding, admiration, and later acceptance of the locals. (Stewart 1994) Judith Okely points out how difficult the entering of a Traveller-Gypsy group was in the UK:

Soon I was offered my own caravan on various sites by the local officer, also sympathetic to my interests. Eventually I needed only to appear as a student, without any duties of a rent collector etc. This role first as a student helper or warden was the only possible opening, and viable only during the short life of the temporary sites. Months if not years of day visits could have been spent in the vain hope that the Travellers might spontaneously invite me to join them. Attempts to divert me to other localities failed partly because the opportunity to live alongside Gypsies after such a brief acquaintance existed nowhere else. (Okely 1983:40)

The above references reveal how usual suspicion during fieldwork is, and how a researcher depends on different circumstances in the field. In my case mismatching between my respondents and me could be summarized by the following quotation:

Fine if you'd like to talk but what can you give in return?
Well, I'm about to write a study.
And do you think it helps us?
(Fragment of a discussion between me and one ghetto resident, part of my field notes).

In quest for a framework that treats knowledge and action inseparably, “giving something in return” was the first question to deal with, and various forms of applied anthropology and academic feminism seemed to be possible answers. Out of its demand to reshape notions on validity and data-collection, academic feminism implicitly rejects the power relations between researcher and informant. “The researched” are no longer treated as passive providers of knowledge and the researcher is no longer soaking up the information. Feminists, therefore, seek for genuine, non-exploitative relation between the researcher and his/her “interlocutor”. Research becomes a means of sharing information and [...] the person of the interviewer is an important element in establishing trust and thus obtaining good quality of information” (Mary Marnard – June Purvis (eds.) 1995:16). Though reciprocity and reflexivity is essential for academic feminism, “being there” was too slight for my informants’ expectations. They were asking for more serious things than my presence: money or access to workplaces through my help. Thus, the theoretical goals of feminism, the non-influencing of the informants with pre-coined intellectual expectations on their lives (Okely – Callaway (eds.) 1992), and putting aside positivist detachment when

conducting interviews (Mauthner 2000) were too abstract for my work. My research had more practical and simple goals: to reward the informants.

I figured out and tested various incentives during the fieldwork. Some scholars consider material inducement as being successful in encouraging a hard-to-reach population to answer (Ebers 1997), while others argue against for its benefits. Berstein claims that paying subjects make them less conscious on future effects of the experiment (Berstein 2003), while Slomka et al. underpins its negative effect on motivation: incentives influence opinions. Lemmens and Elliott (see Lemmens and Elliot in Berstein 2003) advocate for a clearly and meticulously worked-out system of giving payments in order to avoid inequalities in reward. My previous experiences with the community echoed insights of Ladányi and Szelényi (Ladányi-Szelényi, idem) on trying to help a group of Roma people. Far to plead for an outstanding “Roma culture”, the two scholars observed the existence of an egalitarian culture within the community: let all community members be allocated equally, or, if resources are limited, no one be rewarded. As I had insufficient money to equally reward each informant, material incentives were dropped from my list. Giving gifts poses the same threat: what to give, and to whom? Although later, when family relations became clearer, a gift was given to those who were much more eager to help me; at the end, however, I realized that many belonged to the same extended family.

Therefore, being influenced by its successes in applied anthropology I chose a rather impersonal solution; dedicated to value-expressed accounts undertaking to solve community problems, many trends in applied anthropology try to give solutions to their researched groups (van Willigen 1993). In my case reciprocity was embodied into non-personal community-accessible resource offering: helping ghetto people and other Roma from the district in their businesses with local institutions.

Outcomes of such techniques turned out to be different than expected. Offering assistance proved to be an unsuccessful, as it was needed in only two or three cases. I brought and translated legislation to the locals when needed, but this assistance proved insufficient for many. This changing of my research framework was – on the other hand – successful inasmuch as it made the informants talk. Nevertheless, as further discussions made it clear, their reasons for repudiating me were grounded; in the following chapter I will present the reasons of rejection, which may be regarded thereafter as telling ethnographic data instead of unpleasant fieldwork-events. Suspicion for this paper reveals relevant aspects (agents and events) of, either, state-socialist modernization or its consequences for the future decades.

As listing all difficulties of my fieldwork ends here, I believe it is appropriate to clarify my position towards any opinions on reliability of the collected data. Discussing the “witch’s brew” of data collection, revealing circumstances shaping and re-shaping them is perceived here as sign of scientific awareness: relating all information on ways of collecting data is not just a matter of reflexivity in anthropological tradition but a *necessary* condition to convey objectivity to research data (Okely – Callaway 1992).

Understanding Suspicion

1. The territorial stigma

The neighbourhood was negatively labelled even before my attempt to enter it. Non-Roma outsiders, to begin with, named the ghetto as being the worst among all the places in the district:

I was brought up there, living there, my parents living here, too. So I can tell you, local Roma are different. When I was a kid we used to play together with Newton Street Roma, we were not afraid of them. I remember a tall, bold-headed guy staying there, always thought he must be their leader. But Galilei Street is different. When somebody had to move there, everybody was mourning him. (non-Roma woman)

The “green block’s” label as a “Gypsy area” is commonly shared by all other Galilei Street dwellers, including the Roma. When asking where I could find local Roma to talk to, everybody, both the Roma and non-Roma directed me to the “green block of flats”, “where – as they said – the Roma live”. When first meeting the local school staff, I was strongly advised not to go to the green block, as “they are evil”. Local



schoolteachers consider ghetto people “aggressive”, “non-cooperative”, “violent”. An ex-NGO worker depicted Galilei Street people as follows:

Those from Galilei working at the public sanitation are all Roma except for one. They're like a big family but full of conflicts. Roma live on the other side of the street, but live together with Romanians and Hungarians. There are no common shields between the two parts, although there are no conflicts either. Some from the green block had problems with the police. There are some families who are difficult to work with and threatened us. (ex-NGO worker)

Delinquency, aggressive behaviour, lack of cooperation, despised area; putting all the factors together, we may label the “green block” inhabitants as bearers of territorial stigma, as Wacquant (Wacquant 2008), puts it, a negative label inseparable from the geographic area, location. To follow him, territorial stigma, together with another three aspects including local delinquency, organizational density (denoting local provisioning of basic goods leading to an increasing isolation of the area) and social mechanism (fuelling ethno-racial tension), are all manifestations of contemporary urban marginality. Subsequently, territorial stigma is a negative public image that associates locals of a given area (usually a ghetto) with delinquency, insecurity, moral dissolution, and cultural deprivation. Being scorned from the outside world, shantytown dwellers are usually associated with poverty, crime and moral degradation. No wonder their experiences of insult and shame, in a reaction of the defamed place, may turn out into symbolical violence against local representations of the state or – as in my case study – against other local institutions. Negative labelling – both a reaction to and a result of experiencing insult and shame from outside the ghetto – is commonly shared by many different categories: employers, when ghetto dwellers mention their place of residence; the police; bureaucrats; and different sort of authorities.

Enfolding such stigma begins with the structural reasons responsible for exclusion, followed by subjective factors enforcing stigmatization. Being typical elements of the Eastern-European post-1989 scenarios, unemployment and poor living conditions are the two structural reasons causing impoverishment for the Romanian Roma. Similarly, the history of the entire urban district is strongly connected to Romanian state socialism and post-socialism. Being a major target of forced industrialization carried out in the 1970s and 80s, a number of factories were established in the area, thus turning it into an important industrial district for the city. With a shortage of unskilled, skilled or semi-skilled work force, the communist leaders encouraged rural people (among them many Roma) to settle down in the district and become factory workers. Out of the promise of upward mobility (from landless peasants to urban dwelling factory workers), state socialism also allocated apartments for the newcomer minorities in the neighbouring blocks of flats. Galilei Street is a typical example for such improvements; the heyday of the district is recalled in many narratives:

In the '70s and 80s this area was full of young workers, having the same working hours, as each of us finished work at two p.m. Then, instead of going home we hung around together in the city, in cinemas, cafés, some of us in discos. As I remember it was a happy life as everybody had a workplace and an apartment, though it was just a workers' home, a one-room apartment shared with three, divided by a thin wall from the neighbouring one, where another four girls or boys lived. Singles were living in a separate building, family men and women in the other, true, sometimes there were mixed hostels. We were going out for trips in Saturdays, and – to have a free Saturday – we usually took on a 16-hour-shift. Factories organized the trips for us or else we organized them ourselves. (non-Roma woman)

Man: We have no workplaces nowadays, the MPs are careless as all the factories were closed. I was a decorator before 1989, worked 24 years in one of the big factories, 13 years on the other but I had to leave as I have become ill. I'm on sick relief with insufficient years for a normal pension. It was a fine world then with richness and workplaces.

Woman: I was working in one of neighbouring factories. Those were good times as my kids had kindergarten [i.e. for free] and we were close to our houses. We were allocated this apartment from the factory when my first child was born. She was only six months and we had no furniture, so when the apartment was allocated we had to sleep on the floor. We could borrow some money from the House of Mutual Help (CAR), which they took of our salaries. That's how we bought the furniture. (Roma couple)

While forced industrialization offered many benefits to the newly recruited workers, it had its flip-sides, too: working before 1989 in physically hard conditions, usually in polluted environments could seriously damage the health of the locals, and thus prevent them from taking other jobs. Then, the neoliberal economic policies accompanied the post-socialist changes and hindered the availability of decent work; among its flip-sides we may list the insecure business environment for entrepreneurs, bankrupt companies, unpredictable employment policies and low salaries, all reinforcing post-socialist marginality of many Romanian citizens, including the local ghetto residents.

From 1986 I was a road sweeper, and then I was the one with filling refuse collection cars. Afterwards I became ill, very ill. I had many siblings and had to work as I was the oldest. I quit school and started to work with permission from the Ministry as I was not of age. I was qualified as an overlay and mosaic maker. [...] It was difficult to work with concrete, very difficult, and this is how I started with water and cleaning. First I started as filler, later as a cleaner of green [outdoor] spaces. [...] The total number of my working years was 25. I also worked in a village for a mill; it was difficult as everything was full of dust. I worked as unskilled worker from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. It was my workplace after 1989, after finishing military service. I didn't want to return to the refuse collectors as it was hard to work in the rain. Can't say it was difficult to work at the mill but there was dust everywhere, so I went back to sweeping. I got ill in 2004, become unemployed, and later went on sick relief. My boss didn't want to let me, as I was qualified. I was on allowance for 9 months, and later I came back. I left for a private company, where, as I was told, salaries are better there. But they just kept us hanging on. This was in 2004. We were promised 150 million (ca 400 Euros) but got 5 millions (ca 150 Euros). I didn't quarrel as I had no one to complain to. (Roma man)

As seen from the fragment above, factory closure² (necessary for post-socialist industrial restructuring) resulted in large-scale unemployment and a diversification of living conditions. Better-off workers from Galilei Street and its neighbourhood moved out for better living areas, leaving the poor, usually unemployed Gypsies behind. Initially, during the 80s only two or three Roma families were dwelling in "the green block" and in other neighbouring flats. Later, however, as privatization became less and less transparent, and property relations became more and more obscure, in lack of a new factory owner, poor, usually unemployed Roma families illegally occupied the empty apartments. Gradually, as living conditions became lower, electricity, running water and gas were cut off, and the inhabitants couldn't to pay their utilities. Around 2005 the local council backed by Roma organizations tried to legalize the squatters' situation, providing them property certificates and paying off their debts. In the same period an entrepreneur showed up, promising money for all Galilei Street inhabitants as price for the attic of the houses, a price that included a refurbishment of the estate and taking the garbage away. Refurbishment had been started on the exterior of the blocks, and entailed a moving out of majority of Roma, as they were said to have no money to buy the houses. "The green block" seems to be the last in renovation: either because it is the furthest from the main road or because it's overpopulated by Gypsies, who, where said to be less keen to cooperate with authorities.

I worked in one of the factories and this is how I was allocated the apartment. In those times there were no Roma but later the Romanians left as each got a new apartment after 1990. They had children, so they left [i.e. having many children meant a higher

2 Similarly to the factories, public sanitation was, too, a national company before 1989, and – as it was for factories – it underwent thorough a restructuring after the political changes.



ranking on the list of the allocated]. We had to work in a small factory and had only one daughter, so we were not allocated a better apartment. The majority [of the Roma] moved in abusively in 1992. [...] . In 1990 almost everything was deserted. Only 2-3 families were staying here but we did not know each other. In those times there were only four Roma families here but many of them left. There is but one who stayed. We bought the apartments later, in 2005, as we had no right to do that previously (i.e. as problems of ownership were not clarified). We paid rent till 2005, and then we bought the apartments. Before (i.e. between 1992 and 2005) the local council made contracts for all. Later (i.e. after 2005) the man (i.e. a local entrepreneur) came and bought the attic from each so we all could buy the apartments. Then we all tried to disconnect our apartments from the common network of electricity and pipe lines for natural gas. (Roma woman)

While access to some resources (became limited to the ghetto-dwellers, others remained still available. Local schools encourage the enrolment of Roma from the district, and the majority of local NGO clients are Galilei Street people and their children. Despite this, a good functioning of such resources is blocked by a few factors that are rather subjective: misunderstandings and mismatches are the most common among these. Different expectations towards the institutions and different opinions on their services are all relevant in discerning local Roma from the outward world of the helpers.

In the eyes of local school teachers "good" students are those with good school performance and behaviour; meanwhile, for locals the school is a good place to be, a place where children are treated decently:

Two of my three children were in the local school. No, I was not contented at all. There were some travellers who beat my children; once they poured ink on my son. Then I went to school to ask what had happened. The form-teacher told me she can't to anything as these kids are dangerous. Well, I said, if you don't know how to handle this, how should I? And I transferred my child to the school for children with special educational needs. The same happened to my second child, so the third one was automatically enrolled in the special school to be taken there and brought back by the siblings. I had to work I could not see them at the school." (Galilei Street woman)

I very much, very much liked to go to school but I was thinking differently then. [...] I was in the local school and regret not going further. I had problems with my eyesight and didn't know it, even my mother did not know it. I could not see so I could not learn. But I didn't tell my mum as she would have made glasses for me, glasses I would have been ashamed to wear. What would other people say [if they see me with glasses]? So I went to school just to be there, just to be there. I was caring it's not about that. Later my mother had a pair of glasses made but in the third grade I was told I'm not too sharp minded, that I have to go to the school for children with special educational needs. [...] And I left but went on in the same way. I learned, but then was absent for one or two weeks; it shouldn't have been like that. Sometimes I was quitting [meaning to be absent], walked out with the boys. I think I could have made it with some care [graduating] but I walked in the street well dressed, with makeup, smoking. We were out and had fun." (Galilei Street Roma girl, 18 years with 8 classes completed)

The same instances of mismatching occurred with the local NGO, which had many programs for disadvantaged people. The main selection criterion was family income (below 600 lei, about 150 Euros) per person. Additionally, families with truant children are selected, followed by those with family conflicts and other potential problems: mono-parental families, domestic violence, low health conditions, dwelling place-size (usually between 3 and 5 per persons per room). The "centre," as locals and employees call it, has been offering a variety of services: assistance with homework, psychological consultancy for children, games developing social and mental abilities, possibilities of spending spare time, daily food, etc. Misunderstanding arose when the yearly allowance was cut. For many it was the main reason for feeling upset with the NGO:

It was fine, there was no problem earlier. But when the allowance was cut it's not like before. (Roma woman)

I was there; my daughter had a sponsor, too. We got one million [old Romanian lei, about 25 Euros] a year. But it was cut off. Sometimes they help me, sometimes they don't. Yes, my daughter is there, gets a file, just to play there. Or sometimes she gets an apple or a banana, things I myself can buy for them. What opinion should I have? (Roma woman)

Stories of the cut-offs sound differently from the NGO employee's viewpoint:

Till this summer we had some emergency allowances as we called them, from money coming through the English affiliation [the NGO being partly allocated from British funds]. It was for emergent cases like when running water was to be cut off, or for a kid go to school or if the parents have no money to buy shoes. You can imagine, the last allowance was 100 new Romanian lei [under 25 Euros] per year and it was allocated in final situations and decided individually in each case. They get accustomed with this sum, however it wasn't big money; each kid got it, as in those times we were sponsored by English money. Last year was the last when British money was allocated. Because of the crisis the English lost hundred thousands of pounds and asked us to cut 25% out of the budget. Subsequently we forsook of the emergency allowances, thinking we could raise donations for school equipment, clothes; however – I think – it was the worst move in relation with the parents. On the other hand it was clear to cut this sum off as people or companies could much easier be responsive if we say clothes and school equipment is needed [than money]. We did not cut off the budget for daily food but forsook of the emergency allowances. Because it was clear, it created a dependency: people did love us for the money and did not care too much about us to stay with their children. It was clearly a dependency. And social assistants, too, used this method to blackmail the beneficiaries: you won't get the money unless you send your kid to school. [...] And then there was a scandal with many families, as they refused to sign any document, not even a thank-you letter for the sponsors. They had threatened us with not sending kids to the centre." (local NGO leader)

Misunderstanding in this latter case consists of different expectations in assistance and allocations: the local NGO thinks of a long-term assistance in children socialization, improvement of school performance by daily work, while the local parents prefer a concrete, direct help that visibly improves their lives over a short period of time.

2. Me, as one of "them"

Beside the general climate of stigmatization (making the locals look suspicious to persons from outside the ghetto who are dealing with "local Roma"), mistrust towards me had more concrete reasons. Later, when discussions became more open, plenty of informants conveyed that the local ghetto people were several times "used" by NGOs in their quest for clients. The first "complainer", a 10-11 year old local girl, recalled a chairperson from the neighbouring orphanage, who, for the sake of an application file in order to obtain money for his institution, took pictures of the falling-plaster walls, the misery and dirt of the lobbies. The money – as the locals believed – was allocated and used according to the interest of the orphanage; yet no Galilei ghetto dweller had ever seen a penny of it. Others mentioned journalists who, in their articles questioned local poverty by scornfully contrasting the misery of the building with the satellite dishes arising from almost every window. Others recalled images of NGO workers who hadn't kept their promises and never returned:

There were here many others, including an NGO saying they'd help us to send the kids to school. Well, they'd said we can help you with a PC. We gave them the personal data and they promised to call us. And two years have passed and nothing. It's better to tell from beginning you cannot help. One day some students came, saying they're from



the local council to help us in getting a job. They took personal data and took some pictures, yet they found nothing for us. They had a laptop, put [uploaded] our pictures there and left. If, so, I think...yes, help if you can. Enter and say, we can help you with this and this, but cannot help with and this. It makes us easier to understand. Just as we understand you as you need help. But if you cannot help, better frankly say so. (Galilei Street, Roma man)

Before you, many people were interested in the Roma. It was with workplaces, it was a research on workplaces for Roma. They came for the unemployed to help find them workplaces. The unemployed here gave interviews. There were many such people [who conducted interviews], took their papers and [the locals] hoped something was going to be found, but they have never returned. They never returned. It was a couple of days before. There were many of them, like you. With laptops, with ... They took personal data and also took some pictures. There were some young ones saying they'll help the Roma. But nothing happened; people are still staying at home. (Galilei Street, Roma man)

The richness of data is salient in the locals' experiences with "outsiders": these helpers conduct interviews ("the unemployed gave interviews here") and take pictures, practices typical for a researcher, and yet they never keep their promises and never return. Becoming one of those "interested in Roma", who "never returned" certainly raised the suspicions of the locals.

3. Internal differences: "me" and "us"

Structural and subjective reasons for stigma – pointed out in the first chapter – could have been responsible for detaching the people inhabiting the ghetto from the outward world (Wacquant, idem), making them "bad clients" in an unwelcoming territory; however, their homogeneously negative image is partly inventive. As researchers point out (see Hannerz 2004), internal diversity is also characteristic for ghetto communities. Consequently, the green block-inhabitants could be divided into (at least) two main categories according to their relation towards living in the ghetto. As everyone comes from the working-class districts of the city, except for an old couple and an extended family occupying four apartments in the block, discerning the dwellers' life-stories is quite difficult. "Homogeneity" is even salient, as only one dweller seems to admit the intrusive occupation of the apartment; all the others explain their presence in the block by their initial knowledge of the area:

What brought you right here, after you had to sell the apartment?

We had already known the area as my grandmother stayed here, it was the district we all grew up, so we knew there are cheap apartments here (Roma man)

Again, as majority of the residents are employed from time to time, though on the fringes of the labour market; many who are temporarily employed have decorated apartments, which fact makes it more difficult to discern the internal categories. Having in mind similar life-careers, subjective indicators were introduced, such as residents' relations to the place and their viewpoints on the residential segregation. The first group of ghetto residents were the so-called complainers, who regard their downward mobility as sign of decline. However, as Wacquant's interlocutors have territorial stigma as elementary for their identification, at Galilei Street only the downwardly mobile bring it into discussion. Residential segregation – dragging them into "a place like hell" as Wacquant's informants name it – here denotes a socio-cultural boundary between the worlds of "the civilized" and "uncivilized". The ghetto is a miserable place, equivalent to punishment and inadequate for decent persons like themselves. A majority of such workers are employed alongside their poor neighbours in local factories. As I could follow, the downwardly mobile maintain contacts with each other, or with Roma persons outside the ghetto on the opposite side of the street.

We had an apartment there, [in one of the working-class areas] but we wanted a house with garden. This is how we arrived here. I had problems with paying the overhead expenses, which is why we were thinking about buying a house. [They pay the price but

later find out the house was already sold]. Then I asked the owner, OK, give us a place to live, but not here! Anywhere but here. [...]

This means you're not friendly with the neighbours?

No, just saying hello, and that's it. They speak vulgarly and I don't like the kids. No, I don't go to their places. There's music everywhere tuned up to the maximum, they're quarrelling with their children and wives. Here the police come regularly, if not today but tomorrow because of the quarrelling children. I don't care if they're Gypsies. It is normal, to be a Gypsy, to be poor as we all are. But dress up well and be clean! If I warn them to be less lousy, they turn at me, what do I want? You cannot get along well with the parents, too. It's a disaster. Have you seen *Shatra*, the movie? There they had their own laws, and so it is here. (Romanian woman with Roma husband)

After we moved in I was a joint representative, seconded by a Gypsy neighbour. Then a conflict occurred because of the utility bills for water, and the neighbours were quarrelling. None of them could count. [...] Please, don't take any pictures; I don't want anyone to see my misery. I tried to hide from my colleagues where I live. [...]. Once we complained about the neighbours at the local council. We tried to explain they are too loud, cursing their own children and arguing over 5000 [old Romanian] lei [about 1-2 Euros]. Children, can you imagine, for 5000? The biggest problem is the high number of children and their noise. There're not the same. I have problems with 4 or 5 families. Almost everyone works at public sanitation but some get only the allowances. I think they sell the canteen bills and buy cigarettes from money. (non-Roma woman)

I don't really like the local school, as it is full of Gypsies. I don't have friends among the neighbours. The women are evil, the children lousy. It could be that I'm living here only for a couple of years; they've been here for 20. That's why – maybe – they don't regard me as an equal. (Roma woman)

The second category of ghetto residents is that of middlemen, the similar-but-different ones. As with the complainers, the middlemen admit inferiority in living condition and share the stigmatized identity but – at the same time – they do not recognize themselves as part of this inferior world due to their careers and personal achievements:

I hung around with some friends, I didn't like to go to school. Put my bag on the drain and left for the woods. Then my father said, instead of getting lost, becoming a vagabond, better to work with him whitewashing the houses, as in those times [i.e. in the 1980s] one was working with whitewash. I got 20-25 lei, which was big money in those times. Father put me to wash a bottle, to clean the cleaner, so this was how I learned. Father said I can earn a living with this job and so it was. I worked eight years with my father before and after 89. We had no company [i.e. they were working on the black market], as it was recommended to us; we made an apartment for somebody, for the neighbours, friends, and then others invited us as we were serious. [...] I stopped working like this two years ago, when the downturn started. I'm thinking to go abroad but need a degree. I'm about to make it as the Roma Party has a project in Bucharest with huge funds for helping Roma. [...] It is like a car, nice outside but if a car mechanic checks the inside, it's a disaster. It is different with this block, where the outside looks miserable but the inside is beautiful. (Roma man on the refurbished apartments – i.e. sign of being better off – in the ghetto)

[After returning from Hungary] I worked for myself, made a team and so on, in the construction companies. Plenty of work there, but we're asked for seriousness. We had to deal with many serious people, they were lawyers, they were doctors ... And this is how I started entirely on my own, as I told myself, I'm not stupid. So I started my company in 2007, having some good years in 2007, 2008, and until the middle of 2009, but no work since then. [...]



We made a house with my in-laws but did not get along well so we were thrown out, and this is all we could buy from our money. True, we didn't stay here for two years; we refurbished the apartment and then moved in. I grew up in this area. When I was a child we lived in the neighbouring block as my father was a factory worker. Then we moved out of here and into the working-class districts. [...]. Well, many criticise me, saying: do you live in this block? Well I'm not too proud of it. I want to prove there's a flower in every nation, that must grow high, and I am such a flower. The majority from this block got their start from me, work for me even now. Many boys from here work with me, I got them started. (Roma man)

The third group is neutral within the context of the territorial stigma, meaning not being too involved in the sorrows of living there. The majority does not even spontaneously introduce residential segregation in his/her narratives. They don't feel ashamed because of living here; being a Galilei Street resident for them is just a simple matter of fact.

Do you get along well with the neighbours?

Yes, no problems at all, no bother; not being in touch; my door and their door [are separated]. I have no problems with neighbours, but if you ask me where certain people live, I can't tell as I don't know them by name. I have no contacts but am paying the overhead expenses. I go on the apartment of the joint representative only. Have some colleagues here [in the block] who work for a factory. Once I talked to them and told them how difficult it is to work at the supermarket where I had been before. They told me: see there are openings now at the factory. I went for an interview in the morning and in the afternoon they'd called me, so I left the supermarket. (non-Roma woman)

Understanding the internal differentiation of ghetto residents is important for the following reasons: firstly, it clearly denotes that bearing a stigmatized Roma identity – here linked with a territory – has nothing to do with ethno-racial background: many informants who characterized “the Gypsies” as “uncivilized” are themselves coming from Roma families. Secondly, internal categorization is strongly linked to mistrust in the field: neutrals were generally suspicious of me, middlemen and complainers were generally open for cooperation. To return to my initial standpoint, suspicion had little to do with my person: the latter two groups were keener to talk as they recognized themselves as members of an outward world, where – in their view – I, too, belonged. It was the culturally distinct world outside the ghetto, the world of the “civilized”, the decent, the non-Gypsies with whom they regard themselves as equals.

Togetherness was – of course – different in the case of neutrals, as this category encompassed the majority of the unemployed, the less educated and the poor. Success in approaching them occurred when I accentuated my subordinated condition as a working person and emphasized that I had to carry out this research which was assigned to me. On the other hand, likeness in their case was usually contextual. Contrary to some examples in the literature (Okely 1983), they seemed not be in the need of someone from the outside world, as – I suppose – the outside world – in their view – could not offer anything relevant.

Conclusion

■ Previous chapters highlighted that mistrust in fieldwork is a telling ethnographic data instead of an unpleasant event. Being rejected by the Galilei Street ghetto residents was due to the social-culturally constructed and mediated differences between me and my informants. Besides some “hard” events like post-socialist industrial restructuring and residential policy, “soft” encounters – mismatch with local schools and NGOs interested in helping the local Roma – deepened the suspicion of ghetto residents toward local institutions. When – after an involuntarily wrong research question – I, as a researcher became associated with the people from the hostile outer world. As asking about their lives reminded each informant on how were they “used” by local institutions, their reaction could be nothing but rejection.

The tools available for handling suspicion have been limited. When asked to help the informants to obtain jobs or access medical services, a researcher's resources seem to be inadequate. Having in mind the limited connections of Romanian anthropology with a world outside the academy, this seems to be a difficult task, though, I would add, not impossible to fulfil. But then, changing the research framework still brought some success, as it detached the focus from "their lives" and gave them a new territory of discussion: complaining about local institutions.

The anthropology on the Roma and especially the policy evaluations tend to share the viewpoint of the informants against the local setting as state policies or non-Roma prejudices in everyday life (see Gay y Blasco, 2003; Okely, 1983). Still, direct or hidden advocacy has its limits: sometimes the ones labelled as "the deprived" by statistics and EU-reports, driven by sorrow and mercy, are nevertheless the ones helping you, who – due to the image of a learned and better off scholar – flatter yourself in articulating their needs.

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