# Roma Identities and the Reproduction of Inequalities in Bulgaria: Kinship, Gender and the State

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Declaration of Authorship

I Iliana Tsankova-Sarafian hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Iliana Tsankova-Sarafian Date: 16th Dec 2020

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**Abstract**

This multi-sited ethnographic study is about the 'unfinished' identification, the singularity of experience and Roma 'becoming' in Bulgaria. By presenting a singularity of individual trajectories, voices and specific circumstance, the work explores Roma lives from 'unexpected' standpoints. The thesis follows the plot of individual life courses in order to illustrate the many juxtaposed contexts through which identification in social life is empirically negotiated. The 'unexpected' and contradictory nature of the minutue of everyday lives manifests across different arenas from history, kinship and childhood to activism and conversion to Evangelism. Influenced by a situational approach, the written materials presented here range from personal accounts to description of locations and reproduced stories. The research employs a self-reflexive approach to the material which is carried across chapter to chapter. The core idea of the thesis is that Roma identification can be intricate and at times problematic alongside, through, and despite of the constraining circumstantial external and internal structures and forces, including those of state and 'community'. Following this logic, the overarching questions posed by the thesis are: What are the principles and behaviours that contradict 'Roma-ness' and community belonging? What are the exceptions to the 'expected' and how are these dealt with and navigated by the research interlocutors? The aim of this work is to paint a complex picture and to create episodes which do not necessarily make 'one whole' of a linear account, in order to illustrate the uneven nature of inequality and identification; and to give an account of the ways the individuals in the multi-sited field confront, negotiate and reproduce understandings and demands that are often conflicting and ambiguous. Herein lies the contribution of the thesis, namely in its invitation to researchers to consider the unpredictability, the incommensurability, 'unexpectedness' and 'unfinishedness' of the everyday that animates Roma lives.

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**Notes on Terminology and Language**

I avoid the term 'Gypsy' throughout the thesis and I only use it in the instances of direct quotation or where it is necessary for the discussion. 'Gypsy' (and its translation in Bulgarian as tsiganin/циганин) is generally considered to be a pejorative exonym within the context of my fieldwork in Bulgaria, therefore when I use the word 'Gypsy' I refer to the racialisation process through which a single identity is constructed. However, the thesis recognises that Roma are a heterogeneous community with linguistic and religious diversity and there are contexts such as those of the Traveller/Gypsy communities in the United Kingdom in which the use of the term 'Gypsy' is preferable. I acknowledge also that the term '**the Roma'**, although used as a self-appellation of an ethno-cultural subgroup, is used as an 'umbrela' term for Gitanos, Travellers, Romanlar, Kale, Manus, etc. Therefore to avoid grouping, an assumption of a monolithic identity and ascription I differentiate between 'the Roma' and 'Roma'. I use the latter throughout the thesis.

Non-English language terms are italicised and explained (usually translated in the text). Bulgarian and Turkish words are transliterated in the text also. The words *tsiganin* (male Rom) and *tsiganka* (female Roma) are translated as 'Gypsy' in English; however this does not represent the original meaning of *tsiganin* and *tsiganka*.

# PART 1: Beginnings

# Chapter 1: Introducing the 'Unexpected'

# Theory, Sites and Method

## Purpose and Theory

This ethnographic study is about the 'unexpected', the singularity of experience and the strife 'to become' and identify. The core idea of the thesis is that Roma identification can be intricate and at times problematic alongside, through, and despite of the constraining circumstantial external and internal 'community' forces. The thesis follows the plot of individuals in order to identify the many juxtaposed contexts, through which identification in social life is empirically negotiated. By presenting a singularity of individual trajectories, voices and their specific circumstance, this work explores Roma lives from 'unexpected' standpoints. This 'unexpected' and contradictory nature of the minutue of everyday lives manifests across different arenas: from history, kinship to childhood and conversion to Evangelism. Influenced by a situational approach, the written materials presented here range from personal accounts to description of locations and reproduced stories.

The aim of this work is to paint the complex, uneven nature of inequality and identification, which here I mostly refer to as 'identity', and of the ways individuals in my field-sites confront, negotiate and reproduce understandings and demands that are often conflicting, ambiguous and contradictory. Speaking of identity here I do not reject Hall's suggestion that the term identification must be preferable to identity itself (1996:2). On the contrary, I agree that the term identification allows for a better understanding of the process in which people come to identify themselves and that identification "happens over time that is never absolutely stable" (ibid). Here I am transgressing and using identification and identity interchangeably whereby identity is both situational as located in the social context, a

question of 'blood' and inherited traits from generation to generation, as well as a constantly evolving unstable and fluid notion (ibid). I am influenced by Said's (1993) writings on how imperialism impacted identities in that "no one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points [...]. Imperialism ['s] worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or Black, or Western, or Oriental" (Said 1993:336). During fieldwork I was able to find spaces, stories, examples of the everyday which puzzled me and challenged my preconceptions about Roma identification. These were positions of liminality, 'neither here, nor there' and of 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1974:232). This 'inbetweenness' (Basu 2017) opposed methodological essentialism, the singular, 'the certain' and fixed classifications of Roma identification which I thought I was familiar with. Following this logic, the overarching questions I ask in this thesis are: What are the exceptions of the 'expected' and how are these navigated inside communities and externally? How do my informants deal with principles and behaviours that contradict what is meant to be 'Roma-ness' and community belonging? What can be inferred from the individual trajectories I follow in the thesis in order to contribute to the literature on Roma and beyond? I must note that it is not my preoccupation to present a coherent and conclusive response to these questions. This is not an account of what constitutes Roma identities, nor do I set out to explore what is unique for the communities I studied. There are numerous studies which have focused on such outcomes and I capitalise on this work in order to position my research and its contribution. However, what I intend is to present situations of permanent 'unfinishedness' (Biehl and Locke 2017) in order to create episodes which do not necessarily make 'one whole' of a linear account that paints one picture; rather this thesis brings together a collage of experiences and stories with which I hope to challenge 'the expected' and the categorical, and contribute to further discussions. In this pursuit I found that the 'anthropology of

becoming'[1] (Deleuze 1995, Biehl and Locke 2010) is particularly relevant for this thesis. An 'anthropology of becoming' stipulates the illumination of the everyday through the singularity of human experience, 'experience in the making', through ethnography that does not assume universality in theory, a writing that does not "contain and reduce" but hopes to convey the "messiness of the social world and the real struggles in which our informants and their kin are involved" (Biehl and Locke 2010:321). Such anthropology contends that despite the importance of anthropological and other theories for understanding human experience, they have limits and can only 'attempt' to interpret the 'messiness' of life partially (ibid: 322; Jackson 2013a).

The anthropological literature on Roma has tended to present identity as monolithic and given, as opposed to being fragmented, precarious and ambiguous. Well known anthropological studies which I draw upon in this work have engaged in elaborating a shared group identity whereby the individual is seen primarily as part of the collective and communal whole (Sutherland 1977; Gropper 1975; Okely 1983; Williams 1982; 2003; Silverman 1988; Stewart 1997, 1998, 2001; Gay y Blasco 1999; 2001; 2008; Gheorghe 1997; Lemon 2000; Engebrigtsen 2007). These important accounts have laid the foundation of Romani Studies today and focus largely on what may be 'expected' of 'the community', or in other words, what is specific of Roma in order to make sense of group belonging (Gay y Blasco 2011: 444). Nevertheless, "in treating individuals primarily as exemplars [...] the ethnographic literature consistently describes them [Roma] as amorphous aggregates of archetypes, groups of moral beings equally positioned vis-à-vis the world" (Gay y Blasco, 2011: 445). Authors have pointed to the contradictory nature of categorisation and that in practice its application can be fluid and constantly contested (Williams 2003; Stewart 2013; Engebrigtsen 2007, 2011; Theodosiou 2008, 2011; Gay y Blasco 2011, 2020). As it happened

[1] I am grateful to Dr Paloma Gay y Blasco for introducing me to João Biehl's work.

throughout fieldwork and in the process of writing the thesis I questioned my focus on Roma identification. Despite my (at times obsessive) interest in the subject, I found the topic to be too complex, highly contested and politicised. Roma identification is complex due to the heterogeneity and difference in sub-group identity. There is a variety of religious, geographical and other differences and affiliations that divide Roma groups in Europe. Acton and Klímová (2001) record that Roma are often seen as a "nation without a state" (see also Marushiakova et al 2004). Research has suggested that it is difficult to talk about Roma *per se* because the term encompasses a wide variety of sub-groups; hence Roma cannot be seen as a homogenous community but rather as 'communities of shared social practices' (Guy 2001) and although there are similarities in speaking the Romani language (Matras 2013), in cultural practices, rituals and belief systems (Foszto 2006, 2007, 2009; Gay y Blasco 1999, 2001; Ries 2011; Roman 2015), there is a multitude of differences such as geographical location, languages and preference for self-identification (Surdu 2014; Surdu and Kovats 2015; McGarry 2010). In Bulgaria, as in the rest of Europe, Roma are generally seen as a single and homogeneous community in the public discourse (Tomova 2008, 2011).

Numerous studies have been engaged in explaining who 'the Roma' are. Linguists, for example, have based their scholarship on the link between the Romani language and the Indo-Aryan languages of India (Fraser 1992; Matras 2002). Historically, Roma have been seen as nomadic tribes who migrate from place to place due to their 'itinerant handicrafts' (Bancroft 2001, 2010). After frictions and mutual intolerance between 'settled and unsettled', the so called 'nomads' must escape to another location in order to survive. In time as well as in space this 'unsettled' lifestyle' had to 'move on' (Kenrick and Clark 1999). Roma/Gypsy Travellers had to adapt to the 'Gadge/gorgio'[2] world constantly, to negotiate and adapt to the

[2] The terms 'Gadje', Gorgio' (England) or 'Payo' (Spain), Country people (Ireland), Flatties (Scotland) are used by Roma/Gypsy/Traveller communities to refer to nonRoma. The terms are seen as pejorative.

dominant economic patterns and, "know the enemy", and interpret this knowledge in order to be self-sufficient (Okely 2010:42). Banton (1983) and other theorists have stressed that 'the Roma' case does not fit currently existing theories. According to Eriksen (1993) Roma are "a cultural and symbolic phenomenon" viewed through the prism of difference (Eriksen, 1993:74). As Barany (2002) puts it, "the most important factor of Gypsiness is the division of the world into *Roma* and *gadje*, a division that has contributed to the absence of a large-scale integration of Roma into mainstream societies" (ibid:14). This significant factor for negotiating Roma-ness ('Gypsiness') is the re-creation of Roma culture vis-à-vis other cultures, or the emphasis of particular choices Roma make in positioning themselves versus the dominant population (Okely 2010). There is a consensus amongst anthropologists that Roma identity is created as a result of and in opposition to the macro-community (Okely 1983; Sutherland 1986; Stewart 1997; Gay y Blasco 1999; Lemon 2000; Marushiakova and Popov 2005). In other words, identification (or Roma-ness, Romanipe, Gypsiness, Gitaneidad, etc.) is grounded in the difference between Roma and nonRoma as well as between Roma sub-groups. For example, Silverman (1988) presents the case of 'Gypsiness', through the example of Roma in North America who succeeded in preserving distinct cultural attributes by maintaining boundaries between Roma and nonRoma through mobility, employment and abiding by strict taboo systems. Later, Silverman (2012) also argued that for Roma, identity "has always been construed in relation to hegemonic powers such as patrons of the arts, socialist ideologies, European Union officials, and NGO funders" (ibid:53). Gay y Blasco's work on Gitanos in Spain shows that they differentiate themselves from the *Payos* (nonRoma) by referring to women's decency and chastity. It would be a failure if a woman is not living a "proper" Gitano life-style and does not adhere to the established rules of morality (Gay y Blasco 1999:63). Durst (2010) in "*What Makes Us Gypsies, Who Knows...?!*" contends that "the category of Roma/ 'Gypsy" is a category which acquires its meaning

through the relationship with nonRoma, confirming earlier writings such as those of Okely (1983), Stewart (1997), Gay y Blasco (1999) and other. Surdu (2014), a Roma scholar, goes on to say that "the Roma population is a negative and oppositional construction made by dominant groups and self-internalised by many of those labelled as Roma" (ibid:33). Mirga (2018), himself also Roma, confronts Surdu's approach by advocating for a more active engagement with research on how Roma shape their own ethnogenesis and by considering the views of the emerging Roma scholars on the subject of identification. Perhaps Stewart (2010) gives an answer to this tension of essentialism versus social constructionism in that "our notions of culture, of ethnic group or people are so utterly rooted in the schemas derived from practices of nation states (which are, or at least strive to be, homogenous, neatly bounded entities) that Romany communities appear as an anomaly" (in Stewart and Rovid 2010:2).

Other authors have taken a socio-historical approach to investigating Roma identities through the lens of poverty, precariousness and the concept of 'underclass' (Ladányi and Szelényi 2003). Studies have accounted for the effects of communism on Roma in Eastern Europe (Guy 2001; Mirga 1992; Mirga and Gheorge 1997; Gheorghe 1997; Balibar 2009) and contended that communist approaches to Roma assimilation produced ethnicizing and politicization of the respective Roma communities and that this dictated how they identify. More studies have focused on the political representation (Kovats and Surdu 2015, van Baar 2011), including the aspect of transnationality, representation in Europe, policy and Roma identity (Vermeersch 2006). Concepts such as 'Roma integration' and 'social inclusion' in the political arena have become the vocabulary of large international non-government and government organisations whereby Roma identity is conceptualised as 'ethnoclass' and focuses on the alleviation of poverty and improvement of their socio-economic situation through education, housing and employment (Vermeersch 2006).

More recent studies have suggested 'superdiversity' (after Vertovec 2007) echoing Okely's (1994:62) earlier suggestion for the use of hybridity[3] (albeit with caution) as a relevant framework to explain the heterogeneity of Roma communities and discuss identification as less determined, beyond complexity and essentialism (Tremlett 2014; Tremlett and McGarry 2013). Kocze et al (2019) warn of the provenance of 'super-diversity'/hybridity and the 'risk of losing sight of ethnicity' (ibid:63). Instead Kocze et al (2019) reaffirm what earlier feminist studies have conceptualised as intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; Collins 2015; Yuval-Davis 2011) and suggest it as a framework to use when considering Roma identification and its negotiations. Yildiz and DeGenova (2017) challenge the "status quo within Romani studies" which has presented a dual approach to theorising 'the Roma' identity. These authors contend that there is an opposition between the essentialisation of Roma identity, 'culture', and 'ethnicity'; and denial of the relevance of ethnicity (ibid:426). Along the lines of this academic thinking, in this thesis I would like to push beyond these boundaries by providing examples of remarkable similarities, common and shared identification markers, as well as spaces and circumstances in which individuals may identify as Roma or decide not to do so while choosing to identify differently. For this purpose I provide context, building on both earlier and more recent research in Romani Studies and history, whilst insisting on the value of the micro, the singular, 'unfinished', 'the non-important' and unexpected identification, instead of creating categorisations, aggregates and topology (Gay y Blasco 2011; Biehl and Locke 2017).

The stories in this thesis are incomplete; they represent lifeworlds and engage a range of problematic, including the question of by whom and how Roma histories are controlled, how children are brought up and who influences their education, how economic and social

[3] Okely suggests the concept but she also acknowledges that she hesitates to use it not to create incongruity.

transformation takes place and who becomes 'the Roma elite', who looks after Roma children in state institutions and how they perceive themselves, how womanhood/adulthood begins and how religion plays a role in everyday life. Each thesis chapter brings forward different spaces, stories, domains and contradictions in order to explore the processes through which they are "rendered possible'" (Berliner et al 2016). Ultimately, identity politics arises as a result of representation in 'history, language and culture' and identity representation, therefore it is not so much about 'who we are' or 'where we came from' as it is about 'who we might become' (Hall 1996). Each chapter provides only an entrance into multiple worlds, hoping to add to the identification debates in Romani Studies but to direct attention to the 'anthropology of becoming' (Biehl and Locke 2017).

**Conceptualising the State**

There is one particular agent, an ingredient, actor/s as well as spectator/s present to varying degrees within each chapter and this is the state. So how do I conceptualise 'the state' and its interventions within domains of education, social relations and constructed boundaries such as family, civil society and religion? Abrahms (1988) argued that scholars should cease thinking, talking, and writing about 'the state' as if it existed as a unified, autonomous, moral entity or agent. The immediately present institutions of the 'state system' – and in particular their functions – are the core object of the task of studying the state (Abrahms 1988) or in other words, of working out how 'the state' comes to assume its status and authority over all forms of social relations (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). As presented in this thesis, history-making, education, child protection and safe guarding, civil society and religion provide clues to understanding the micropolitics of the work of the state, how state authorities and governments operate in people's daily lives, and how the state comes to be imagined, encountered, and re-imagined by its subjects. Analytically, arguing against the assumption

that ‘the state’ is an empirical object, Abrahms proposed that it is not “a reality, which stands behind the mask of political practice” (Abrahms 1988:58).

The state could be reproduced through different practices, i.e., bureaucratic practices through which the state’s primacy and superiority over other social institutions are reproduced, and social inequalities are maintained (Sharma and Gupta 2006:13; Fassin 2015). But what is it that the current state reproduces? Practically, the state reproduces values, both believed and performed and throughout the thesis I show that the state’s values may not always be shared by the values of its subjects. As opposed to seeing the state as unemotional and monolithic in structure, the examples I give show a series of gaps, where the state’s presence can become extremely brutal or is in fact absent. For example, in practice it seems that once a family or a child comes to the attention of the social services, there is a high chance that the child may end up in an institution (Chapter 5). The school administration can make decisions regarding a child’s education performance while sharing prejudices against Roma parents whose children they educate (Chapter 3). The state is seen as the provider of ‘better education’, ‘better nourishment’ and ‘better upbringing and culture’, although usually states are seen as being devoid of culture and are primarily conceptualized in institutional terms (Stoler 2004). Theories of the state often have implicit in them theories of nationalism; similarly, theories of nationalism assume that nationalism is a state prerogative (Anderson 1983). These narratives of nationalism march alongside with the concerns for better education and ‘enculturation’ while the numbers of Roma children labelled as coming from ‘inadequate families’ continue to rise (Toma 2012; Gay y Blasco 2016).

I must acknowledge that it is easier not to distinguish between the state and the politico-historical regimes (e.g. socialism, postsocialism, etc). In Abrahm’s words ‘‘we have come to take the state for granted as an object of political practice and political analysis while

remaining quite spectacularly unclear as to what the state is" (1988:112). I am aware that I need to analyse the state at its work not only as an external and political entity. Taussig (1997) warns of the danger of reifying the state as an autonomous entity that regulates the communities we study. Anthropologists have written about the false dichotomization of the state and the community/the kin, the grand versus the small, and the external versus the local (Stoler 2005:155; Thelen et al 2018; Pine 2018). The many levels, agendas, faces, positions, organisations that constitute the state "can be both arbitrary and contingent" (Harvey 2005:139; see also Navaro-Yashin 2002; Fassin 2015) and need to be conceptualised not only through the lens of the state but also through community frameworks. Sharma and Gupta (2006), however, alert us to the challenge faced by anthropologists in studying states through the lens of local communities while resisting the state (ibid:27). Krohn-Hansen and Nustad (2005) contend that the lack of ethnographic focus on states "undermines anthropologists' capacity to deal satisfactorily with important forms of power and politics" (2005:21). Bearing in mind these considerations I attempt to engage with the state in a nuanced manner, by being mindful not to implicitly assume a monolithic state, reifying its motives while still presenting the major role of the state in Roma identification. I shall show how the state regulates its subjects through mechanisms such as historical accounts, education, care, birth, marriage and religion (see Foucault 1984) and how individuals and community, on the other hand, resist, shape and perpetuate their identities. In order to achieve this I consider the challenges and impediments, as well as the resilience and coping mechanisms, inside kinship relationships (Thelen et al 2018). I argue that gender, childhood, adulthood, parenthood can be understood within a framework of kinship relatedness (Carsten 2000) and provide examples of how kinship opposes the state in order to create alternative narratives and forms of history, identity and belonging.

The thesis carries a continually occurring theme which falls within the study of socialism and post-socialism. The collapse of the Soviet Union, its various effects on Central and Eastern European states and the transition towards free-market economy are important aspects of analysis. I look at the heralded change in the role of the state, its relationship to kinship and gender roles (Pine 2001; 2002) and how these are inscribed in different institutional settings and practices in Bulgaria (Kaneff 2004; 2011). The attempts of the 'transition states' to establish liberal democracies have both included some populations and excluded other (Stewart 2001; Knudsen and Frederiksen 2015). Thus, the thesis reflects on the effects and the centrality of state production towards Roma identification. Paying attention to the state and non-state, public and private dichotomies can illustrate the complexities that have shaped people's lives since the fall of communism (Hann 2007; Verdery 2003; Pine 2018; Kaneff 2019).

**Structure of the thesis**

The substantive chapters of the thesis are organised around the six main themes that emerged during my fieldwork: history and its effects on Roma identification (chapter 2); the meaning of childhood and education through the lens of Roma children themselves, their families and the professionals working with them (chapter 3); the modes of Roma 'empowerment' and its manifestation or lack of it, through civil society engagement (chapter 4); the state's interventions in taking care of Roma children (chapters 5); the everyday gendered realities in the communities I studied (chapter 6); the kinning of the Pentacostal church and its impact on individual affiliation (chapter 7). This is what I found composed the lifeworlds of my informants and I aim to present them in the order that they happened and as I experienced them. I also ground my approach in an exploration of my own position in the field as a Roma woman, which is carried across from chapter to chapter.

In **Chapter 1** I present the complexity of my fieldwork and its stages. I reflect on sites, theory, methods and ethics. My "own" culture (Okely 1996), with which I thought I was familiar before commencing fieldwork, presented some puzzles and unknowns many times (Behar 1996). Despite these challenges, such occasions helped me to bring my embodied knowledge to the surface and gave me an opportunity to explore new representations.

In **Chapter 2** I discuss the historical aspects of exclusion and marginality. The purpose of the chapter is to look at the social conditions and understand how these impinge on Roma everyday lives today. The chapter discusses histories of exclusion that predestined longstanding prejudice. By tracing back the Roma historical background, I aim to contest notions of exclusion as not only part of current modernity paradigms, but also as historically grounded assumptions and beliefs that have shaped contemporary "racial politics" (Gilroy 1987). I focus on the historical moments of silence while finding out that history and the past are remembered. In the silences and the comfort of 'spaces' the past is narrated safely as well as resisted and 'allowed' to be forgotten or suppressed.

**Chapter 3** illustrates the complex interrelationships, grey areas and niches of education and literacy. I explore some of the tensions arising from historical and current relationships between Roma and the state, and how these relationships have evolved more specifically drawing from the realm of education. Here I reflect on the state ideologies of education and examine how schooling can be both empowering and disempowering. I also provide an overview of the suggestions that Roma 'culture' does not encourage children to pursue education and how everyday realities show a more complex picture.

In **Chapter 4** I focus on civil society organisation and its central role in inclusion and empowerment. The contradiction here is the imposition of a certain Roma identity which in

reality is divorced from the everyday realities of my informants. Here I pay attention to Roma achievements in higher education and present the stories of university students and graduates whom I met through fieldwork. Their stories brought a number of themes, including reflections on change in social status, expectations from within and outside the community, acceptance and identity choice. There are a multitude of conflicting issues as the chapter sheds light on how social inequalities are reproduced and sustained.

**Chapter 5** reflects on how evolving social policies for children and their families affect the marginalisation of Roma children from mainstream Bulgarian society. The subject of this chapter reflects on the dramatic overrepresentation of Roma children living in care provision in Bulgaria. Here I demonstrate how both universal social policies directed at helping all children and policies targeted to help the most deprived children in a population, the children in care, can further marginalise them. I present a rarely explored picture of how state care impinges on Roma children's identities, be they ethnic, cultural, gender and other.

In **Chapter 6** I explore Roma ideas about gender and the place of sexuality constructed by certain Roma 'morality' and kinship strategies. The construction of identities, be they racial, gender or class, cannot be seen as isolated and dissimilar. Such ideas influence the construction of Roma adulthood and personhood. I must warn the reader that this chapter may seem somewhat of a departure from my original arguments, however my intention is to point to the interrelatedness of kinship, gender, education and economy as they play a vital role in identification. Kinship, femininity and motherhood are much interlinked in my informants' context and family is central to life in the Roma neighbourhood. Kinship relationships shape household arrangements and influence the way identities are perceived and negotiated. There are gender, community hierarchies and sets of behaviours which warrant a specific model of Roma-ness to be 'expected' within the community. Relatedness,

reputation, respectability, honour and prestige, rituals, unwritten 'marriage rules' and kinship strategies are all approaches to identify, to be and 'to become'.

**Chapter 7** sheds light on the tensions between anthropology, religion and how the researcher's positionality posed challenges and opportunities in the field. I consider the 'process of revitalisation' of religion in the communities I studied and how this impinges on Roma identities, histories and choices. I also present the narratives of the church groups and individuals, and more specifically how women, as the majority of converts, perceived change in belief and their sociality as a result of Christian evangelical conversion. Ultimately, I address the question of the extent to which religious affiliation influences Roma roles and identification within the family, the kin, the state and the 'outside world'. I examine the relationship between the church and the state and illustrate how inextricable these have become.

In **Chapter 8** I provide concluding remarks on the different layers of meaning and the range of factors that work towards constituting Roma identities and how inequalities resulting from contradictions, enforcement and choice in identification reproduce themselves, mutate and persist. I sum up my reflections on the overarching conclusion of the thesis that Roma identities are varied, layered, complicated, yet they are also shared and re-negotiated in the realm of space, state and non-state provision, history, kinship, language and religion.

For the ease of the reader the thesis is divided in three parts. In the first part – *Beginnings* (chapters 1 and 2) - I set the scene by introducing my research as well as the history of my interlocutors. The second part – *Childhoods and Becoming* (chapter 4 and 5) - I explore what being Roma may imply for children and adults who grew up on the edges of the community, or **outside**, specifically in care, and of Roma whose lives may be seen to contradict or

challenge expectations of the community by nonRoma and also, by Roma themselves. These accounts present individuals and collective actors in interaction in everyday life, in the neighbourhood and also in institutional/state settings, including educational settings, away from the Roma neighbourhood. In the third part – *Adulthood and Becoming* (chapters 6 and 7), the thesis reflects on some of the 'typical' internal markers of identification such as marriage, weddings, gender positionality and religious affiliation and the enormous importance they carry as well as the contradictions they pose **inside** the community. The theme that glues the three thesis parts together and which runs throughout the thesis is the role of the state, ranging from explicit interventionist state policies and prosaic micro control to what seems to be an withdrawal and retreat. In other words, in the first two parts of the thesis the state features as a main player in decision-making, in historicizing, in educating and in taking care of Roma children, and in the second part the state's presence in communal kinship, gender and religious relationships is somewhat sporadic and withdrawn, yet still there in the background. Crucially, the thesis provides examples of how kinship opposes the state in order to create alternative narratives and forms of history, identity and belonging. The two of course are interconnected. Kinship and politics go hand in hand (Thelen et al 2018). These spaces of state presence or absence, relationships inside and outside the community and the state, ways and choices in identification, can present opportunities to learn. Herein lies the contribution of this thesis, namely in its invitation to researchers to consider the unpredictability, the 'world of multiple orderings of reality' (Tambiah 1990:84), the incommensurability and 'unexpectedness' of the everyday that animates Roma lives.

**Research Sites: Radost**

The Roma neighbourhood is located in the outskirts of the town of 'Radost'[4], close to an industrial sector. The neighbourhood has approximately 1300 people, which makes up about 14% of the 9000 inhabitants of Radost. The division and separateness from the rest of the neighbourhoods in Radost is seen from the moment I draw close to the Roma neighbourhood. While there are very few Roma living in other parts of town – mainly in the apartment blocks in close proximity to the neighbourhood, the majority of Roma live here. The neighbourhood itself is 100% Roma, with not a single ethnic Bulgarian inhabitant.

Structurally, the Roma neighbourhood is not autonomous but there is a clear spacial delinianation between the Roma and nonRoma part of the town as seen on the picture below. It is as if the main town has retreated to its site and the Roma have created their own site. Doctors and nurses visit rarely, if at all. Teachers visit before enrolment time in the beginning of the school year to make sure they have the required quota of pupils. When social workers visit the neighbourhood inhabitants are worried as this means children will be taken away. Police navigate only on the main road since going further in the neighbourhood is seen as 'dangerous'. The rubbish trucks come once a month and only if prompted by a concerned Roma citizen. Ironically, all the rubbish bin collectors and the cleaners in Radost are Roma.

[4] Radost is a pseudonym and means 'Joy' in Bulgarian. The name 'Radost' reflects my personal experience and the many happy moments I shared with my informants. Throughout this thesis the location of the town has been altered to preserve its anonymity. Throughout this work also, for reasons of confidentiality, I refer to all inhabitants by names different from their own and avoid giving specific individual details which could identify them in circumstances which could prove to be problematic.

Image 1. Birdview of Radost (MNest Photography)

In the 1950s there were only a handful of Roma families in the 'old' Roma neighbourhood in Radost. This is when the local administration decided to move them all to a new area, close to the industrial part of town. The 'old' Roma neighbourhood was next to the site on which the local hospital was going to be build. The 'old' land was exchanged for a 'new' land which was first called 'Novodrumtsi' ('Newcomers'), then renamed again to 'Nov Pat' (New Road) and later renamed again after the local factory for magnetic equipment, which in a way merged the factory with the Roma neighbourhood. The inhabitants of the neighbourhood refer to the neighbourhood as '*the mahala*'[5]. In official documents, however, the name of the neighbourhood is presented as either 'the Gypsy/Roma quarter (*tsiganski/romski kvartal*)' or 'New Road'.

Since the fall of communism hardly any investment has been made here, no infrastructure, no pavements, no street lights. Apparently, these roads have names but there are no street signs

[5] The word Mahala or Mahalla is used in many languages and countries and it means neighborhood or location in Turkish and Arabic.

or labels. An outsider wouldn't be able to find their way even if they had an address and unless they asked the locals they wouldn't be able to reach their destination. It is no surprise that the roads have no names as the neighbourhood's name 'New Road' gives a clue – there is a perpetual newness of the Roma quarter and its 'newcomer' citizens, although, the site has existed for almost seventy years. As I walk through the neighbourhood I notice that the streets have gradually become narrower and there is more rubbish around. The rubbish tanks in the beginning of the neighbourhood are overflowing and one wonders when collection took place last. The difference is not only visual and I can smell it in the air. A smell combination of burned wood and animal waste greets me as I go along the main street. I see houses, most of them unfinished but painted with bright colours. Here and there I see that on the main street there is a tree, a remainder of past times. There are no trees further down in the neighbourhood. Some of the houses have broken or missing windows which are covered with carpets or blankets; the gates are broken, the metal roofs have halls or broken tiles. The eye catches a white tall building with well-maintained façade, a painted fence and a cross on its roof. This is the local evangelical church which is in contrast with the rest of the grey and unkempt buildings.

When I go further towards the central part of the neighbourhood I see a space that is burgeoning with children and it resembles a children's playground. This is in fact the neighbourhood playground but it is right next to one of the busiest roads in town leading to the industrial site. Most children are here without their parents' permission because the playground is without a fence and has an open access to the busy road. Cars, lorries, horse cars and people pass by constantly. The children fight with each other to reach the only broken swing left and one metal piece resembling a spaceship. Right in front of the playground I see two huge rubbish bins overflowing with waste. On the sides of the busy

road I see men who are waiting in hope to be picked up by local businessmen for temporary daily work. They need to bring food to their children.

Image 2. The neighbourhood's playground.

A short street takes me to the central part of the neighbourhood, a square space of old stone tiles, covered with cigarette butts and empty packages of waffles and sweets. I see a two-story building in front of which is a café. The first floor is a *chitalishte* ('a house of culture'). This building was built by Roma volunteers during communist times. In front of the building is the neighbourhood square filled with adults and children and it is a bee hive in this afternoon hour. A multitude of people go around the makeshift market stalls with second hand clothes, fruit and vegetables. I hear negotiations between customers and traders. In the summer evenings the square is filled with people who sit on the warm stones, drinking beer and eating sunflower seeds. Children chase each other until late at night.

Further inside the neighbourhood I see a labyrinth of narrow roads without pavement. Two small cars cannot pass by each other. One part of the road is paved, a legacy and a reminder of better times thirty years ago. The road holes are there to teach me that next time I will need

better shoes to walk on the muddy streets. I turn around and see why children have given up on wearing shoes; walking shoeless in the mud may be easier. I feel for the children who go to school covered in mud every morning. As I progress ahead on the narrow roads I go through different smells. Someone is cooking and they are calling their children to eat. I hear all kinds of sounds – mostly the latest hit music in the neighbourhood. This neighbourhood is anything but silent. People are watching me. I am foreign here. I ask a stranger where Neli, the teacher lives and they show me. I stop in front of the house I was looking for and Neli meets me. My fieldwork has begun.

Image 3. The end of Radost.

My parents were with me in Radost that afternoon when I first began my fieldwork. They insisted on accompanying me as I had to be safe and well and this was going to give them peace of mind. I did not see this as relevant since I had just come back home from living on my own in London - surely I was going to manage. What I failed to remember was that for an unmarried Roma woman who was nearly thirty years old to live in a family that was not her

kin was highly unusual. My parents knew this and their presence that afternoon had a purpose; they were there to protect their daughter's respectability. They left assured that their daughter was going to be safe. Neli's parents then became responsible for me and by living with them I was automatically identified as a member of the family. In fact, I was later introduced as a distant relative. The first task of my fieldwork was completed - I had a home and protection.

The introduction to the locals in Radost was important. My parents were identified as Roma and this gave me a good start. However, to be identified as Roma due to my parents' origin or Romani language skills was not sufficient. I had to be presented as a respectable daughter. So, Neli's father and mother took on the responsibility to look after me and take care of my respectability. My Roma-ness and past were the subject of many discussions. Whose daughter was I? Where did I come from? Why wasn't I married? Why was I spending time in a small town in Bulgaria since I could live in a metropolis in England? Although, in time, both the researcher and my Roma-ness gained me entry into the corridors of state institutions and the homes in the Roma neighbourhood, being an insider, meant that my reputation was of utmost importance to deal with at first. My childhood was spent in a Roma neighbourhood, leaving me intimately aware of the locals' worldview and social norms, and I was naively certain that this experience would give me quick and unproblematic access. Precisely because of this intimate involvement over a substantial portion of my life, I believed that there was 'an underlying appeal to shared experience' which enabled me to appreciate the local contexts over and above mere 'understanding' (Okely and Callaway 1992). Ultimately, I was an insider. Fieldwork challenged my naivity, perceptions and expectations. To be accepted by the community was more complex than I had thought.

I got to know Neli through my connection with a non-governmental organisation based in one of the largest Roma neighbourhoods in Bulgaria. Neli was employed as a teacher by the NGO which provided education support for Roma children in the region. Like me, Neli was in her thirties, unmarried and educated. Neli's family kindly offered me the role of a daughter and this meant that I took part in every aspect of family life. I lived in a household of ten – Neli's parents, their two sons, two daughters in law, three grandchildren, Neli and myself. Neli's mother looked after the grandchildren, the men sold clothes in the local market, and the daughters in law went to work in the local sewing factory. I alternated between helping Neli with her education projects, childcare and doing chores in the house. The cooking, the cleaning, the childcare and the shopping were entirely women's domains. The men, on the other hand, went out to the market early in the morning and came back home at dusk. Neli's sisters in law competed with each other as to who would make the tastiest *banitsa*[6] or cake and Neli's mother would comment on their performance. Gradually, my cooking skills had to be tested as well. '*Iliana, you must learn to be a good house maker. That's how you will marry. People look for hard-working daughters in law'*. So, I learned how to make *banitsa*, *baklava*, beans and potato soup, fruit compote and cook with anything that the garden produced.

Fortunately, I was not the only unmarried woman in her thirties. Neli was already accepted, although no one gave up on finding her a match. Being unmarried gave me the immediate position of a daughter and I expand on these gender hierarchies further in the thesis. Since I was significantly older than the unmarried Roma girls in the neighbourhood, I had a somewhat ambiguous position within the community. I mostly associated with the women in the family and I had to abide by the established gender rules; however as an unmarried woman everyone, both men and women, saw me as not 'mature enough', hence not entirely

[6] Banitsa is a traditional Bulgaria pastry dish and can be sweet or savoury.

belonging to the gender categories established in the household. I did not have children who defined the most important traits of becoming a woman, hence I was not entirely viewed as an accomplished person. My position was somewhere between a girl-child and a woman. Of course, this status had its advantages and disadvantages. Themes such as childcare, the family economy, education, health, discrimination were openly discussed with me by all. However, I was cut off from the area of sexuality, marriage and intimate relationships. For instance, one of the topics of the women's meetings in the local church concerned intimacy, the prevention of violence and HIV/AIDS. A colleague of Neli's, a woman working on this topic in the NGO, was invited to give a talk to the women in the community. Neli gently warned me that this topic may not be so relevant for me and swiftly left the meeting. I, on the other hand, thought that my presence would not be noticed. In a few minutes the pastor's wife whispered in my ear '*Iliana, it may be better if you don't listen to this. I am sure one day you will be able to participate'.* My innocence and expected ignorance on the subject had to be protected along with my reputation.

Writing a book was not a sufficient reason for a single Roma woman to leave her parents behind. Initially, Neli's family thought that there was something more behind my 'escape from home' than 'just writing a book'. Neli's mother asked me quietly one day '*Did you have something bad happen to you? Is this why you are not married and now you cannot find a place at home? My Neli went out with a Bulgarian boy and then they separated and look at her now struggling to find a good man'.* Most people in the Roma neighbourhood assumed that I was in Radost to help Neli with her education projects. So, Neli's mother had undertaken the role of making sure that all her neighbours and hence the neighbourhood knew that I was a respectable girl by teaching me how to cook and look after the household, in addition to telling people that I would write a book and help Neli's work. Writing a book was not a profession in the eyes of Neli's family, and for the neighbourhood I had to be what

anthropology calls 'an engaged anthropologist', whereby one conducts engaged research involving collaboration, advocacy and activism (Marcus 2012; Schuller 2010). Of course, there were risks (Caplan 2014) but non-engagement was not an option.

Fieldwork presented many unexpected moments, including challenging my 'insider' identification and presenting me with many opportunities to learn and observe. I found out that what I had planned as a research project had many interdependencies. At the start of my research project I set out to explore specific aspects of how religion impinges on Roma women's identities, and this thesis does reflect on religious affiliation and its impact. However, as I embarked on fieldwork I was confronted with a number of themes which 'wove' another world of interrelations and unexpected outcomes.

**Unexpected Change and Interruptions**

Just as I began to trace the 'unexpected' in the themes I was researching, also unexpectedly, eight months into my life in Radost, I had to interrupt fieldwork as both of my parents were going through major illnesses and needed care. The **first phase** (Radost, October 2010 – May 2011) of my research had finished and I needed a longer period of study interruption which meant that I had lost my studentship bursary and I needed to fund my studies on my own. The next couple of years saw me juggling care, work, study and coming back to Radost twice for a period of two weeks each time. With the incredible understanding and encouragement of my supervisor I directed my attention at doing the best I could with the materials I had and the access to research as and when it was possible.

I came back to the Radost region for the **second phase** of my research twice in January, 2014 and in June, 2014 as part of my work for an international non-government organisation

supporting children in care in Bulgaria. Another world of children's lives and experiences opened before me and this meant Roma childhoods could not be understood in separation from adult relations. Through the NGO I was able to obtain access to childcare institutions. I obtained a Disclosure and Barring Service check to comply with all necessary requirements for ethical and safe research practice and I interviewed public officials, NGO staff, parents and children over a set period of two weeks each time. This second stage of my work focused on conducting interviews and participant observation with Roma children in care, including interviews with Roma parents whose children were under child protection measures. Throughout this stage I interviewed children aged between 5 and 18 and I talked to parents and foster parents, professionals, including teachers, social workers and NGO representatives.

By the **third phase** of my fieldwork (January – July 2017) Neli had married and she was living in another larger city in Bulgaria. Neli's brothers and their wives had immigrated to the UK and their parents were preparing to join them in order to look after their children. In fact, a large number of Roma in Radost had moved abroad, mainly to Italy, Germany and the UK. By this time I was also married and had a baby. Without Neli's family my return to Radost was impossible logistically. I needed different accommodation and childcare. However, what seemed impossible to me at the time was not impossible for Neli, who invited me to visit her in Sastipe.[7] I had relatives in Sastipe with whom I could stay and who could help me look after my baby, and this is how I embarked on the next phase of my fieldwork, which lasted for six months during my maternity leave. Neli had set up an informal centre for mothers within the local evangelical church and she introduced me to my first informants in Sastipe.

[7] Sastipe is a pseudonym and means 'health' in the Romani language. I call it Sastipe as I connect this period of my fieldwork with better health in my family. Throughout this work also, for reasons of confidentiality, I refer to all inhabitants by names different from their own.

**Sastipe**

Sastipe is a larger city in Bulgaria with a Roma population of approximately 4000 people. Sastipe is situated in South-West Bulgaria, a more affluent region in the country. The Roma neighbourhood is structured into different quarters or *mahalas* as the locals call them– the Lower and the Upper sites. The inhabitants of the Lower *mahala* are both Roma and nonRoma, the buildings are tall and separated in family units. Most of the streets are paved and clean. Many of the Roma inhabitants of the Lower *mahala* refer to themselves as Turks and speak Turkish. A large share of them also identify as Christians. In the words of one of my informants, to be a Turkish Roma or a Turk is '*to have a softer heart, you give to others, you are merciful. This is what our old people learned from the Muslims who lived in this land. It stayed with us and although, many of us are Christians now, we prefer to be called Turks. Besides we know where Turkey is. There is no country called Roma'*. Various authors have engaged with the identification of the Turkish Roma communities in Bulgaria and suggest that when it comes to the ethnic identity of Roma a large share of them use different techniques to avoid external labelling, be it 'Gypsy' or 'Roma', and tend to choose more 'prestigious' and 'kaleidoscopic, context depending' ethnic identities (Pamporov 2009). Marushiakova et al (1993) write that Roma have a 'preferred identity' due to the low social status ascribed to the community in Bulgaria (see also Tomova, 2004). However, according to Asenov (2018) who conducted long-term research in Arman Mahala in Plovdiv, a location of largely Turkish identifying Roma, the local Roma were not concerned with how and what exonyms the macro-community ascribed to them. The "self-sufficiency" and alternative ways to create their own spaces did not require flexibility in identities (Asenov 2018:34). In Sastipe and Radost I witnessed a mixture of these two approaches and I give examples further on in the thesis.

The spatial separation of the two parts of the Sastipe Roma neighbourhood can be traced back to the formation of the first Roma neighbourhoods in Bulgaria during the Ottoman rule which is based on the differentiation of ethnic, but mostly religiously homogeneous neighbourhoods (Asenov 2018:89). The central parts of the cities, shopping streets consisted of Muslim population, while other communities were located in the periphery (ibid). Today the separation between Sastipe's Roma neighbourhood Lower and Upper side is largely due to differences in economic access, however historically this special bordering was a result of the religious differences between the inhabitants. Most of the inhabitants of the Upper *mahala* had Bulgarian names and moved to Sastipe from other parts of the country as opposed to the more established long-term residents of the Lower *mahala* who referred to each other with Turkish names and believed to have come to the neighbourhood with the Ottomans hundreds of years ago.

The physical difference between the two sides is visible. The Lower *mahala* is well connected to the rest of the city with closer access to schools, shops and amenities, as opposed to the Upper *mahala,* which is smaller in size and is located on a hill in the so called 'unregulated part' of the city. This means that the buildings do not exist in the municipality register hence electricity and water are not provided and wherever there are amenities they are seen as part of temporary dwellings by the local authorities. The space is associated with danger, dirt, violence, immorality and the people who live in the Upper *mahala* are seen as dangerous, dirty, violent and immoral. A significant share of the inhabitants of the Lower *mahala* work in Germany and the Netherlands where they establish connections with Turkish communities due to speaking the Turkish language. The work abroad guarantees them a stable and higher income. The Upper and the Lower sites intermix rarely in everyday life, however marriages between the inhabitants of the two sites happen and local churches consist of inhabitants from both sites. When I joined Neli in Sastipe she had established a mother's

centre which was part of the local evangelical church and consisted of attendants from both mahalas. They were mostly young mothers who were my first informants in Sastipe. Gradually, I was invited to their homes and took part in everyday household tasks as well as in events such as weddings, christenings and church services.

**Method: Doing Multi-sited Research**

The two locations of my research are different in size, composition, economic access, etc., although there are natural "partial connections" (Strathern 2004) and remarkable similarities of narratives and identity signifiers. I would like to explain that my methodological move here is not to juxtapose the two localities. What I aim is to show the contradictions posed before the individuals I followed, and to recognise the incommensurability of everyday life in both locations. Although in my pre-fieldwork training I did not plan to conduct a multi-sited ethnography, the changes in my personal circumstances, as well as the situation of my host family, resulted in the unintentional multi-sitedness of my research. Since its beginnings multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) has gained traction in anthropology due to its adaptability. Multi-sited ethnography, challenges the 'Malinowskian complex' of a single site ethnography (Marcus 1995), and proposes a methodological shift in ethnographic practice under the influence of the 'writing culture' critique (Clifford and Marcus 1986) in a postmodern world affected by globalisation (Appadurai 1995). Multi-sitedness proposes 'freedom' from conceptual boundaries of the delimited site, and allows following movements of people, ideas and objects, to trace and map complex networks (Candea 2007:168). However, multi-sited ethnography has its limitations. Researchers have pointed out that there is a minimal development of deeper relationships (Berg 2008) and have questioned the relevance of the selection of sites in multi-sited ethnography (Hannerz 2003). Candea (2007:169) suggests that despite its strengths of enabling anthropologists "to expand their

horizons in an unprecedented way", multi-sitedness is weak in its lack of attention to processes of bounding. I recognise the weaknesses of the approach. However the inevitability of my circumstance pointed me into a different direction – the fieldwork sites chose me. By following my main contact (Neli) in the first research location and by tapping into my previous knowledge, language skills, 'epistemological insiderness' (Brubaker 2017) or simply as an anthropologist 'at home' I forged long-lasting relationships in the field. I had to be open and adapt to the developments occurring as I realised that the methodological plan I had prepared in my pre-fieldwork year would not enable me to achieve the kind of embodiment, participation and knowledge I had envisaged to achieve. Building on relationships of trust and respectability was more important than the methods I had devised before fieldwork. I found solace in that "the most rewarding fieldwork is when the anthropologist is open to what comes and what the people often consider significant. Thus the anthropologist may find herself changing emphasis and topic." (Okely 2008:55). And as Biehl and Locke (2017) contend there is a permanent tension between empirical realities and theories and that we find "theory to be always catching up to reality, always startled, making space for the incompleteness of understanding that is often a necessary condition for anthropological fieldwork and thinking" (ibid:7).

**Life Histories**

As I created relationships I chose life histories as narratives to be able to capture experiences (Denzin 2003). My research methodology was influenced by feminist epistemologies as I constantly questioned the practice and ways of 'writing culture' (Clifford 1986) in terms of what methods of inquiry to choose. Narratives, stories, songs and poems can bring meaning to personal and collective experiences (Cruikshank 1998). They can also be transmitters of knowledge and perceived morality. Through the life histories I hoped to bring out my

informants' understandings about their lived experiences, and the ideals, morals and practices attached to them. Gradually, I became more aware of the wider aspects of state interventions, kinship relationships and religious affiliation and followed those links provided in the histories of the people I met.

Relationships change and are created through the medium of ethnography, so anthropologists must constantly question the methods of inquiry they choose. Life histories or narratives are constructed, they create meanings from experience. However, could they be seen as truthful/ objective information for my specific project? To answer this, I go back to positionality and autobiography (Okely et al 1992). This is in opposition to the positivist theories which emphasise neutrality and 'detachment' from the object of research. The relationship between researcher-researched is an important point to explore when answering this question. Narratives are the product of a mutual story constructions, meaning that stories are created in an interactive or dialogical process. Cruikshank's studies, for example, show how the Yukon narratives, stories, songs and poems can bring meaning to personal and collective experiences (Cruikshank 1998). They can also be transmitters of knowledge and morality. Life histories derive from a specific context and are a blend of personal and collective experience (Denzin 2003; Crapanzano 1980). The author/ researcher must acknowledge their presence in the whole process of inquiry and that the end product, the written life history, is a construct of specific mutually created representations. There are entanglements between the anthropologist, the changing world and the deep relationships formed in the field. Anthropology often looks at 'the other', but by representing the emotional dialectics between the informant and the researcher over time, I intend to show the effect of fieldwork on the anthropologist. This is why and how the thesis methodology, theoretical considerations and positionality converge. I find that I come back to the concept of reflexivity, examining myself and my perceptions to represent reality constantly.

**Ethics**

A few brief points about my ethical considerations are needed here. There are different levels of ethics with which I needed to engage in relation to the production of this thesis. Throughout my fieldwork I had a constant encounter with children, be it in their schools, homes, in the mother's centre or in the streets. Conducting ethnographic research with children[8] raises a number of methodological and ethical challenges that have been part of the anthropology of childhood since it was established as an independent subfield (Hardman 1973). Through the second stage of my fieldwork, in particular, I focused on research with Roma children in care. The first and foremost ethical consideration was to make sure that I take all measures for protection and safety of the children who were part of the research, both in institutional settings and in the Roma neighbourhoods.[9] I needed to consider the inherent asymmetry in power of the adult researcher-child participant relationship, and that access to children is always mediated by other adult gatekeepers. The face-to-face interviews with children in the care homes were overseen by a third party (teachers, educators, social workers and NGO representatives) and all conversations with children in the neighbourhood had an adult (a parent or a guardian) present.

The purpose of the study and the mapping of information were negotiated with the NGO which I worked for and which helped to obtain access to the childcare institutions. The NGO

[8] Undoubtedly, ethnography has been a methodology which has given voice to "children's muted voices" (Lee 2001: 49) and made them active participants in the production of research data (James and Prout 1997). There are aspects of these issues that are common to ethnographic research and participant observation in general, regardless of the group being studied (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1988, Okely 1983).

[9] In recent years there has been a marked shift, particularly within social anthropology and social geography, to develop ethnographies of childhood and I saw this as an opportunity to combine observations with interviews and other forms of data such as children's drawings gathered directly from children themselves. Such qualitative research methods have been explored with children before. Inclusion of children as key participants and social actors is the continuation of a trend that begun in the 1980s, as research in anthropology and sociology started to pay increasing attention to children's subjectivity and agency. Once recognised as social actors, children have also become research participants (James and Prout 1997).

managers contacted the country representatives in order to enable me to have access to research information. Approach to public officials and professionals was also negotiated through contacts and projects with the local authorities. The aim of the research project, and the risks involved, were explained as far as possible before every interaction, so that informants could make an informed choice regarding their participation.

It was essential that children have the full information about the research in order to give their 'informed consent' to take part. It was also important that the research is 'freely volunteered'. The Convention of the Rights of the Child provided me with guidance for child participation in research (art.12 - respect for the views of the children, art. 13- rights to freedom of expression, etc.). Also, for the purposes of this study I consulted with the Association for Social Anthropology Guidelines for Ethics in Research. Information for the research participants under the age of 18 was presented to the child and their guardian/representative. I obtained informed consent for each specific interview with adults such as public officials, NGO staff, parents and other by asking them to sign a consent form. There were times when I came across illiteracy and the written consent forms were not appropriate. For these reasons, informed consent was negotiated verbally. The names of any child under 18 in my research are encoded and anonymous. All of the adults who did not wish for their names to be included have been changed. I protected the confidentiality of my participants by using pseudonyms, and I gained consent from them before conducting the research.

**Ethnography and Engaged Anthropology**

The research used both qualitative and quantitative data collection: participant observation, life stories, focus groups in the case of the NGO groups, the parents and the professionals; review of the anthropological literature on Roma communities; visits and review of the local

historical archives, a review of available studies, statistics, policy documents related to children in care in Bulgaria; semi-structured interviews and surveys (this method enabled me to obtain information from child care professionals, parents and other stakeholders). Data gathering involved common techniques in anthropology such as audio-video recordings, participant observation, interviews and collecting documents. The largest periods of time spent in fieldwork, however, remained spent in participant observation and collecting life histories. Participant observation enabled me to live with and be a part of the daily lives of people and I questioned my fundamental assumptions in accordance with learned theories or previous experiences. Participant observation and doing ethnography is a two-way process, it is dialogical, it captures silences and noises, it sees the central and the marginal, it listens and it talks back (Wolcott 2001).

In practice, ethnography involves empathy, action and engagement and this has been seen at times as problematic since historically anthropology has been less comfortable with the integration of politics and ethnographic research (Kirsch 2010). I referred earlier in this chapter to the so called 'engaged anthropology' which was almost inevitable in my research as I was seen as an educated insider and I was expected to give back to the community (Chapter 4). Jumping from the pages of the thesis one can infer my engagement in the collection of a Roma history archive for the local museum (Chapter 2), the help with homework and interactions with teachers (Chapter 3 and 4) and the work for the NGO to reintegrate Roma children back with their families (Chapter 5). I cannot claim that I am alone in the realm of 'engaged anthropology'. The anthropological literature points out to the most prominent ethnographers being 'engaged' in collaborations with their informants (Eriksen 2005; De León 2015; Ortner 2019). Kyriakides (2017) contends that anthropology, be it in the form of ethnography, fieldwork, and writing, has always been engaged. Engagement is "a prerequisite of conducting research, and predicated on the encounters, events, and relations in

which the ethnographer becomes involved during fieldwork" (Kyriakides et al 2017:3). Engaged anthropology can also have undesirable effects and I shall illustrate aspects of this in Chapter 4 which provides insights into NGO activism, the 'Roma elite' and the rupture between them and the people on the ground.

One particular childhood memory springs to mind as I reflect on my personal stance on 'engaged anthropology'. It was a hot day in August. Everyone in the Roma neighbourhood was inside their homes having an afternoon nap or watching Latin American telenovelas. Now and then one would hear the laugh of naked children sprinkling each other with cold water in the scorching sun. I was at home with my two sisters watching a Bollywood movie when suddenly we heard our neighbour shouting for help. Tsanko was in distress because his pregnant wife Milena was not well. I knew Milena well because I went to school with her, she was my neighbour and we grew up almost inseparably. Aged 16 Milena left school to marry Tsanko. That afternoon Tsanko knocked on our window and asked whether he could use my parents' phone to call an ambulance. At the time my parents' house was one of five houses in the neighbourhood with a stationary telephone line. I opened the door and Tsanko called the emergency number. The disappointment in his voice grew gradually until he began screaming. '*I need an ambulance now! She cannot breath, something is wrong. Can you hear me? I don't have a car! I can't bring her to you.*' The ambulance never arrived. Milena was taken to hospital in the car of another neighbour. She gave birth to a baby girl and later she passed away. By the time I was a teenager I was painfully aware of the daily struggles of my community and I was determined to be engaged in everything that was going to bring a potential for change. While in the field I was expected to be an engaged anthropologist and indeed, I never imagined being otherwise. So, in the chapters that follow I strive to present "an ethnographic sensorium: a multifaceted and affective point of contact with worlds of

inequality, hovering on the verge of exhaustion while also harbouring the potential for things to be otherwise" (Biehl and Locke 2017:4).

# Chapter 2. Narrating Beginnings and Memories

## Introduction

My family rarely talked about where they came from. My own interest in the subject began, admittedly, after I learned about the family history of a friend who diligently produced an elaborated ancestral family tree going back centuries ago. My grandmother's memories about where her ancestors came from and what they did were limited but she recalled narratives, some firsthand and other passed down by previous generations, unveiling details about my family history previously not known to me. Some of my ancestors were war soldiers; they fled persecution; were servants and dreamed of owning land to be able to settle. As in most family histories there were stories of marriage, separation, single motherhood, death, shame, joy and secrets.

In preparation for this research, I wanted to find out about my own beginnings, and as I looked for clues of the historical context I visited my hometown's library, the regional history museums and the national archives. The earliest evidence of my family's existence I found in an archive which recorded persons employed in the 'Labour- Cooperative Farm' (*trudovo-kooperativno zemedelsko stopanstvo*—TKZS)[10] in 1945 after the end of the Second World War. There I traced my great grandfather, whose profession was recorded as *'tsiganin*' (Gypsy). This was the only record of him and I was disappointed, in Foucauldian (1991) terms, to come across a mechanism of archival state regulation through such an ordinary and ubiquitous means, proving its power and authority, in order to reinforce popular representations that place Roma outside the boundaries of society (see e.g. Vermeersh 2005).

[10] The Labor-Cooperative Farm (trudovo-kooperativno zemedelsko stopanstvo—TKZS) was established in the beginning of the communist rule in Bulgaria and closely resembled Soviet cooperatives in organization. It consisted of a state-controlled farming production based on land taken from private landowners in the pre-Second World War (Kaneff 2002).

It is unknown to me why my great grandfather's ethnicity had to be categorised but I had to choose, in Hall's terms, to accept the archive not as a categorization and labelling by the state, but as an "incomplete living institution" (Hall 2001). So, in this chapter I write as an act of giving voice to something that has deeply influenced my own commitment to the study of Roma memory and helped me to piece together my past through the stories of my informants. In line with the thesis methodology I set out to produce reflexive ethnographic knowledge, a narrative inquiry as a collaborative construction which contains the researcher's perspective and co-construction of the narratives (Riessman 2008). The aim is to present life stories as the starting point and the exploration of a life as lived in order to connect these stories of personal experience with their wider histories. Indeed history, at least in part, can be understood and conceived of through the small everyday acts of individuals, and the histories that have brought them to their present place (ibid). This process is about storytelling and creating history as "an endless new chain of happenings whose eventual outcome the actor is utterly incapable of knowing or controlling beforehand"(Arendt 1977: 59-60).

This chapter is about the beginning, or at least what my informants saw as the beginning, of what it was and is to be Roma. In support of the core idea of the thesis this chapter presents examples of the problematics of analysing Roma-ness through an anthropological lens and how the expression of historical Roma-ness can be a diverse expression of identities and representations (Buckler 2007; Lemon 2000; Gay y Blasco 2011). The 'unexpected' elements here are found in the memories narrated by my informants where one can find the individual reconstruction of life events not occurring independently of public memory, yet not captured by mainstream history. I shall show that while exclusion of Roma has been a constant trait throughout the past, Roma have also played roles in constructing Bulgarian identity and

legitimating claims of Bulgarian 'culture'.[11] I consider Bulgaria's specific context in order to acknowledge that a contextual and historical approach is necessary when accounting for how state politics impinges on Roma identification, particularly during socialism. I review some of the academic discussions on Roma memory and representations and then I go on to engage with the particularities of the everyday negotiations of individuals who were and are often considered as 'outsiders' within Bulgarian society. This chapter is an attempt to add the principle of difference and heterogeneity in the dominant historical imaginings of Bulgarian history in order to include alternatives to power-related memory politics (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). By presenting different past and historical narratives, I argue for alternative narrations of positioning and belonging.

**Remembering and Forgetting**

As I embarked on fieldwork I began a project aiming to collect as many old photographs and stories existing at that time in the Radost Roma neighbourhood. I then asked people to share the stories depicted on the photos with me. The ultimate aim was that one day the pictures and the stories will be presented in the Radost 'house of culture' (*chitalishte*)[12] and in the Radost history museum. The initiative was meant to inform the history of the Roma

[11] The critique of the concept of 'culture' in anthropology entails a shift from coherent and homogeneous cultures towards analysis of fragmentation, contradictions and multiplicity (Hannerz 1992; Appadurai 1996).

[12] Chitalishte translated in Bulgarian literally means 'a place to read'. The chitalishte was established mainly as a voluntary educational institution to promote democracy and national identity (see Valkov 2009:428). Authors argue that the creation of the chitalishte was an idea influenced by Western Europe, dating back to the Ottoman rule of Bulgaria, and its main purpose was to "transfer education to the masses" (ibid). While in other countries (Britain, France, Germany, Serbia, Albania, Turkey) the similar concepts to chitalishte were not preserved, in Bulgaria the idea became a mechanism for national identification and belonging (ibid:429). Later, Stalin's Russia developed a network of the so called "houses of culture" (dom kulturyi), which focused on "culture" as folklore (Donahoe and Habek 2011). This influenced other socialist countries such as Bulgaria where the "houses of culture" functioned under the Soviet framework. Authors hypothesise that the Soviet "house of culture" system was tailored after the already existing Bulgarian network of chitalishte (Savova 2007: 194-201). The Soviet "house of culture" also hosted predominantly professional performances, whereas the chitalishte remained a place for amateur creativity (ibid). Today, Bulgaria still keeps a nation-wide state-funded network of community cultural centres (mostly still called chitalishte) in almost every populated area of the country (ibid). There are two 'chitalishte' in Radost – one serving the entire town and a separate one serving the Radost Roma neighbourhood.

neighbourhood and to present a collection of images capturing different realities from those presented in the more popular history accounts, which may see the creation of oral sources as biased or problematic. The creative process was the central focus of the photo/oral history elicitation and as a result a number of themes arose and led to the writing of this chapter.

Prior to my fieldwork I came across a number of studies which have documented that history and memory for Roma are shaped by particular choices they make in talking or not talking about the past. Anthropologists have observed that the past, consisting of forced evictions, assimilations, inequality and discrimination, has forced Roma to constantly re-negotiate identity in the present , and shaped their "indifference to recollection" (Lemon 2000, Stewart 2004). Roma have had a permanent representation as populations who are 'problematic citizens', 'untouchables', 'stranger minorities', 'internal outsiders' (Bancroft 2001), who have chosen to live the way they live, facing poverty and exclusion or ultimately living a 'bohemian' lifestyle, an image imposed in arts and literature by "picturing Gypsiness" as the marginal, foreign and deviant (Gay y Blasco 2008: 301-302). These images are recycled constantly but have their roots in history and "evidence the productive power of representation" (ibid). The "hunger to recycle" and repeat these representations is one reason not to portray Roma as they are – as populations who have adjusted to social and political changes (ibid). Moreover, often the voices and historical representations of Roma have not been fully considered in anthropological circles. In discussing the Gitanos' understandings of their own history, Gay y Blasco (2001:631) suggests that ethnographers have missed opportunities to analyse Roma attitudes towards their origin or past, and their alleged "forgetting" or "downplaying" has not attracted particular attention (ibid). Such a tendency of "communal forgetting", as Gay y Blasco (2001) calls it, involves particular practices (e.g. information about past events and people is not passed on to the younger generations). Stewart (2004) approaches the issue from a psychological perspective and contends that

despite "the Rom's presentist rhetoric", the past is remembered (ibid:564). He illustrates how personal experiences of Roma in the Second World War have been remembered in time and turned into shared memories, despite the "absence of commemorative ceremonies" and an "obvious lack of interest" in recreating their own history (Stewart 2004:563). This process he calls "living with the past" by "remembering without commemoration" (ibid). According to Stewart, Roma remember by embedding memories in the oppressive relations with nonRoma. On the other hand, Kaplarski (2007, 2013) in his articles critiques Stewart's and other approaches to analysing Roma memory by contending that fixing on essentialism and 'one' ascribed Roma historical identity, not accounting for the difference in experience and life histories results in their 'exoticism'. By focusing on the persecution of Polish Roma under Nazi rule and the silence surrounding the murder of approximately half a million people (ibid) Kapralski challenges the conception of Roma as a people "who neither store and share memories of the past nor conceptualize themselves in terms of a desired future" (2013:230). His main argument is that Roma have been a "muted group" (Ardener 1975) unable to express itself through factors such as low levels of education, political representation and other.

Considering the above approaches to Roma memory, here I provide glimpses of different ways of remembering. I show that my informants may choose not to commemorate painful historical events, but this does not mean that these "affective spaces" (Navaro-Yashin 2012:12) are not remembered and passed down - through rituals, songs, body movement, and through silence itself (ibid). Silence is often a very powerful vehicle for transmission of unbearable memories – including silencing the experience of the Holocaust (see also Stewart 2004). Often there is no need to commemorate or even articulate something which is always present and is happening 'now'. The present encounters with violence, racism, removal and non-acceptance do not need a special place of memorization. What is in the present cannot be

forgotten. Remembering and forgetting are selective acts of history-making, and some histories can be "unthinkable" (Trouillot 1995:29).

There is a variety of cultural, regional, religious and geographical differences and affiliations that divide Roma groups in Europe. As argued in the introduction chapter of the thesis Roma cannot be seen as a homogenous community[13] or only as "communities of shared social practices" (Guy 2001; see also Okely 1983). Nevertheless, just as other groups, Roma too generate a collective identity or consciousness that is shaped by the individual identities of its constituents. The Bulgarian ethnographers Marushiakova and Popov write that Roma in Eastern Europe exist at least in 'two dimensions', both as a separate ethnic community, and as an ethnically-based integral part of society within the respective nation-state as citizens (2011:54). They further propose that the failure to consider the interlinked dimensional 'community/society' distinction can result in viewing Roma communities within the frames of being either marginalised or exoticized (Marushiakova and Popov 2017).

In the examples I present here I would like to continue the above discussion and revoke critical thinking in binaries, categories and 'the absolute' by bringing to the forefront life histories which may render a more nuanced approach in considering Roma identification. Even though oppression is an essential feature of Roma history, it is only a partial representation of Roma and their relations with nonRoma. In addition, the influence of political regimes, persecution, change, transition, life events such as weddings, births, deaths

[13]Roma in Bulgaria vary widely in terms of lifestyle, economic activities, social characteristics and everyday practices. The largest Roma group in Bulgaria is thought to be the group of the *yerlii* or the 'local Roma' (Marushiakova et al 1993). They are sub-divided into Bulgarian Roma (*dasikane Roma- or Christian Roma)* and Turkish Roma (*horahane Roma* or Muslim Roma). Another prominent Roma group is the Kalderash Roma. They are grouped into more groups by their traditional craft such as *Ursari* or *Mechkari* ('bear trainers'), *Lingurari* or *Kopanari* (carpenters). In addition there are other local Roma sub-groups who identify themselves under different names according to the region they live in. For a number of reasons, be they socio-economic or simply due to globalisation and urbanization processes in Bulgaria, some Roma subgroups are less prominent. However, the religious difference between the subgroups remain. During the Ottoman rule Roma were identified as either Muslims (faithful) or non-Muslims (*raya*- gentiles) (ibid).

and other are narrated by my informants not only vis-à-vis nonRoma but also vis-à-vis other members of the community (see further in 'Resisting the past' section). Authors propose that this is due to the high demographic mobility between places whereby it is no longer necessary to remember ancestors left behind, but it becomes crucial instead to create new kinship (Connerton 2008:63). In Halbwachs's words "no memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections" (Halbwachs 1992:43). As I searched to find out histories and ways of remembering I was reminded that it is our experiences that make us who we are and determine how we create or choose not to create our life histories (Jackson 2013). Some of my informants chose to speak out and share their stories and others did not see value in looking back. I do not pretend that presenting 'inbetweenness' and ambiguity is a solution or the 'right way' to deal with the discussions on Roma histories and memory. Instead, I advocate for further discussions, and most of all, for giving a choice and agency to the narrators - to forget or commemorate, to hide or display, to resist or give in, to follow traditions or not, and all in between, when it comes to the recollection of memories and the past.

Moreover, the past is also about power and how power is maintained (Foucault 1984; 1991), kept secret (Carsten 2007) and controlled by the state and its mechanisms such as museums (Basu et al 2015), archives (Derrida 1996), by historians, scholars and by Roma themselves (Gay y Blasco 2001). Pierre Nora's concept for *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) conveys that memory is no longer a real part of everyday life and these 'sites' are "embodiments of a commemorative consciousness that survives as a history" (1996:6). Museums, archives, sites and other articulate the past and for Nora this is how history with its record of the past has substituted the role of memory. He argues that memory, in opposition to history, evolves constantly and intersects with remembering and forgetting (ibid:11). Museums and monuments give physicality to memories and in a way they represent a more solid side of

remembering, however unwritten memories make us "*feel* and *think* the past" hence we choose difference ways to remember (Watson 1994:8). Although there are few records pointing to the history of the localities and the people whom I researched, the collected stories here show an interconnection with the local and national collective history. As opposed to apparent representations of Roma and nonRoma in mainstream historical accounts, especially the ones in museums and archives, as not sharing history with one another, in the process of elicitation it crystallised that they indeed shared and occupied common spaces and representations. Just as others did, the local Roma aspired to give their children the best start in life through education and employment; they took part in celebrating local traditions and participated in everyday life. My informants also chose an array of ways to remember, adhere, forget, resist, talk about and suppress the past.

**History and the state**

Here I look at some key historical developments by giving examples of events which played a major role in inter-ethnic relations, socio-economic life, religious beliefs and state politics in the formation of identities in Bulgaria. The earliest historical evidence indicating the presence of Roma in the Balkans dates back to the 9th century and the first wave of large Roma settlements in Bulgaria can be traced back to 12th - 14th century (Marushiakova and Popov 2001). Large numbers of Roma also arrived in the Balkans with the Ottoman Empire in the 14th century, some of whom were sedentarised and other preserved their itinerant way of life and occupations well into the 19th century (ibid). Travelling was not necessarily always an economic choice for Roma. In a conversation about the 'old times' Assuna (aged 73) asked her friend Rucha (aged 69):

*Didn't our old people come from Drama? You know the lighter skinned Roma women used to be called 'dramski tsiganki'* (the Gypsy women from Drama). '*Around the time of the wars* (referring to the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913) *my father and mother had to move from place to place, so they left Greece. They spoke in Greek and Romanes. Their cousins went to Turkey. My parents moved to Bulgaria and so when I was young, people used to call me dramska tsiganka'*.

What Assuna was referring to was an event which happened after the Balkan wars whereby the newly established Balkan states did not recognise the presence of national minorities within their state borders as this was conceived to cause harm to the nation-building process (Kitromilides 1989; Marushiakova et al 2001). In the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, Turkey and Greece agreed on a major population exchange of two million people based on their religion. As part of the agreement, over one million Greek Christians and 500,000 Muslim Turks in the Anatolian and Greek lands were uprooted overnight (Kitromilides 1989). Muslim and Christian Roma in Drama (Greece), where Assuna's family resided, were part of this exchange. Some of them settled in Turkey, some were scattered throughout Greece and others settled in Southern Bulgaria.

Still, travelling and geographical flexibility played an important role in Roma socio-economic life. Some traditional crafts, such as carpentry, basket weaving and ironmongery/blacksmithing, required flexibility in location for economic survival. This was confirmed in the conversation with my two informants Assuna and Rucha:

*'In the old days they moved from place to place. My grandfather used to tell us that he travelled with the King's army during the wars* (the Balkan wars). *He was proud that he fitted the shoes of King Boris'* (referring to the Bulgarian King Boris III)

*horse. My grandfather was a great blacksmith. He taught my brothers. When the communists began to rule my family wasn't allowed to do these jobs, so we all began working in the cooperative. My father still had his workshop, though. Nobody could stop him.'*

Prior to communism and under Ottoman rule, Roma were also involved in low-skilled work in the tobacco industry, tin factories, brick-laying (Genov et al. in Ivancheva, 2015) and as in Rucha's case, they were servants in larger Bulgarian households.

Image 4. The oldest photo –Rucha and her relatives.

The photo above is the oldest photo in the Radost Roma neighbourhood. It was taken in 1942 and depicted two Roma sisters and their children. One of the children is Rucha aged three when the photo was taken. Rucha's father and mother were servants in a wealthy Bulgarian household and they took their children to work with them. She described how her mother and aunt dressed similarly to nonRoma women because they wanted to look '*clean and orderly, like the Bulgarians'*, which was going to guarantee their acceptance and continuation of work

in nonRoma households. Roma had to constantly negotiate and adapt to the dominant economic patterns in order to be self-sufficient also. For instance, despite the communist hegemony on compulsory sedentarisation and geographical restrictions Roma in Hungary, former Czechoslovakia and Russia found ways of moving by seeking locations where work matching their skills was available (Stewart 2004; Okely 2010, Guy 2001, Lemon 2000).

Communism brought enormous changes to everyday life. The Bulgarian Fatherland Front[14] (*Otechestven Front*), "the spreadheading force of socialist construction" (Brunnbauer 2008), focused on efforts to create a socialist everyday culture (*sotsialisticheski bit*) and promote the "socialist way of life". This way of life promoted "proper life", a new sense of community and opposed the "bourgeois" attitudes towards individualism (ibid). Socialism had become 'doxa' (Bourdieu 1997), an inseparable part of everyday life, seen as 'natural' and part of embodied knowledge without any alternatives. The Fatherland Front defined what was not socialist by responding with rules and regulations. Roma transient way of life was 'un-socialist' and needed to change by them joining the proletariat, being emancipated and contributing towards the anti-capitalist rebellion (Ivancheva 2015). Below is an excerpt from a decision taken by the communist party in 1978 to 'involve Roma in labour' for the benefit of society:

> 'The emphasis should be laid on their [Roma] involvement in labour which benefits society, on advancement in their education, on improvement in their living standards, on an increase in their consciousness and self-confidence as full-fledged citizens of socialist Bulgaria, on their growing participation in the building of a developed

[14] The Fatherland Front aimed at creating the "New Man" and the "socialist way of life" (sotsialisticheski nachin na zhivot). "The Front projected an image of itself as a participatory mass movement—a socialist civil society of sorts. It also thought to provide room for social involvement for non-communist party members, where people would come together on the various fronts of socialist construction and would internalize the norms and values of socialist community." (Brunnbauer 2008:45)

socialist society - Decision #1360 of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of Bulgarian Communist Party of October 9, 1978 (in Marushiakova and Popov 2000)

Roma had to become 'full-fledged' members or 'citizens' of the socialist society by shifting from 'unproductive people' viewed as the "underclass"[15] to a social proletariat. Underclass" as a label applies not only to those who stand outside of mainstream society and its central institutions but also to those who reject its underlying norms and values (Morris 1994). The 'morally different Roma' were posing a challenge to the cohesion of the nation-state and its definition of citizenship. As a result, Roma became objects of exclusion and assimilation efforts in the name of inclusion, which aimed to erase cultural differences and turn them into industrial workers (Stewart 1997).[16] The communist party aimed at providing waged labour to those who were looked upon as *lumpenproletariat* according to the prevailing Marxist ideology of the time (Ladanyi et al 2001, 2003). Their "vagrant way of life" involving crimes, begging and scavenging had to change (Stewart 1997:99). The incorporation into the labour market was meant not only to eradicate Roma 'nomadism' but also "all aspects of Roma culture, without exception, […] regarded negatively as relics from the past and as obstacles to their successful integration into wider society" (Guy 2001:11).

The 'utopian' but also highly modernist ideology of communism, an intricate and not a straightforward ideology with a definite underlayer of folklore, had to be applied to all spheres and social categories which affected Roma as well as other minorities. Initially,

[15] For Ladanyi et al (2001, 2006) Roma in communist times moved from and to 'cyclical phases': from lower class to under-caste and underclass. Stewart (1999) proposes the concept of social exclusion as a term without negative connotation as opposed to the controversial classification of the Roma as 'underclass' (after Myrdal 1964), developed further by the concept of 'the culture of poverty' by Oscar Lewis (1966). Lewis sees the 'culture of poverty' as historical phenomenon emerging out of societal change toward modernity and different social order. The concept of 'underclass' is similar to Marx's concept of lumpenproletariat (Stewart 2001), referring to individuals on the margins of society. Morris (1994) in her book *Dangerous Classes* points out that disentangling what 'underclass' means is complicated due to the looseness of the definition. The term 'underclass' overemphasises a popular wave of thinking whereby Roma are blamed for their situation.

[16] I use exclusion here as a concept explained in Stewart (2002) and Ladanyi et al (2006).

Roma were valued on the folkloristic level but utterly excluded from the apparent modernist ideologies, unless they assimilated with Bulgarian society (Marushiakova et al 2000). For example, for a relatively short period of time (from 1945 to 1950), the leading political line was to promote Roma as an equal ethnic community within the Bulgarian nation and to encourage their active involvement in the construction of a new socialist society (ibid). During this period the socialist regime aimed to support 'the culture', mother tongue and education of all ethnic communities, a policy similar to the *'korenizatsiia'* (indigenisation)[17] implemented earlier in the USSR (Marushiakova and Popov 2015; Weitz 2002). Folkloric elements, such as ethnic music, dancing, dress, which were previously seen as 'backward', were now celebrated as the expressions of culture and seen as the exotic element of the Soviet regime (Weitz 2002.) The pictures below illustrate how Roma in Radost were allowed to wear their traditional attire called *shalvari* (wide Turkish style trousers with a short top) and to sing in Romanes. The photos below depict two events in the mid 1940s: one of Roma women and men dancing in the centre of town on the national 'Day of Culture'; and the other of a group of Roma musicians and dancers practicing before their concert in another Bulgarian city. Zuhra, featured in the second photo, told me that the Party used to be supportive of Roma traditions and the local council encouraged them to dress, dance and sing in order to show the '*tsiganski* traditions'.

> '*People liked us and enjoyed listening and dancing to our music. I even remember the Leader of the Communist Party in Radost dancing with us. In time, though, we couldn't wear our shalvari anymore. We had to wear Bulgarian costumes, which we had to borrow from the 'house of culture''.*

[17] 'Indigenization' in Russia promoted national languages and culture through all sorts of national institutions, including through schooling (Liber 1991). The process of indigenization involved voluntary resettlements, emphasis of folklore, language and customs by "promoting nationality as a category offering access to power and privilege" (ibid).

Image 5. Dancing in shalvari- traditional Roma costumes (1949).

Image 6. The Radost Roma Folklore Band.

These somewhat flexible policies on 'cultural' representation did not last long. The Party changed its tactic in the following decades. In its line of reasoning the state had to take care of those groups who, as a result of "capitalist exploitation" in the past, were found to live in social and cultural "backwardness" (Marushiakova and Popov 1993). The Party had the ambitious goal to modernise and change the life of these 'backward' groups by improving their levels of education and qualifications. Schooling was seen as the main socialisation agent (Voiculescu 2019), tasked to erase any differences among children from different ethnic and religious communities in order to transform them into 'builders' of the new socialist system (Hann 2002; Pelkmans 2009). Special classes for adult education were created for Roma adults, and education for all children became compulsory. Parents were punished for their children's truancy with fines or compulsory labour and the share of Roma employed in the agricultural cooperatives, state-owned farms, and industrial enterprises increased (ibid). Nelis (aged 51) told me about the time she spent in the 'School of the Fatherland Front' in Assenovgrad, the first such school established in the country initially for women with nonBulgarian enthnicity only. This was a project directed at attracting young Roma who were seen to be more active and 'well to do' in their respective communities. Nelis needed a recommendation from the Radost Leader (*Predsedatel*) of the Municipality Council in order to be accepted in the School.

> '*Our days were busy in learning how to cook, sew, read communist literature and, generally, how to behave. The teachers taught us good manners. The classes in communist ideology taught us about the role of the communist party and how it cared for the Bulgarian minorities. Everything we heard about the western countries had to be ignored. USSR was everything. We received certificates and went back home where we were expected to become active volunteers in the community. I organised sewing and cooking workshops for the women in the neighbourhood. I had to write a*

*detailed report for the Radost's Fatherland Front Office and work with the chitalishte to encourage people, especially women, to speak in Bulgarian and send their children to school. The teachers would call the police if children from the neighbourhood didn't go to school. They contacted me first and I had to report anyone who doesn't go to school. Of course, I didn't report everything...*'

Targeting Roma women in communist education projects was of a particular interest to the Party. Women as the main caregivers were going to influence their children in accordance with the communist ideology. Nelis made sure that she followed the general rules, however she also presented an "evocative transcript" which anthropologists have explained as a way to present a different narrative in order to resist the repressive socialist regime (Humphrey 1994). The space for opposition and resistance was virtually non-existent during socialism, whereas political loyalty and adherence to the rules were rewarded with career prospects (Watson 1994).

Although, Roma were employed ".... the attitude […] towards the Gypsies was not one of initial confrontation but rather an attitude adopted towards a community of a lower status whose members did not deserve special attention provided 'they knew their place' and did not create problems" (Marushiakova et al 2000:6). Roma labour, namely the bodily maintenance and assimilation into the proletariat, was widely accepted, however Roma personage was a threat to the production of socialist society and had to be utterly rejected (ibid). Gradually in the 1960s Bulgaria adopted strategies of strict ethnic identity repression, involving the sedentarisation of Roma groups, closing down Roma newspapers, local community centres and banning the use of the Romani language (Marushiakova et al 2000). The socialist governments of Eastern Europe aimed at extensive development and industrialisation (Pine 1998). These processes were implemented concurrently with Roma

resettlements and compulsory sedentarization. The centrality of the state, the production of its power and its effect on the representation of communities was focused on territory and creation of spaces to embody the production of 'equal' citizens (Pine 2002; Hann 1996) but often in reality in the case of Roma the state created segregation. The Party had some "quick-fix solutions" (Ivancheva 2015:49) in order to provide temporary settlements in response to the housing shortage in cities and towns. Compact Roma settlements were 'hidden' behind tall concrete walls and became completely isolated pockets of peripherality (Stewart 1997; 2012). In Bulgaria entire Roma settlements were demolished and replaced by urban buildings. Semi-legal housing and neighbourhoods consisting solely of Roma inhabitants burgeoned (Asenov 2018). Such was the case of the Radost Roma neighbourhood. The local Roma did not choose to live in this neighbourhood themselves; the state authorities appropriated the space to them. The story of the 73 year old Assuna, who was one of the oldest person in the Roma quarter in Radost, presents some important aspects the resettlement process. Assuna's father and grandfather who used to work for a wealthy Bulgarian man owned lands and livestock before socialism. In time her father earned enough to buy livestock and land. He became the first Roma to own land in Radost and was able to build a house in the nonRoma part of town. When the communist regime took place, the authorities confiscated all private land and took Assuna's father's property in order to build a hospital in the vicinity. Instead Assuna's family was given a plot of land in the outskirts of town where most of the previously itinerant Roma were to be settled.

The new Roma quarter was first called 'Novodrumtsi' ('Newcomers'), and then renamed to 'Nov Pat' (New Road) and later the communist activists renamed the neighbourhood after the factory for magnetic technology next to the Roma quarter. My informants talked of '*the mahala'* (the neighbourhood) as 'home'. 'Their space' was internalised and reflected class, morality and intentions (Bourdieu 2005). The 'mahala' was both 'a problem' because of its

inadequate infrastructure and a solution because it was 'home'. It is undeniable that space and identity are interconnected (Madanipour 2003; Appadurai 1985; Marcus 1995). Space can be produced in economic terms and constructed in memories, images, social interactions, everyday life. Michel Foucault (1984) approaches the relationship of power and space by arguing that architecture works through the power of the state to implement its ideology in everyday life. Medo (aged 68) also recollected that he was born in a different part of Radost.

> '*Our neighbours were not only Roma, there were Bulgarians too. I don't know when my parents came to Radost. I only remember my grandmother and grandfather being servants for a local Bulgarian family. Why did we get to be moved from where we were to the end of town, I don't know. I only remember that there were a lot of us and one house would have at least 10 people living in it and children were everywhere, roaming and playing. Maybe the Bulgarians got fed up with us. They wanted to separate us. We have to be always apart.'*

The locals used space as an attribute to identity, both for access and rejection. The nation-state, on the other hand, with its territorial ideologies and ethnic boundaries, was constantly threatened by the possibility of its disintegration (Appadurai 1996) and had to find ways to relocate and resettle. Gay y Blasco records a similar pattern in Spain where social workers, policy-makers and bureaucrats insisted and defended the forceful relocation of the Gitanos in order to facilitate their compulsory re-education (2008:299).

Land ownership and settled status was an important factor in negotiating identity for Roma, albeit often not achievable. Stewart in *The Time of the Gypsies* (1997) presents the aspect of Roma 'peripherality' as regards to their adaptation during communist times. Roma lacked autonomy, not possible to achieve through labour, and were not able to reject openly the

"situational" representation given to them. Opposing popular art and culture representation of Roma/Gypsies as 'wandering', nomads, always moving and 'unsettled', the photos I collected presented localised history, sedentarization and a sense of belonging to the Roma neighbourhood. The photos below show the oldest houses in the Radost Roma neighbourhood. The house in the first photo is also remembered to have had the first radio in the neighbourhood. This was important for my informants because the house became more of a community gathering place. The second photo shows the building of new houses and the progress people wanted to achieve in owning a home.

Image 7. House with the first radio (1953).

Image 8. Building new houses.

Changes occurred not only in spatial delineation but also in all aspects that would signify identification. The so called 'Process of Revival' took place in 1984-85. This process was a policy specifically aimed at Turks to forcibly change their Turko-Arab names into Slavic names (Marushiakova et al 2004). During this period Turkish Roma also had to change their names to Bulgarian names. [18] Assuna became Assya (a Bulgarian Christian name) and Rucha was called Rumiana. All public documents were altered, and the nationality designation 'Gypsy' (*tsiganin)* was omitted and changed to 'Bulgarian'. The category "*tsiganin'* (Gypsy) was no longer part of identity documents and official terminology. Along with the banning of the Romani language from being spoken in public places came the ban on wearing *shalvari* also. This ban included the playing and dancing of *kjuchek*, a widespread form of oriental dancing amongst Roma in Bulgaria (Silverman 1983). The *zurna*, an instrument played exclusively by Roma in the region, was prohibited in both private and public settings since it

[18] My father tells me that he also was requested to see the local communist leader in order to choose from a list of Bulgarian, non-foreign sounding names. His previous name – Essat, was replaced by Emil. His sister Dzamile was called Daniella. His father Ali was called Iliya and his mother Dzuna was called Anna.

was regarded as a Turkish instrument (ibid). Medo showed me pictures which present four generations of *zurna* players in his family. Medo's grandfather is pictured in the first photo below while playing at a Bulgarian wedding.

Image 9. Generations of zurna players.

Image 10. Zurna players on New Year's Day: Medo's father

Image 11. Medo's sons and gradsons.

Image 12. Medo's grandsons and great-grandsons.

'*My great grandfathers wore Turkish clothes. One woman from the local museum told me that they have other photos of my grandfather. We are still known as the Maretata because we are four generations of zurna musicians. I know that for a long time, even when the Turks were in the land we played music and entertained Turks and Bulgarians. Then when the Party ruled, we continued to play our music secretly by*

*gathering in areas where people wouldn't hear. I couldn't be only a zurna player. I was also a worker in the local cooperative. I played zurna on Saturdays and Sundays at our* (meaning Roma) *weddings. Today, the playing of zurna is mostly my main job, really. My children and grandchildren (see photos below) are all zurna players and they are respected by all – Roma and nonRoma'*- Medo.

Along with the repression of all things Roma 'in culture', the state actively set out to create joint Bulgarian narratives through ceremonies and awards, which supported the spreading of the communist ideologies but also aimed to erase ethnic, religious, class and cultural difference in order to promote unity and build allegiance to state ideologies (Marushiakova et al 2015, Kaneff 2004). Roma had to appear similar to everyone in all domains of life - music, dance, attire, education, employment and they also had to preserve, renegotiate and elaborate the social norms and customs of the surrounding population (Marushiakova and Popov 2015: 35-64). As opposed to representations of Roma and nonRoma not sharing history with one another, in reality they shared and occupied common spaces. For example, the photos below illustrate the local dance ensemble which by the late 1970s was one of the main initiatives of the Roma *chitalishte* in Radost. Kaneff in *Who Owns the Past* (2004) shows how institutions such as the *chitalishte*, which was a state as much as a community institution, and the Fatherland Front worked towards the active participation of all citizens and this included Roma. This required that everyone wore Bulgarian traditional costumes and sang only in the Bulgarian language at performances. Rucha explained to me that speaking in Bulgarian, valuing Bulgarian 'traditions' and teaching these 'traditions to the young generation' was an important aspect of how well accepted Roma were by nonRoma and *'suddenly, we were singing in Bulgarian, dancing with them, competing and winning competitions'*.

Image 13. Roma women dressed in traditional Bulgarian costumes.

Image 14. Roma women dancing in traditional Bulgarian costumes in the *chitalishte*.

Roma could not and did not run away from the state as they struggled to be an integral part of it (Marushiakova and Popov 2016), including through education. Education was compulsory and Roma children had to speak Bulgarian in public and in private. In the1950s the state commenced the building of schools for Roma in their secluded Roma neighbourhoods. The

building of the first school in the Radost's Roma neighbourhood was well received by the community and seen as an exceptional achievement. Medo reminisced:

> *'The Party wanted our children to go somewhere when we were at work. Nobody was out of work, unlike today. I was about 12 years old when the municipality built a school for us. It was a small room on a hill so it was visible from everyone in the quarter. Only tsigancheta* (Roma children) *went to this school. At the time no one finished 4th grade. The then Mayor didn't want his town to fall behind other places in Bulgaria, you see. At the time, there were some kind of competitions for the cleanest cities, for the best looking buildings, for the places with many educated people or something of that sort…The little schoolroom was not enough for all the children so they moved the school to a local farmhouse with three main rooms and they separated the children according to age. The locals helped in the building of the school. My sons were educated there. My wife was the cleaner. We also got our first shop and the shopkeeper was one of ours* (Roma). *I remember the long queues. We were developing. The neighbourhood grew and grew. Our children began to study."*

The standard of living and Roma civil status improved during communism (Marushiakova et al 1993; Tomova 1995). Everyone had to have a job, access to free health care, and free and mandatory education. Rucha told me: '*We were understood. They* (meaning nonRoma) *still overlooked us but it was illegal to call us tsigani or bad words openly and this made us feel safer. We were seen as equal. We didn't worry about having enough to eat and about the education of our children'*.

The local 'house of culture' was built together with a large grocery store, a place for a cinema and a kindergarten. The large two-storey building was built for one summer by Roma

volunteers and the locals took pride in their neighbourhood. The photo below presents the first Roma kindergarten established in the late 1970s in Radost. The kindergarten still exists in a different location outside the Roma neighbourhood, although it is still attended by Roma children only.

Image 15. The new Roma kindergarten (1980s)

Image 16. Isma.

Radost also had its first female driver who was a Roma woman called Isma (photo above). She worked as an ambulance driver for the local hospital. Her son Assen proudly showed me '*a piece of good history with a sad end*'. Isma was also the first Roma woman to graduate from High School and her marriage was the first officially registered marriage in the Roma neighbourhood. Isma died aged twenty three from severe haemorrhage after an abortion. She was accused of having extramarital relationships with nonRoma men but in Assen's words, Isma became too 'atypical' for the community and for her husband who did not want her to be '*too visible'*. She was a Roma who ventured into a nonRoma male dominated professional world and this was too alien to the people in her community. In effort to be included, to live and adhere to the socialist rules, to climb the social ladder, she risked estrangement from her community and her family. Still, Isma had a special place in the memories of the locals. Her friend Rucha was proud of her.

Nevertheless, the communist efforts for improvement in literacy, health and employment rates, proved to be difficult and inconsistent. For example, although, schooling increased under communism, many Roma children were sent to schools for children with learning difficulties, a legacy which continued in postsocialism (Greenberg 2009; Matache 2014 ). By the 1970s, such schools were officially called 'schools for children with inferior social status and culture' (ibid). In fact many of these schools continued to function after the fall of communism. In Medo's words:

> *'At that time the Party decided that we couldn't look after our children and grandchildren well, so we had to send them to school about 70-80km away. Of course, they provided free meals and clothes. This helped. But when one of my sons came back and wanted to enrol in high school in Radost they wouldn't accept him*

*because his school was branded as school for slow* (meaning learning disabilities) *children.'*

The collapse of Communism in the late 1980s brought enormous changes to Central and Eastern Europe (Hann 2007; Kaneff 2011). This political and social upheaval had profound effects on all members of the formerly socialist states. After years of assimilation efforts, suddenly, Roma were openly 'the other' again. In November 1989 while there was a jubilee in Germany for the destruction of the most visible symbol of division between USSR and Western Europe, the Berlin Wall, the fear of the unknown and the forthcoming struggle had gripped the Radost Roma neighbourhood. A process of reconstructing of the socialist states in Eastern Europe began in accord with the emerging market economy and the neoliberalist ideology (Voiculescu 2019). This involved welfare state reduction pushing the most vulnerable in a population into extreme poverty and long-term unemployment (ibid). The economic crisis affected Roma the most as it brought enormous levels of open hostility against them (Guy 2001). After 1989 the displacement of Roma increased and since their housing was not formally legalised under socialism and they did not own land the new authorities commenced mass evictions. A number of Roma neighbourhoods were pronounced 'illegal' and their inhabitants were pushed out to zones without any access to economic and education opportunities (Ivancheva, 2015). Violeta, a pre-school teacher remembers:

*'The factories promised us that they will not make more than one member of a given family redundant. This promise was not kept for Roma. They lost their jobs in massive numbers because most of their jobs were in agriculture. In practice, what was happening to the Roma was an economic genocide'.*

Anthropologists have described the strategies employed by households and individuals to survive the social changes which occurred in post socialist societies (Pine 1998, 2002; Hann 2002; Verdery 1996, 2003). Roma in Bulgaria also devised strategies to survive as Rucha told me:

*'Initially people had money but there was nothing in the shops. Imagine queuing for hours just to get half a loaf of bread. The crisis deepened more and more. This is when people began to travel to Macedonia and Turkey to buy goods and sell them back in Bulgaria. This was not regulated. No one had a registered firm for trading or anything of that sort. People earned their living from collecting scrap metal, picking herbs and recycling paper. Some of our Roma did this but others often got ill and passed away.'*

Thirty years later, despite the many political and socio-economic changes in Bulgaria, the legacies of socialism linger and can be found in state systems, in landscapes, in buildings, in memories – written and unwritten. This is why it is important to understand the specificity of socialist experiences, and to explain why, and how, this period heralded change in the role of the state and ultimately in the lives of its subjects.

**Controlling the Past**

So far I argued for recording alternative narrations of history, belonging and the past. In this section I reflect on how Roma choose to control, silence, obliterate and resist the past as is evidenced in the photos and the stories I uncovered. Again, here I rely on life histories which have the capacity to draw out not only people's experiences but also the narrative strategies of remembering. Life histories provide a means of getting closer to the experience of those whose lives and histories go undocumented, unheard or silenced (Riessman 2008). Individual

cases and narratives helped me to understand complex inter-relationships (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2001) and how my informants related to the past. The past in people's imagination had multiple forms and consisted of numerous conflicting and complex versions (Herzfeld 1991:226). The narratives in this section can also be considered as "postmemory" (Hirsh 1997) to illustrate how the 'generations after' certain painful past events bear a collective trauma of the experiences they "remember" through their Roma ancestor's silencing and "downplaying" of the past. Growing up with these past silences and experiencing the same trauma in the present can "evacuate" memories (ibid). But such 'evacuation' would be only one type of forgetting (Connerton 2008). More importantly, we need to consider these strategies of seemingly 'treating' memory as unimportant or "unspeakable" (Trouillot 1995:29) as essential for the negotiation of the present and in that sense they are also about the future (Pine 2013).

**Silencing and forgetting**

Understandably, not everyone in Radost was eager to share their photos with me. Some of my informants decided not to talk about the past, perhaps as a result of a decision to silence previous experience or as a "prescriptive forgetting" strategy (Connerton 2008). Such "forgetting is constitutive in the formation of a new identity" (2008:63) focusing not on the loss but rather on the gain for those who know how to "discard memories" serving a purpose such as managing one's identity (ibid). For Connerton forgetting is a process by which shared memories are constructed along shared and patterned silences (ibid:65) and this can manifest in religious, political or social memory. "What is allowed to be forgotten provides living space for present projects […] It is not so much a retention of relatedness as rather a creation of relatedness between those who were previously unrelated" (ibid:66).

Jana, a Roma woman in her fifties, was most sceptical about the photo elicitation initiative. She was perplexed as to why I would ask about how people were in the past and not be interested in how people were living now:

> *'You are asking too late. Most of our old people who would have known something about where we came from are not around anymore. Anyway, why do you have to know this? You will be better off not knowing. You are young and you have future, why should you be interested in the past. Don't bring pain to yourself.'*

Behind Jana's scepticism I recognised a common thread which authors have reflected on. She thought of the past as a time of persecution, transition, unwelcome change and discrimination (see Stewart 2004). In addition to the largely orally transmitted culture, the sense of 'who would care?' may have been one of many reasons not to talk about the past and "downplay" history (Gay y Blasco, 2001). There was one definite pattern which I observed and this was the internalisation of discrimination and exclusion and for Jana this was too painful to recollect:

> *'Even if we had books about where we came from, who would care to read them? We are tsigani and I can't think of anyone who would read about us. They cannot stand us* (referring to the local nonRoma), *how would they read about us? Who are we? We are no one to them. If you write a book, write something good about us'*.

Jana was smiling but behind her smile I saw sadness and pain. She needed significant convincing and was surprised to hear that within Bulgaria and internationally, both in and outside academia, the history of Roma has been written about, debated and even contested. The works of linguists, historians, folklorists, politicians, sociologists and anthropologists

have attempted to shed some light on Roma origins. When I explained to her that I was going to write a book and this is why I wanted to record the stories and experiences of the people in the Roma neighbourhood she responded:

> *I know in the 50s or 60s we moved from another part of town but this is all I know. We are dark-skinned and maybe India is our motherland. We look like the Indians, don't we? Actually, in 'The Law is Blind* (a Bollywood film from the 80s well known among Roma in Radost) *I heard the word 'pani' for water. This is our Romanes word for water too… I don't know. Don't ask me. We don't really know where we came from. Why should I burden myself by thinking about pain?*'

Jana's experience of discrimination had led her to believe that no one would be interested in reading about where Roma came from. Naturally, the years of discrimination for her did not need further attention within the community and externally. Jana did not rely on a shared past to connect with her contemporaries in order to have a sense of belonging to the community. The written or spoken record of history did not necessarily mean that the end result was the collective preservation of identity. It was the shared sense of belonging in the present that Jana was emphasising on. 'The old times', i.e. the past, were simply a period of forced assimilation, poverty and hardships.

**Controlling and obliterating**

As I reviewed the photos introduced to me, I also came across patterns of controlling the past, meaning that some images were reshaped/re-worked in order to hide previous histories. I noticed photos in which people had been cut out or scratched from the pictures. By cutting

out, scratching or destroying images my informants negotiated the past vis-à-vis other community or family members. Sana explained:

> '*We have many photos from weddings. We get married and then separate, so the photos of previous marriages are destroyed or people are simply cut out or scratched. Also, if people hate someone they scratch their photo - their eyes, hands, heads.'*

Image 17. Cut out person as not married anymore.

Image 18. Scratched face –no longer daughter in law.

Image 19. A collection of scratched and cut out images.

Talking about the past required talking about death and this brought an array of emotions in my informants. Grief, sorrow, fear, pain and loss are experiences associated with death and these feelings were often silenced. It was difficult for some of them to talk about their relatives who passed away and the silencing was apparent. Anthropologists have written about Roma/Gypsy attitude towards death and associated rituals (Okely 1983; Lemon 2000). Gay y Blasco (2001) has explained this process. For her, to be able to understand the attitude of the Spanish Gitanos towards the past we need to look into the mnemonic practices through which they deal with the dead "to find the recent, personal past and hence the discrete, affective pasts that link relatives to each other in the present" (2001:637). The Gitanos of Madrid contain and then **obliterate** the recent past so that they are able to separate it from the present. The Radost Roma appeared to act in the same vein as the Gitanos of Madrid whereby they chose how to talk or not talk about the dead, how to erase memories by removing as many material reminders of them as possible, to control and resist the past. This is what Sana told me:

> *We usually don't keep pictures of people who are dead. We don't want to disturb them. I shouldn't mention my mother's name and I don't have photos of her when she was older. God forgive her, let her be in peace and be where she is… If my children see pictures with pierced eyes or cut off heads, they will destroy them. Any possessions of the dead need to be destroyed - clothes and everything together with their photographs. They are thrown into a river or burned. Maybe that's why our children do not know who their ancestors are. All of this is done because people are frightened of evil spirits. These things are called 'chukano' in Romanes.*'

From a first impression, it seemed that people did everything possible to erase the memory of the deceased and were reluctant to discuss loved relatives. However, this seemingly

neglectful attitude on the surface was covering 'deeper' meaning bellow it. The beloved deceased were in fact treasured and protected through the burial rituals and afterwards in the mourning period and beyond. Sana did not need photos to remember her mother, she remembered 'deeper' in her own words. She did not want to speak about her so that she leaves her deceased mother in peace. Sana also elaborately explained the burial procedures which required strict rules, including the disposal of the possessions of the deceased, as follows:

> *'Every family has their own ways to bury the dead but we have some common things we do as tsigani. The body has to be washed outside of the house, usually in the yard and we put sheets around the place where the body is washed. The water is gathered in a big vessel and is thrown away in the river. The clothes are burned. No child or a pregnant woman should touch these otherwise they will get ill. If the dead is a Christian, they are dressed in new clothes, if they are a Muslim they remain naked. The hands are bandaged together so that the dead person doesn't take any of the living people with them. The dead is put on a bed inside the house and covered in sheets. We don't leave the dead alone until s/he is buried. The keeping of the dead continues throughout the night so that the relatives are not scared and alone. People bring sweets, coffee and juice. From time to time a relative starts to mourn out loud in a song to relieve their grief and to remember the deceased. If they cry over the dead they shouldn't allow tears to fall on them because otherwise the dead body may be taken by a chukano. In the night all lights are on in the house of the dead to chase away any bad spirits. Also, outside men light fire and stay around it until sunrise. This is how other people learn if someone has passed away also. Everyone is allowed to visit the home of the deceased. Even the enemies can attend the funeral. Everyone is quiet and shows respect for the dead. The mourning period continues for 40 days.*

*Men don't shave and women wear dark clothes and black scarves. They don't dance, there are no weddings at this time.'*

Sana's detailed description of the burial process and the mourning period afterwards is an example of elaborate mortuary rites of passage. Mortuary rites have many functions. Mary Douglas (1966) writes that funeral customs remind the living that death and suffering are integral parts of nature (ibid:210). As passage rites, they support the individual as s/he accomplishes transition and moves through uncharted waters. In the case of the Radost Roma, the members of the community appeared to distract the mourners in order to lift their spirits up as these ceremonies also prepare the individual for their own death. The anthropological literature provides many insights on death as a rite of passage. Anthropology teaches that death ritual is an expression of a cultural blueprint, of values passed down to future generations. The analysis of mortuary practices has provided anthropologists with information on the behaviour of kin and community, their belief and value systems, and understanding of moral and social orders (Bloch 1971; Bloch et al 1982; Huntington et al 1991). For Malinowski, death rites functioned to lessen anxiety. The crisis of death triggered "a chaos of emotion" and the mortuary ritual dampened the potential danger to the individual and the group (Malinowski 1954:97-99).

In addition, the strict abiding by the rules of whom, what and how the body of the deceased is treated reminds of the 'mehrime'/'mahrime' concept which anthropologists in Romani Studies have observed (Sutherland 1975; Okely 1983; Williams 2003; Stewart 1997; Silverman 1981; Miller 1998). The concept of 'mehrime' includes beliefs and 'taboos' referring to the connection of the body (upper and lower parts), pollution and identity construction. 'Mehrime' also draws a separation between the inside and the outside (Okely 1983:80). I came across examples of this concept, also not specifically talked about by my

informants as ‘mehrime’, yet still traced in Sana’s explanation about death rituals. I encountered similar traces of pollution beliefs at the time of birth and in regards to women’s sexuality and I briefly touch upon this in Chapter 6.

**Resisting and Adjusting**

Anthropologists are largely in agreement that Roma construct their way of life vis-à-vis non Roma. Marushiakova et al believe that this ‘Roma – Gadge’ divide is linked to the fundamental opposition ‘we – they’ after Barth (1969). As regards to the past, along with the keeping of the Bulgarian traditions, Roma secretly kept their own celebrations. The Roma of Radost knew how they were portrayed outside, they internalised these representations and acted upon them. As other ethnographers have pointed out (Okely 1983; Lemon 2000; Engebrigtsen 2007), living by the ‘deviant Roma’ stereotype also helped them to adjust and benefit from these representations. The official assertion was that Roma had to adapt to changes and indeed during communism they largely did so. In the end of the 1960s all of ‘the Roma’ elements in weddings, specifically the costumes, the religious aspects, the dance and the music, were replaced with the standards enforced by state institutions. Also in the 1960s everyone had to have a legally registered marriage in a civil ceremony. Yet, the ‘genius’ of Roma was to adapt, but not in the popular and predictable ways (Okely 1983; 1994). Despite the assimilationist efforts of the Party, Roma continued to speak the Romani language at home and used their Muslim names inside kinship relationships. In fact, some of my older informants continued to be called by their Turkish names even by their nonRoma colleagues. Roma musical forms thrived in private settings and in Bulgaria, "wedding music", a musical genre heavily influenced by Roma, came to symbolize an anti-government resistance to state folklore (Silverman 2012). Rucha, in her wedding photo below, was secretly wedded in a ceremony wearing Turkish Roma attire and dancing to zurnas. Raba, in the second photo,

was also wedded in a Turkish ceremony, despite the danger of being reported to the local Party leaders.

Image 20. Rucha's wedding – 'old Roma way' (1950s)

Image 21. Turkish Roma bride (1960s)

On the other hand, Datcheto (in the photos below) remembers how she had to go outside the Roma neighbourhood in order to attend a special civil marriage ceremony in the 'House of Culture' in Radost. The Party had created a pathway to follow, some new authentic traditions which had to be shared by everyone – both Roma and nonRoma. More weddings became '*komsomolski*'. The so called Komsomol weddings were celebrations in which the guests were reduced in number and only accessible to the closest relatives and friends of the newlyweds. The latter were often not dressed in special clothes. No gifts were exchanged, and the celebration was meant to be modest. These types of weddings were held mainly in larger cities and were seen as more applicable to the educated Roma who chose to be '*in time with what was happening throughout the whole country*' in Violeta's words (pictured as a bride in the second photo below).

Image 22. ‘New’ socialist style wedding (1970s)

Image 23. Komsomolska *svatba* (wedding) in 1981.

## Conclusion

For the purposes of my study I located my thinking in the lifeworlds of my contemporaries, exploring their strategies to live their lives and to imagine, structure and fulfil them in the past and representing them 'now'. It is the narratives such as those presented here, that are behind the *nowness* of the everyday, and offer not just some sense-making of the increasingly complex lives and identities of Roma, but glimpses of the possibilities that are realised in the everyday. Just as my informants did, I connected the individual representations of social life, of the places where I did fieldwork and the people I met, with the wider collective historical representations. I argued that history, at least in part, can be understood and conceived of through the small everyday acts of individuals, and the histories that have brought them to their present place. This process has been a constant reminder, within and outside the field, that the local social context for my informants' life stories is inextricably connected with the broader context of social and political life in Bulgaria and beyond. Asking why and how the local Roma in Radost explain, rationalise and make sense of their past offers insights into the social framework in which they operated and made choices within the community but also how they managed the complex relationship between themselves and the state. Crucially, remembering and forgetting, "downplaying" and silencing of memories is not only about the past, it is about the present which is constantly reminding of the past and hence it is about the future also (Pine 2013). A future of no past and present persecutions, assimilations and exclusion, one which Roma have and are hoping for, a time and space when they can 'become' (Biehl and Locke 2010).

Unfortunately, including Roma history was of no particular value to the local museum in Radost. There were only two historical pieces of evidence, or objects, which may have been relevant in the Radost museum. The first object was a picture of the Roma musicians and

*zurna* players, which my informant Medo shared with me (see images 6 above), and this image was presented in the museum as follows: "historical aspects of a Bulgarian wedding". The second evidence was a regional ethnographic text[19] which illustrated "The Bulgarian resistance and fight for freedom" through the story of a local noble Bulgarian man who was beaten by a *tsiganin* (Gypsy) named Kajtaz, hired by the Ottoman Turks. Nevertheless, my contentment is found in that my informants chose whether they wanted to remember, forget or create history as opposed to the local historical absence of narratives about them. Perhaps, this was their moral stance to resist external identification (Gay y Blasco 1999; Stewart 2002) or it may have been their say in determining who controls their past and what they are to 'become'. To become must begin from somewhere, it has a starting point, because everyone starts somewhere and Roma do too.

In the next chapter I discuss how state policies, some of which were a direct legacy of the socialist regime, continue to interact with the lives of Roma children, men, women and communities. This is why it is important to understand how the past shaped many of the individual stories recorded in this chapter and how these life stories were inter-connected with the wider memory-making. I am deeply grateful to the women and men of Radost who shared their stories and memories with me and as a result made the wider histories more vivid and enriched. Unfortunately, I was not able to organise an exhibition of the photo material presented in this chapter during my time in Radost but I have not given up on pursuing this task in the future.

[19] I am not able to cite this work due to preservation of anonymity.

# PART 2: Childhoods and Becoming

# Chapter 3. Educating Roma Children– State and Kinship Moralities

## Introduction

I explained my research to Mrs Stoyanova in a phone conversation prior to our meeting in person; however, it never occurred to me to introduce myself as a Roma researcher. It was during our in person interview when I realised that my researcher identity did not entirely fit with Mrs Stoyanova's perceptions of Roma. Once I mentioned that I was living in the Roma neighbourhood and that I grew up in a Roma neighbourhood elsewhere in Bulgaria Mrs Stoyanova paused and said '*Well, you must be an exception'*. Our conversation came to an end quickly afterwards. So, in this chapter I explore some of the tensions arising from historical and current relationships between Roma and the state, and how these relationships have evolved more specifically drawing from the realm of education. It is apparent in the narratives presented here that there is an enduring appeal of dichotomies between state and non-state, public and private, Roma and nonRoma and I endeavour to engage with these categories, hierarchies and inequalities by giving examples of how they are entangled, connected and complement each other (Pine 2018:97).

As illustrated in the previous chapter Roma have historically been perceived as the 'troubled subjects of the state' (see, e.g. Hawes and Perez 1986; Clark 2008, Stewart 2012, Marushiakova et al 2005) and during socialism they needed to learn to abide by state ideologies in forming the proletariat, a socio-economic layer that has no regard for singular identity and is interested in achieving a communal 'socialist utopia'. Socialist education was meant to provide the state mechanism, the foundations to achieve such utopia. However, with the fall of communism in Bulgaria, as in other Central and Eastern European counties, the neoliberal ideology prioritised economic development and individual freedom for self-improvement (Wacquant 2012). People, who previously relied on the intervention and

provision of the state, now had to conceive of themselves as independent from the state and act individually in accordance with the skills, education and socio-economic relationships they had acquired. Largely having not achieved the educational goals of the communist regime, working in low-skilled jobs and not owning land, Roma were left at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy. Although the education system in Bulgaria, as other public institutions, was formally committed to the moral obligation of providing equality of opportunity, in practice it continued to institutionalise inequality.

Here I make use of the Romani Studies literature which provides examples of the boundaries between Roma and nonRoma, state and community, and how these are constructed in moral terms (Okely 1983, Stewart 1997, Gay y Blasco and other) as I set out to illustrate the conflict and contradiction between different regimes of morality (see also Lambek 2015, Robbins 2016). Some of the narratives presented here suggest that 'Roma culture' does not encourage children to pursue education and consequently the blame is put on Roma parents, and on Roma women in particular. I follow the argument made by Pine (2018:98) that in socialism and in post-socialism there has been "a phenomenon […] an ideology that undervalues or devalues the domestic domain in favour of a particular public." This is a view of 'the family', or the community, as antisocial, where "the visible" politics of the state provides social value, but the domestic/kinship world, seen largely as the world and the priority of women, as less valorised (ibid 2018: 99). Conventionally, much attention has been paid to tangible ways of supporting Roma children in schools and through curricula instilling certain values (which I refer to here as moralities in emic terms) through instruction and training, but less attention is focused on what happens inside their homes and communities.

This chapter presents a complex picture in regards to Roma education in postsocialist times and it is about schooling as being both empowering and disempowering. What I am

attempting to convey here is an 'imperfect' situation, dis-synchronization both within schools and within community. There are different aspirations, moralities, understandings, hierarchies and inequalities. The reader must be warned that I introduce many actors, multiple stories and narratives and I do so in line with the arguments of the thesis, namely to illustrate the contradictions between different actors, such as teachers, parents, children, state officials, as well as between domains – private and political, kinship and polity. All of these personalities and domains "are understood to produce and reproduce different forms of freedom and non-freedom, exclusion and inclusion" (Goddard 2018:108). The contradictions in ideologies affect power relations and I argue that there is a clash of moralities both "inside and outside" (Pine 2018: 98) as I look at how Roma education is perceived by teachers, the state representatives or the 'outside' actors, and how education is reproduced and confronted 'inside' kinship relationships. In addition to the more mainstream analysis of the dichotomy between state and community, I also consider the divisions, the fragmentation within the state and the kin/ community which are not always reflected on. Finally, and most importantly to me, I provide partial glimpses of children's sense of belonging, of their aspirations 'to become' and how they navigate the different realms of school and home.

**The Teachers**

Fassin's edited book *At the Heart of the State – the Moral World of Institutions'* (2015) analyses the nature of state morality and the view of the state as an 'unemotional' structure. The state is constituted by "physical persons" who act on the basis of emotions, values and affects when it comes to the practical execution of policies. These state actors/persons have different "moral subjectivities" (ibid: 4), and positions ranging from rigid interpretation of policies to a more flexible and partial commitment towards their implementation. Fassin illustrates the work of prison officers, the police and the judicial system and how value 'subjectivities' are displayed by the supposedly 'impartial' state system (ibid). I find Fassin's

analysis fitting also in regards to the state education system. In what follows I provide the nnarratives of three teachers whom I met during fieldwork in order to illustrate how they interpret state policies and conceive of their work as educators to Roma children. In reality, the school system does not coincide with the lifeworlds of Roma children and their parents and this clash of moralities is understood differently by their teachers.

**Mrs Stoyanova**

Neli, with whose family I lived in Radost, worked on a project which aimed to connect Roma parents, most of them mothers, with the governors of the local schools in order to establish an inter-ethnic dialogue and participation in the educational life of the town. Neli introduced me to Mrs Stoyanova when I began fieldwork in Radost. She was the long-term head teacher of the local *Gymnasium* (High School), the best performing school in Radost with a hundred year old history. Only three Roma children out of 185 pupils were studying in the *Gymnasium*. In Mrs Stoyanova's words this was partly because the school was located far from the Roma neighbourhood and children had to walk a long distance, and partly because the school was providing education to the local '*crème de la crème'* population which meant that Roma parents '*were not going to get along'* with nonRoma parents. Mrs Stoyanova was proud of her school's reputation which she guarded fiercely, including by not accepting pupils whose circumstances would change the excellent results and dynamics of her school. Many of the children who graduated from the *Gymnasium* went on to become doctors, engineers, teachers and Mrs Stoyanova proudly kept pictures of such role models on the walls of her office. First, she assured me that Roma children and their parents are treated equally in her school, regardless of their ethnicity and then she went on to tell me how two of the Roma children in the school were not regular attendants and 'struggled with achieving well' so only one of them was '*otlichnichka*' (excellent student). Mrs Stoyanova revealed that her long

educational practice of over thirty years has taught her to recognise which children were going to excel at school and which were going to fail.

'*Today, a common practice for some teachers is the admission of a privileged attitude towards some students and deliberately negative towards others. I understand this and would like to explain it. We have hidden expectations on the potential of different pupils. That is, if a teacher believes that a child has a high success rate they will do well. The opposite is also true. Some children, such as Roma children, may need more support at school and a fraction of them can do better. However, I have been around for a long time to be able to predict who will do well and who will not. Most of the Bulgarian children are honest, cultured, ambitious, curious and intelligent. They are also less aggressive. As a young teacher I taught many Pomak*[20] *children so I know that there is a difference. They were disciplined and had a lot of respect for the teachers. They were very modest, quiet and some of the children did well. The Roma children, on the other hand, are stronger physically, they are beautiful children but many don't do well intellectually because they lack discipline. They are usually display aggression. This is because their parents are not interested in their children's education, it is their culture, their home environment and this is who they are. It is irresponsible in my opinion. They use their children for everything and anything to earn money and don't see education as a priority…they marry them off early in lavish celebrations but say that they cannot afford to buy them clothes to come to school'*.

Mrs Stoyanova's observation that teachers systematically misinterpret children's "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1997) was disappointingly legitimate. Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" illustrates how educational credentials help to reproduce and legitimate social inequalities, as higher-class individuals are seen to 'deserve' their place in the social structure more than others. In other words, educational success can be largely pre-determined. As

[20] 'Pomak' is a derogatory term and refers to a Bulgarian population, also seen as a minority, who converted to Islam during the Ottoman rule.

children from different social backgrounds become more singled out they progress through the education system differently. Success in the education system is facilitated by the possession of "cultural capital" and of a higher class "habitus" (ibid), which legitimises inequality. In Mrs Stoyanova's own words those who had 'cultured' competences were already selected to do better and the educational system was designed to recognize and reward children who were 'honest, cultured and ambitious'. These qualities were not ascribed to Roma children whose 'culture' was unchangeable, 'backwards', 'naturally' inferior and in need of the "dominant" naturalised culture (ibid). This dominant culture should be shared and followed by all. Such logic advantages the children who possess the values and the morality of the dominant group but discredits those children who supposedly lack the morality, the citizenship and obedience of the former group. Ultimately, it is parents who are to blame for not placing enough value on education and discipline. This is what Bourdieu (2007) also calls a "symbolic violence" where cultural norms seen not as arbitrary, but as legitimate, reproduce and legitimise inequality.

Mrs Stoyanova's case shows that the self and state can be combined (Fassin 2015). It also illustrates how the state has powers to enforce specific requirements for education, and other domains, by engaging various actors, where bodies, minds, and souls are organised and ordered (Foucault 1984). I am dubious whether social and political interventions lead to new values/moralities in society or simply allow state agents to reinforce state moralities as they deem fit (Fassin 2015). Fortunately, not all teachers in Radost shared Mrs Stoyanova's views.

**Mr Janakiev**

Mr Janakiev introduced himself as 'a committed to egalitarianism professional who loves history'. Close to half of the pupils attending Mr Janakiev's school were Roma children. His school was also part of Neli's project and had a well established parent participation group in the governance of the school, with Roma parents as members. The most recent attempts of

the Bulgarian state authorities to return Roma children to school had proved successful in Mr Janakiev's school. In his words '*for the first time since the fall of communism, Bulgaria has small armies of teachers, social workers and police officers who work for the inclusion of Roma children at school.*' In the last three years the school had seen an increase in Roma pupil attendance and better education results. He also planned projects for organising more after-school activities, days of 'culture' and home-visiting. Unfortunately, his ideas needed additional school resources and he was familiar with the difficulties of obtaining government funding. Mr Janakiev used to be the deputy mayor of Radost with responsibilities including the disbursement of educational resources for the municipality. The local government did not typically demonstrate enthusiasm towards securing Roma/or minority education funding, even when funding existed within national Roma education programs. Mr Janakiev was of the opinion that the local authorities either lacked the initiative to apply for national funding or sought to divert the funding towards other less controversial causes. '*It is hard to convince my colleagues that we need to support those children who come from underprivileged backgrounds. However, the local governors cannot afford to invest in the minority population because this is not going to win them the mainstream electoral vote*.' According to Mr Janakiev there was one aspect with which the local authorities were concerned and this was the high Roma birth rate. In meetings the authorities often discussed how the state system, including schools, social and health services were going to be 'overloaded' by Roma demand. '*The national government as well the local authorities face a problem - a large share of young Roma population, who have lower levels of education and are deemed incapable of contributing to the county's economy.'* The rise in Roma population, however, was a 'problem' with a double solution - to ignore demands for further investment in the community and to focus on cutting access to any exiting benefits. Frustrated by the 'misjudgement' of the local authority in the end of his political term Mr Janakiev decided to go back to his role as a school principal but even there he faced difficulties with what he was

attempting to achieve. '*It is a public secret that school directors refuse to accept Roma children in their schools because of the fear that the Bulgarian children will leave. Only recently one mother threatened me that she will move her child to a different school since more than half of the children in my school are Roma. The mother complained to the Mayor's office and the school is now pressed to stop accepting too many Roma children'*. Mr Janakiev aspired to show a different kind of school to the local authorities and beyond; however it was the very system he worked in that prevented him from doing so (see also Engebrigsten 2015).

**Mrs Manova**

Mrs Manova was a teacher in Mr Janakiev's school. She was convinced that working with pupils outside formal education and in a way that brought education to their communities was going to produce change. Mrs Manova believed that the school was not a 'tabula rasa' system where teachers supposedly produce knowledge in their students from scratch. She thought, in Freire's terms (1970), that it is not the intellectual elite, the dominant group, who produce those moments of change for 'the oppressed' but the power of the individual will that initiates the process of transformation. Moreover, anthropologically, it is local knowledge, as Geertz calls it, that creates the starting point for teaching; for it is always "small facts that speak to large issues" (Geertz 1973:23).

Helping Mrs Manova with her afternoon classes became one of my main activities during fieldwork in Radost. Mrs Manova had undertaken the role of visiting families and children at home once a week on her own initiative. Also, in collaboration with the Roma evangelical church she organised parent meetings and after-school activities to help children with their homework. Twice a week she would help anywhere between sixty to eighty children. She only just managed to support such large number of children by organising the older children to help the younger ones and by alternating tasks with Neli. At the time the government had introduced incentives for teachers of minority pupils while implementing measures to stop

social payments for parents who refused to send their children to school. The school attendance in Radost increased; however, in reality, teachers were 'passing' pupils from stage to stage with no real improvement of their education records: '*Teachers of children in kindergartens and schools will be receiving a bonus if they work with ethnic minority children. Honestly, if this is how the government aims to reduce the number of children dropping out of the educational system, they are wrong. You can put all efforts in reaching the children but if their parents don't have money for clothes and food, there is no point. My fellow teachers will only give them the minimal marks in order to pass and there will not be real improvement.*' Mrs Manova was intimately aware of the problems faced by Roma children at home and at school. '*I am astonished that many of my colleagues don't know that Roma children walk through roads full of mud for nearly 3km each way to get to school. This is what I call parental commitment. Who would let their child go to school in such conditions in addition to being treated as if school is not their place?'*

Mrs Manova had good communication with Mr Janakiev and ensured that most children had a continued support during and after school. The children and the parents knew her well and she was familiar with their lives. '*At times, what we teach at school doesn't fit with what children experience at home. We put Roma parents in that difficult position where they need to compete with the system in order to provide what we think is best for their children. Also, often they may not have the opportunity to provide for their children because of a complex set of issues such as unemployment, lack of service support, health and even as simple as not having food to put on the table.'* Neli and Mrs Manova had organised a coupon system in partnership with a local Roma businessman who had a *banichkarnitsa* (a pastry shop) to provide free school lunches for all seven and eight year olds (the youngest pupils) in Mr Janakiev's school. Mrs Manova's family, however, were not happy that she spent a lot of time in the Roma neighbourhood. Her husband and grown up children were afraid for her

safety and her reputation amongst her nonRoma friends. She also faced 'internal' kinship struggles. Regrettably, Mrs Manova's commitment to Roma children was unusual.

Through the three examples of teacher narratives given here I wanted to illustrate how the "physical persons" representing the state act on the basis of emotions, preconceptions and values (Fassin 2015). The state then "is no more an ethereal place where one works impartially for the common good as supposed to in the classical tradition. […] Ideas –and interests- especially those of the dominant are of course defended in the state" (Fassin 2015:8) but not in a synchronised and monolithic way. Apparent is the different interpretation of educational policy implementation and the divisions within state structures such as schools. Mrs Stoyanova understood her role as a guardian of her school's reputation therefore by not allowing the acceptance of Roma children, who did not fit the 'crème de la crème' category; she was protecting the 'quality' of her school environment at the expense of the nondominant social group. Mr Janakiev had professional goals of showcasing his school as the best inclusion model school and although, he understood the context in which Roma children lived, he was faced with the hindrances posed by the local administration, the very state domain that was supposed to encourage him to pursue his ambitions. Mrs Manova took matters outside the school walls and went into the Roma neighbourhood to support her pupils. Her involvement was not unproblematic; she did not have her kinship support.

**The Parents**

As indicated earlier in the chapter, socio-structural explanations for barriers that inhibit the better school achievement of Roma children have resulted into different conclusions concerning 'Roma culture' and its morality. Liégeois (1998) argued that Roma (Gypsy) moral values are not compatible with institutional schooling and that Roma families perceive schools as alien. Some explanations locate poor performance and deviant behaviour within cultural deficit, oppositional culture, or culture of poverty models (Ladanyi et al 2003). Other

studies present how children and childhood are viewed inside the community (Berthier 1979; Okely 1983; Okely 1997; Kyuchukov 2010; Daskalaki 2004; Gay y Blasco 1999; Engebrigsten 2015). For example, among the Gypsies and Travellers in Britain the family constitutes the locus where alternative forms of children's learning and education are being produced (Okely 1997). Hungarian Rom children as young as seven or eight years old are bestowed a moral autonomy (Stewart 1997). Helleiner (1998) reveals the extent to which state intervening policies on children- based on a model of sedentary, domesticated home life and full time education- reproduce and reinforce discourses of social inequality amongst the Irish Travellers. Similarly, in Radost children, teenagers, parents and grand-parents all lived together or at least close to each other. Child rearing was the responsibility of everyone in the family and teenagers were expected to begin adult socialization, including helping their parents and relatives from an early age. Family was a priority and children learned this from an early age. Nevertheless, here I would like to follow a different path of analysis to the one already introduced in Romani Studies, where the Roma family is closely knit and focused on the dichotomy Roma versus nonRoma. What I am interested in is not only to bring forward contradictory situations between state and kin but also to show what happens "inside" the kin in regards to children's education. Again, to do this I bring different stories from the perspectives of parents.

**Mila**

I joined Mila as she prepared her daughter Silvia for her first day in Mrs Stoyanova's school. Mila was excited that her daughter was starting school. She bought beautiful fresh flowers the day before and as she ironed Silvia's brand new clothes she told me about her own childhood:

> *'I came from nowhere. My family didn't have anything while we grew up. My mother and father were growing tobacco and peanuts so my two sisters and I joined them in the fields from an early age. My parents wanted us to study but life was hard. We*

*were villagers so sending us to high school in Radost wasn't an option. Also, you know by the time I was fifteen I was going out with Mitko* (now her husband) *and we got married soon after. Studying was out of question. Today I want better life for my Silvia. She must study.'*

Silvia's father, grandmother, grandfather and aunty were waiting outside in front of the gate dressed in their best attire for the occasion. '*You must study unlike your Grandpa and Grandma*' – said Silvia's grandfather. '*Be blessed my dear child, in all you do*.' – said her Grandma. The aunty, after whom Silvia was named, was a high school teacher in a nearby city. She embraced her niece and said '*You will study in the best school and one day you will replace aunty as a teacher in her school. Agreed?*' Silvia nodded enthusiastically and as they walked to the centre of town throughout the neighbourhood people on their left and right were wishing Silvia and her family well.

A month after Silvia's first day at school, Mila called Neli and me to tell us about her experience of dealing with the *Gymnasium*. Silvia was bullied by another pupil who did not want to sit next to her as she was a '*tsiganka*'. Mila was disappointed and although she herself was used to discriminatory attitudes she wanted to protect Silvia from being exposed to discrimination. This, however, was out of her control now that Silvia was outside the community. She talked to the class teacher who promised to speak to the child's parents but the teacher also mentioned that she could not guarantee that this case will not happen again. The teacher eventually moved Silvia to the desks in the end of the classroom to sit on her own. Silvia was the only Roma child in her class and she came home upset that there was no one to play with her.

Mila faced a dilemma, a decision that Roma parents face daily – to send her child to experience discrimination at school or shield her at home. Mila had taken a loan to pay for Silvia's uniform and school materials. Even though she considered education important for

her child, she also saw such expenses as an obstacle. Primary education in Bulgaria is officially free of charge, but basic costs such as buying clothes, books or any additional expenses must be covered by the parents. Mila shared her regret that she sent Silvia to the *Gymnasium*. The school represented a hostile environment, a place where children experienced prejudice and it became "a mechanism that reproduces inequality" (Daskalaki 2004). Eventually, Mila ended up transferring Silvia to Mr Janakiev's school.

**Emi**

Various stereotypes were utilized, acted on, and even incorporated in the school curriculum and the social service provision. Below are the pictures of a textbook in Bulgarian literature which Emi, the mother of 9 year-old Snezhana, showed me. 'Her textbook tells her that *tsiganite* (Gypsies) are ugly, bad liars'. Emi was referring to a well-known Bulgarian story tale called the 'Unborn maiden' written by the famous Bulgarian writer Ran Bosilek. The prince in the tale ends up marrying the bad, black and ugly t*siganka* (Gypsy woman) who lied to the beautiful and naïve white and golden maiden with whom the prince had fallen in love. The *tsiganka* did this in order to take the maiden's place in the prince's palace. Snezhana came back home and kept asking her parents why they were called '*tsigani*' (gypsies) and that she did not like her 'brown' skin as it looked like the skin colour of the 'gypsy' woman in her textbook. The depiction of the white maiden and the 'gypsy' woman is seen in the photos below.

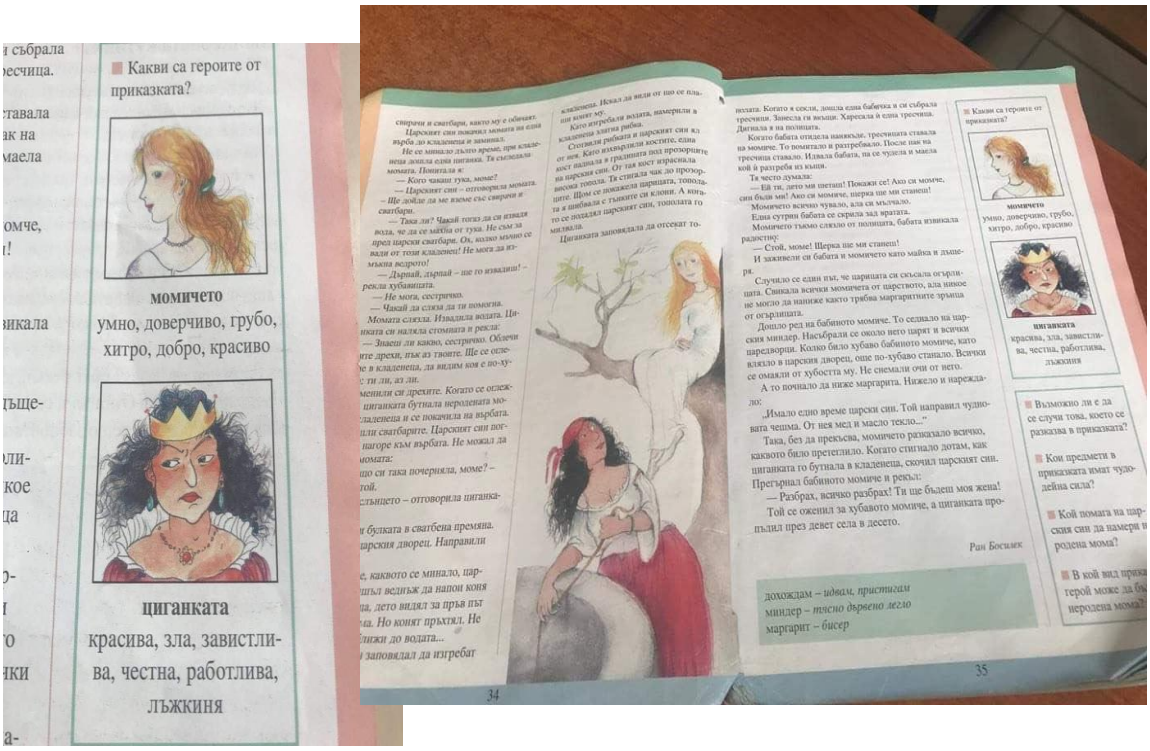

Image 24. The ‘ugly Gypsy’ woman and the ‘beautiful Golden Girl’

The text is followed by a question about the qualities of the main characters in the fairy-tale – the maiden – clever, trusting, beautiful, etc., and the tsiganka – bad, jealous and lying. Children have to link these descriptions with each of the two story characters. The story is about rejecting everything deemed ‘gypsy’ as bad and ugly. In theory and in practice education was supposed to allow children to develop into autonomous adults to be able to function in society on an equal basis with everyone else. The ‘Unborn Maiden’ fairy-tale is an active part of racializing by constructing the national ‘good’ versus the minority ‘bad’, while simultaneously ‘othering’ Roma. This identity-based discrimination trickles through the inequity of education and these state articulations of race lead to ‘internationalision of exclusion’ (Goldberg 2002) amongst the non-dominant group and a ubiquitous sense of nationhood amongst the dominant society (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Snezhana was 9 years old and hence ‘she knew how to read and count’, so Emi decided to stop her from attending

school. School presented Snezhana with practical knowledge and she was able to start helping her mother in her little shop selling sweets.

**Rumi**

I met Rumi, the mother of a 4 year old girl, at the central playground in Radost which was accessed by all children. She was disappointed that her daughter was not accepted by one of the town's mainstream kindergartens. '*For decades there has been discrimination in the education system in Radost. It all started from a kindergarten that was designed to accept only Roma children only because the Bulgarians did not want to mix with our children. This doesn't bother some Roma parents because they silently resign to what is being said about them. I myself went to the 'tsiganska' (Gypsy) kindergarten but I want my children to have a better future. I would like them to have the same chances to education as the Bulgarian children.'* When Rumi wanted to meet with the director of the best kindergarten in town, which the locals referred to as the Palace, it was difficult to arrange a meeting. The teachers told her that there were no more available places but she kept asking for a meeting with the director, who eventually met with her and told her. '*You have your own kindergarten. Even though, your child looks clean and well-behaved, I don't want more of your people to send their children here.'* Roma and Bulgarian, as two categories, were mutually exclusive and could not exist together at the same time and space. Rumi felt as if she was 'a second hand human' ('*chovek vtoro kachestvo*') but she did not give up. She asked me to help her with writing a letter to the Municipal Council. Following this the director of the kindergarten was asked 'to compromise' and accept Rumi's daughter into her kindergarten.

**Krassimira**

Krassimira was spending every afternoon helping her two children, one aged 11 and the other 17, with their homework. She worked as a cleaner in a local hotel and made arrangements to

be at home every afternoon before she went back to work in the evening. She was determined to help her 17-year-old daughter to be accepted at university and wanted to save as much as possible although her family struggled financially. Krassimira's husband was working abroad in sporadic seasonal work and he was not able to save enough money to send back home to support her. Krassimira narrated how she was perceived as a parent by close family and the community. *'It is very hard to be a Roma mother. For example, if our children are sick we would go alone to the doctor as our men never come with us. Usually this is the responsibility of the mother. It is different for the Bulgarian parents; they both go to the hospital when their children are sick, or when there are parents' meetings in school, or when parents need to help each other. I go to the parents' meeting on my own and that is if I can escape from work. If I don't attend these meetings, the teachers say that I am an irresponsible parent, they tell my children off.'* Krasimira would give her last money to see her children finish school. The best advice she had for her daughter was to keep away from boys while she was studying because this would save her from an early marriage and from repeating her mother's struggles.

**Nevena**

It was a warm summer evening and Nevena's husband was sitting in front of the house drinking beer together with the neighbours. I asked whether his wife was at home and he pointed me to her towards their backyard. In almost apologetic voice, Nevena's husband told me that he had stopped his daughter Mirka from attending school. '*This school business is no good. She can stay at home and help us.*' Nevena's husband did not disclose more details but he sent me to his wife, as if there was more to the story but he could not talk about this. '*Go see her; I will bring you some sunflower seeds*'[21]. Nevena was sitting in the garden with her

[21] The eating of sunflower seeds accommodates long conversations but it has also become an inseparable part of everyday relaxation in the neighbourhood. The sunflower seeds - roasted with the shells and covered with salt and flour – were the treat for many a conversation I had. In early post-socialist Bulgaria the sunflower seed trade

sister-in-law and a neighbour. I understood that one day on Mirka's way to school a car pulled right in front of her and took her in. '*This silly boy from that village wanted to marry Mirka so he decided to abduct her. I tell you, the anger and the rage we felt when we learned about this. Awful.*' A man from the neighbourhood saw this and called Mirka's father, so he and his sons jumped into the car and went straight to the boy's house. Luckily, the boy took her to a local café to explain his love for her before he took her to his family. By this time, Mirka's father and brothers were there already and took her back home. In answer to my question whether they called the police, Nevena looked at me with unbelief. '*Are you crazy? How would you call the police? What if the boy slept with her? How would we carry that shame with us?*' How could I forget? To prevent people from talking about Mirka's 'honour', Mirka's parents stopped her from going to school by guarding her well to preserve the family's dignity intact. Mirka was heavily guarded by everyone and most of all by her two brothers who were ready to fight any young man who dared to approach her. Mirka's honour had become even a matter of protection by the neighbours. '*I know you like schools and things but Mirka needs to stay home. Her parents are doing the right thing.*' – the neighbour told me. Interestingly, I had expressed preference or support neither towards the decision of Mirka's parents nor for the school. Mirka and her parents received a call from her class teacher to affirm how well Mirka was doing at school and that it was a pity to prevent her from further education. The parents kept repeating that Mirka did not need to study anymore since she was going to help with the family business. There were two different understandings, values, and morals: the parents thought they were saving Mirka's future by making sure that she was going to marry properly and the teacher thought that they were preventing Mirka from having good future by ceasing school attendance. Cupelin (2017), in her account of the Kalajdzii Roma in Bulgaria, reflects on this moral clash and contends that

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used to be the domain of mainly elderly women facing poverty, but also many Roma women would roast sunflower seeds, wrap them in newspaper cones and sell them to earn a living.

early drop-out is often ethnisized and attributed to 'culture' and poverty without consideration of the history of the practice and its appropriation from a wider social context. Schooling is seen by the state as a moral obligation and anything, including marriage, to prevent schooling is morally wrong (Tesar 2012; Covai 2011; Cupelin 2017). It was easier for Mirka's parents to accept the moral stance of the school and to quietly resists it than having to explain the details of why Mirka neededed to stay at home in accordance with the communal understanding. This was summarised by Nevena: '*Mirka's teacher will never understand that honour is more important than school. One day Mirka's husband won't look at her diploma and congratulate her on her good marks. He will treat her well if she is honourable.*'

Externally, the parents appeared relieved because they had managed to 'prevent the worst' and to protect Mirka from becoming 'dishonourable' (meaning not a virgin), even not desired (see e.g. Gay y Blasco 2012) and defiled (Miller 1998). In private, however, the situation was more complex. Both parents were divided and struggled with the choice they made. Mirka's mother had dreams for her daughter. She thought that Mirka would become a lawyer one day and earlier in my fieldwork she shared with me how she would have moved to wherever Mirka was going to study in order to support her. It was not an easy decision. Mirka's mother searched for my approval. '*I know you would understand me, Iliana. Who would let their daughter go to school after what happened. The people in the neighbourhood are talking already that she is not honourable. Nothing happened to put this shame on my daughter's head and our family. Who would marry her if I let her go back to school? We are not like the Bulgarians whose daughters can do whatever they like; they go to school freely, they get educated, have good jobs, and marry men whom they want to be with.'* Finding a husband, being married and being part of kindred was more important than anything school was going to give Mirka. The approval of the community, the close kin, the sociality around her, was

more important because this was the place where they had 'become' who they were, and they could not imagine a rupture with what was expected of them. This is what Herzfeld calls "cultural intimacy" (2005) that is "the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality" (2005:3). A few months later Mirka married the boy who allegedly abducted her and I was invited to her wedding. Marriage was paramount and in Chapter 6 I provide more details as to why.

In this section I gave examples of Roma parents and their individual circumstances in order to provide how education is reproduced and confronted by the state as well as by the kin. In the narratives the state continued to isolate, perpetuate and enforce its dominant 'culture' but there was no attempt to understand the internal struggles faced by the parents. The parents, on the other hand, responded differently. Authors have brought forward the perspective in regards the separation between Roma and nonRoma/ internal and external/state and non-state in regards to Roma education as essential for protecting Roma-nness/Gypsiness (Okely 1997, Gay y Blasco 2016; Daskalaki 2004, Engebrigtsen 2015, Dunajeva 2017). Engebrigtsen contends that in the Norwegian educational context "Roma are obsessed with keeping separate what can be kept separate; language, knowledge and morality (2015: 122). While I saw elements of protecting identification in my fieldwork, I did not witness "obsession" or preoccupation to keep necessarily separate. On the contrary, parents and children saw that they were not accepted by the dominant education system and this is when they decided to be separate. Mila and Emi were painfully aware of the discrimination faced by their young children. Mila made the choice to move her daughter to a different school and Emi decided to shield her daughter at home. Rumi wanted her child to 'get used' to being in the 'outside' world of a mainstream kindergarten from an early age, which she believed would guarantee more acceptance and better education results as her child grew up. Krassimira gave

everything to see her children get education at any price as she believed this will give them a better future in spite of her financial struggles. Nevena faced what the community perceived as the 'unthinkable' and had to sacrifice her daughter's education so that she can be accepted in the community and have her own family one day. Moreover, these different parental responses provide a clue as to the 'imperfect', fuzzy, non-identical nature of relationships 'inside' the kin and the community. Inequality was not only present in the Roma versus nonRoma or state versus kin divide but there were different layers of inequality existing within each realm. For instance, Roma women were primarily defined by the roles of mothers and wives and they were the ones responsible for all aspects of their children's lives, including their education. For the purpose of brevity here I do not engage with the gendered aspects of education responsibilities within the kin. Nevertheless, I find the analysis of Roma women as the bearers of all responsibilities in regards to children's education important and I will come back to this again.

I highlighted the role of the 'informal', the kin perceptions of education, seen as the opposite of state education, and the influence of parents, kin and peers, in shaping Roma pupils' views on education. This competition between the home and the school/the state—to bring up Roma children with appropriate values, morality and control—creates two impossible worlds for Roma children (Engebrigtsen 2015, Voiculescu 2019, Stewart 1997; Gay y Blasco 2016). Schools can seem rather external, 'foreign', unwelcoming and non-accessible to Roma parents and their children. In practice schools reinforce their 'otherness', despite education being considered to be the most important aspect of 'Roma inclusion' (Vermeersch 2006; van Baar 2011; Gay y Blasco 2016). What is common in the narratives so far is that social policies regarding education view Roma children only through the prism of citizenship, namely to produce adequate adult citizens with an ability for self-governance (Gay y Blasco 2016:447). Yet, education participation rates among Roma children are low not only in

Bulgaria but across Europe (Cashman 2016; Engebrigsten 2015). Children learn that they do not fit into a system designed to support values which they are not associated with and teachers (and other state agents) see them as non-compatible, not integrated within such a system (Hagatun 2020). Such type of schooling, as "commonsensical and unavoidable" it may appear is "extremely difficult to challenge and dismantle" (Gay y Blasco 2016:447).

**The Children**

In this section I focus on life and education 'inside' the Roma family and neighbourhood from the perspective of children. I look at adulthood as corresponding with childhood as a social category within a chronological time (Hockey and James 2002), fixed and translated through social practices inside the Roma kin, neighbourhood and domain as opposed to the state practices outside the community. Conclusively, this framework shows that the 'child' as a social category in the Roma and nonRoma contexts is in many ways arbitrary. Notions of what it is to be 'a child' vary within and between cultures, over time and across generations (James and James 2004). The popular understanding is that childhood is a critical period for preparing children for their future roles as adults. Traditional theories of childhood view childhood primarily as a preparation for adulthood and consider children only in terms of their future becomings, rather than being 'somebody' in their own right (Walkerdine 1993). Moreover, discourses about Roma children in the social sciences and in policies tend to also view Roma children as 'innocent victims' with endangered future who are at risk from 'irresponsible' Roma parents or discriminating school institutions and teachers. In the narratives, both by state and kin, Roma children are often represented in terms of their futures. What is missing here is the children's 'now' experiences and the complex relationship between their past, present and future. This involves recognising a range of social and cultural norms that influence Roma children's choices within their families and the

wider society. From the stories I present in this section it becomes clear that the cultural and social agency of Roma children can determine their school performance and success levels. In the process of talking to them I saw children as active participants whose perspectives were not only important in their own right but whose accounts are taken as competent portrayals of their experiences (Thelen and Haukanes 2010).

**Snezhana (9 years old)**

Snezhana, Emi's daughter to whom I refer to earlier in the chapter, is a bright girl who did well in her education but eventually was stopped from attending school. She was the child that noticed how '*the tsiganka'* is portrayed in the famous Bulgarian 'Unborn Maiden' fairy tale (see image 24 above). At age nine Snezhana was helping her single mother with cleaning, cooking and looking after her brothers.

Iliana: Who is a child Snezhana?

Snezhana: *You have to be good, to go to school, to help... You know I go to school with Marko* (her younger brother) *and he is only little, so I fight with the children who hit him at school. Marko is a child.*

Iliana: Why do they hit him?

Snezhana: *They call him dirty Gypsy and then hit him but I then hit them back*.

Iliana: What does Mom say about this? (Emi was upset that she didn't know about this).

Snezhana: *I don't know. I don't like school anyway.*

Iliana: Mum knows now. Maybe she can help?

Snezhana: *She is 'tsiganka' too. They won't like her at school.*

Snezhana understood that family was above everything else. She not only protected her brother at school but she also spared her mother from the details of knowing what her children were experiencing. Her moral stance was centred in the protection of her kin. She knew how she was perceived and that the presence of her mother at school was not going to

help her. Research has presented that Roma morality and values are closely connected with the understanding of the Roma 'habitus', or the belonging to family and kin, and the great sense of personal and collective autonomy (Engebrigtsen 2007, 2013; Fraser 1995; Mirga 1992; Stewart 1997). Snezhana acted autonomously to defend her brother, despite being seen as aggressive at school, and wanted to protect her mother from being exposed to discrimination. She had also understood what the school 'expected' of her as a Roma child, how she was perceived by this 'outside' world and she acted upon these expectations. The 'informal', the home and the kinship relationships – the cleaning, the care for her brothers, and the help in her mother's sweets' shop were the unknown activities in the 'external' world of state education. In reality, Snezhana was the epitome of what is seen to be a 'good' child inside the community as her help was invaluable to her single mother. Ironically, the 'outside' world did not seem to be interested in Snezhana's domestic experience, yet both domains (state and kin) aimed to produce 'good children', by playing this out in different ways. In this sense, the state and the home were producing the same outcome of the crafting of a 'good' self.

**Iskra (7 years old)**

Iskra had just started school in Mr Janakiev's school. Her class teacher was concerned that Iskra's strong accent in Bulgarian was becoming problematic at school. Children laughed at her and she began to withdraw from participating in class. Her peers were also calling her 'the tsiganka who cannot speak'. Iskra's parents spoke to her mainly in Romanes and Turkish at home and Neli asked me to help by reading and talking to Iskra in Bulgarian. I spent a few afternoons with her so she found courage to question me: '*Where is your mother*?' I explained that she was at home and that I was in Radost because I wanted to learn and write a book about children like her. She laughed '*A book? Only teachers make books.*' Apart from the Bible in the corner of a cupboard there were no other books in Iskra's home. Iskra's

parents were learning to write and read in the local church where Neli and Mrs Manova were providing literacy classes to adults, and they had acquired the Bible in church. '*Are you a teacher also?*' Iskra asked me. I told her that I wasn't but that perhaps she would like to be a teacher one day. '*No, I want to be like mama. I want to feed my baby…*' she replied. Her mother interrupted her '*You don't want to be nobody like me*.' and then she turned to me: '*School is good but I don't want her to be upset by the Bulgarians. As long as she can count and read, I will be happy*.' Iskra did progress with her spoken Bulgarian in the next couple of months but her peers continued to call her '*the tsiganka that cannot speak*'. It had not occurred to them, or perhaps, it did not matter that at age seven Iskra spoke three languages (Turkish, Romanes and Bulgarian) which was more languages than most of the Radost children knew. Her Romanes and Turkish language acquisition belonged to the private, 'internal', non-state realm. It did not fit with the political, the mainstream and the moral. Kinship had its limitations (Pine 2018:100) and the mother tongue mattered only in these 'internal' circumstances. In the end of the day she was in a Bulgarian school and had to speak Bulgarian 'properly'.

**Nicol (11 years old)**

Nikol was 11 years old when I met her. She was *otlichnichka* (excellent student) in Mrs Stoyanova's school. Her class teacher was supportive of Nicol's progress and thought that Nicol was highly unusual in her pursuit of learning and enjoying all school subjects. Nicol's mother and father never finished primary school. Lena, Nicol's mother, was humble about her child's excellent school record. '*It is always difficult to find money for clothes, for books, for breakfast…but we do what we can. It is up to Nicol to decide whether she studies or not. I can't help her with her homework. She does it herself.*' Nicol had three older siblings who left school early so there was no one to help her with schoolwork at home but she persevered. At home there was no pressure on her to do well and at school she had to compete with the

requirements of the school. How she negotiated both worlds was by performing differently in each of them: '*At school I am not tsiganka'*. She had learned to 'act' as a nonRoma in her school, which she understood as 'doing well at school'. She had become 'the unusual' student in Mrs Stoyanova's school. What her teachers did not know was that Nicol had her parents' complete trust and autonomy to choose whether to study or not. She was unusual within her family as the only child that was still in school. Nicol dreamed of becoming a doctor so that she can help her sick grandmother. In order to achieve her dream she had to experience, express, manage and perform her identity differently and according to context (see also Butler 1993). Nicol's independence was commendable and although she did very well at school, I doubt her peers and teachers knew how challenging it was for her to navigate the two different worlds of kinship and school.

**Stefan (12 year old)**

Stefan was not keen on going to school. Although he was receiving support from Mrs Manova he was lagging behind other pupils. His absences from school had reached the maximum tolerance and Mr Janakiev asked for Neli's help in mediating with Stefan's family as a last resource. Stefan's mother was working abroad and he and his siblings were looked after by their father. The father worked as a lumberjack at night because he did not have a certificate to cut wood in the local forests. Stefan would often join his father at night and then he would miss school the next morning. Neli and I visited Stefan's home. '*I just don't like school. I can earn money like my dad. I like to clean and feed our horse. I want to go in the forest.*' - he told us. Neli and I could not convince Stefan to go to back to school. Just like Nicol he had a complete autonomy in making a decision whether to attend school or not. Stefan's case reminds me of Willis' book *Learning to Labour - How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (1977) about the structural organisation of children's lives as regards to education. Willis suggests that viewing working class boys only as failed by the system is too

simplistic. Drawing on Bourdieu, Willis sees schools as serving the reproduction of the 'dominant' culture, but they contain within them individuals and groups with differing cultural norms who contribute to the process of subversion. The analysis of the attitudes and behaviours of the subordinate group, however, is often excluded. Willis presents a reality where working class children do not put their trust in diplomas and qualifications since achieving these is not likely to change their position in society but merely serves to establish and reinforce who remains at the top of the social hierarchy (ibid). Stefan had decided that school is no longer necessary for him since he wanted to follow in his father's steps and support the family economy. But there was something else that is important to point out also. Just like Willis' boys Stefan was loyal to his father – he was "the lad of dad" (Willis 1977:14) –Stefan's father did not finish school and became a labourer from an early age – so Stefan felt that to aspire to something different would be disloyal, almost as if he was disowning his father and trying to do 'better'. Therefore emotionally, psychologically and physically with his presence at school he could not put much value on education.

Research with Roma children in different contexts, especially in countries facing poverty, has tended to focus on children's involvement in economic activities as preventing their attendance to school (Daskalaki 2004; Dunajeva 2017) and on the provision of alternative forms of education inside the family (Okely 1997). Through the course of my research I found that the biggest fear of the teachers and child protection professionals was idleness, children being out of control, being involved in criminal activities as opposed to not being actively engaged in schooling. Children needed to be influenced by people other than their parents who were believed to carry higher moral authority. Externally, 'the good child' was to attend and do well at school.The opposite of this is found in the role of the family, kin and peers and the contesting of what is a 'good child', how to raise or become one. Internally, within the kin, to be a 'good child' meant to be a good daughter, sibling, son, and grandchild,

to partitipate in the family economy, to support your kin. The importance of kinship was paramount. Children had adjusted to navigate through these contradicting worlds and multiple demands. They were also given moral autonomy to decide for themselves and to prioritise demands (Stewart 1997). Surely, such navigations needed good socio-emotional skills which, in fact, schools are meant to teach. Paradoxically, much attention is being focused on developing curricula to support Roma children through instruction and training, but there is less interest in what happens inside families and what children and parents perceive as moral and important. This un-interest leads to contradictions – well meant inclusion, yet resulting in exclusion and divisions in two parallel worlds of different moralities and expectations. Indeed, the clash of different moralities and the contradictions they posed for the children were not necessarily known by both teachers and parents. Going back to the main argument of this thesis, by providing a diversity of situations and characters, I wanted to illustrate how homogenising experiences, situations, persons and identities can lead to misunderstandings.

**Conclusion**

The focal point of analysis in this chapter was to explore how and why the state acts in particular way and how these actions affect the choices made by Roma parents and children in regards to education. There is a universal assumption amongst the professionals in Radost that the critical role of schools is to teach morality, citizenship and discipline to all children. The disciplining force of institutions (Bourdieu 1998; Foucault 1991) to organise time and space, roles and relations, are perhaps the most important resources of the state in its controlling and guiding role for a population. The granularity of the invisible stories, the intimacy of the kinship relationships, and the local expressions of culture did not matter for the formal realm of the state. Clark (1998) summarises this in that whatever area we research,

be it “education or health, the states’ activities regarding the care and control of its Gypsy and Traveller citizens often appears to be confused, shifting between the punitive and restrictive as well as being ill-informed and lacking any kind of joined-up coherent strategy” (Clark 2008:66). The context in which the state interventions and values operate are non-negotiable but in the everyday realities of both state and kin actors there are spaces for negotiation. Still, there were those state actors such as Mr Janakiev and Mrs Manova who saw the incommensurability of the education system in which they functioned. The state is not an ‘unemotional’ system, a robot and a machine as it consists of physical bodies that think and act subjectively (Fassin 2015; Foucault 1984). What is apparent in the situations I described is that a particular individual’s attitude towards education is considered deeply moral according to one person’s values but wrong and immoral according to another’s.

This chapter presented many actors - educators, parents, children and their peers as I felt I needed to present the diversity of responses to education. I presented how these choices are valued or contested by the state actors and the kin respectively. I also attempted to show what effects these contestations have on children and this exploration I feel would entail further research. Nevertheless, it is my hope that by showing the many singular experiences, the controversies, the personal dilemmas, hopes and desires, one can comprehend how complex, yet unique is the disentangling of Roma identification.

Lastly, I will make a brief note of my positional. This chapter was influenced not only by the views of Roma parents, children and professionals but also by my perceptions as a researcher. Since anthropology has been concerned with the issue of morality for a while (Fassin 2012) and this requires the development of a reflexive critical awareness of one’s own moral preconceptions I also need to account for why I chose the information I presented here. In order to understand Roma parents and children I needed to live, engage and learn from them about the way in which they saw and understood the social world around them. As a Roma

researcher I had to recognise my own moral understanding of the importance of education and needed to examine my own preconceptions. My informants recognised me as someone who approved of acquiring education. This is why Iskra's mother asked me to help with homework. Krassimira, whose daughter was accepted at the university, told me that she wanted her daughter to become a teacher and that '*who knows, she might write a book like you one day'*. Mirka's family sought my approval even though I had not expressed an opinion as regards to Mirka's education. I felt that at times parents wanted to give me 'the right answers' because they were aware of the differing moralities inside and outside the community and I had access to both. Admittedly, my leading assumption prior to embarking on research was that schools primarily necessitate knowledge transfer and although, theoretically, I knew that schools are also a cultural system, in practice I became increasingly more aware that the school is where individuals' values are being transferred. Along the way, I came across individuals who challenged the status quo – these were the few but committed teachers who saw children as equal, the parents who strove for what they believed can lead to the better future of their children inside or outside school and the children who bravely made difficult choices in regards to their education. My preconceptions were challenged. Thus in line with what this thesis is about here in this chapter I also reflected on the tensions between different actors, between domains – private and political, kinship and polity, the ideologies that affect power relations. I presented snapshots of the multi-layered and often contradictory experience of marginality whilst exploring the highly individualised, subjective and circumstantial nature of identification in the case of Roma in Bulgaria. I aimed to paint an 'imperfect' picture, familiar to the human condition, that shows one's ability to live in the now and aspire to 'become' in the future.

# Chapter 4. The 'Hyperreal' vis-à-vis the Everyday Roma - Identity and Activism

## Introduction

Earlier in this thesis I reflected briefly on the concept of engaged anthropology. As a Roma child I had some incredibly 'engaged' role models to follow in my own family and I never imagined being un-engaged. I remember my father painting the local Roma *chitalishte* during his annual leave and taking me with him to help. My mother encouraged me and my sisters to do well at school so we can 'help our people'. My grandmother told me: '*You may dream about other worlds but you must never forget your beginnings*'. She herself knitted socks and cardigans which she gifted to the people in the neighbourhood. My aunt, a pre-school teacher, encouraged me '*If it is possible for me to dream, you can dream too*'. Thus I decided that I was going to become a nurse and help my people. Upon my graduation from medical college I applied for a job in the local hospital. Following this the hospital director called me and informed me that although he was not disqualifying me from the application process he needed assurance from the mayor before he offered me a job. The mayor had warned him to keep all jobs for people whom he approved of, including not giving any cleaning jobs to *tsiganite*. An application from a Roma nurse could set a precedent in a small provincial town in the early 2000s. Apparently, the mayor used his control over the state-funded jobs to make sure he had supporters for the next local election. My application was turned down, so I enrolled into further studies and commenced work at the regional non-governmental organisation. This is when I was introduced to the civil society world of Roma activism. Naturally, years later when I commenced fieldwork my first contacts in the field came from NGOs. Non-engagement was out of question for me. I was expected and expected of myself to be engaged, to give back to the community, to 'do good' (Fisher 1997). So, this chapter

contains as much of me as of my informants. What I present here are themes that have been woven into my existence for a long time. Again, in the same vein as in the previous chapters, I present a complex picture of fragmentation to challenge binary thinking and see value in the focus on the granular experience. The ethnographic material here shows instability, tensions, ambiguity but not only; these spaces, narratives and unstable categories can also yield some highly productive discussion points (Lewish and Shuller 2017).

I reflect on the 'emergence' of the Roma–related 'nongovernmental' (van Baar 2018:28). Although, I provide a brief overview of the development of Roma 'non-governmentalism', my aim is not to distinguish, fix or add to different categorisations and forms of Roma activism. Neither do I aim to historicise Roma-related NGO development, because other authors have focused on this (Mirga and Gheorghe1997; Vermeersh 2006, 2006, 2012a; van Baar 2011, 2018). What I do aim is to interrogate the meaning of the 'supposedly unitary category' of the 'non-governmental' through presenting multiple approaches to show how unstable this category is (Lewish and Shuller 2017:634). Since activism is performed by a wide variety of actors who have different professions: teachers, social workers, health mediators, researchers, economists; people of different hierarchical positions, of different ethnicity, gender and class, my goal is to show the diversity of narratives 'within' the 'non-governmental' category as a way of informing theory and practice. Just as the state is not monolithic (Abrahms 1988) neither is the 'non-governmental' and we ought to learn from this.

It has been natural for me to be engaged in NGO work as I was driven to 'better', even change, the work of the state and I illustrate here that this is indeed the grand intention of activism. First, I argue that Roma-related activism aims to correct the actions or non-actions of the state by recreating its work vis-à-vis state processes, including emphasising

bureaucratic practices as its "frame of reference" (Fosztó 2018:128). NGO professionals may not be functioning as employees of the state but they are instrumental in enacting government policies. Activism can "mimic" the state (Bhabha 1984:127), an inherently relational activity through which non-government attempts to achieve social recognition by state and others and I show NGO workers as "ordinary people'" through whose "lives and practices the idea of the state takes shape" (Navaro-Yashin 2012:122).

Second, the NGO/humanitarian realm is often seen as a weak sector "but it is this weakness that is the source of its strength. It brings a moral sense to politics— although not without some ambiguity" (Fassin 2013:37). I contend that there are multiple interests on the part of NGO workers and the communities they work with – from purely altruistic and ideological to practical self-realisation and perpetuation of Roma 'victimhood' (Guy 2013) to ensure continuity of NGO existence. I put forward the case for studying the ways in which humanitarianism (NGO-ism) shapes practices that support the development of policies and the power relations between those who help and the ones who are helped.

Third, I illustrate that engagement can have undesirable and contradictory effects and that it may also be the only alternative for Roma students and graduates (also called 'the Roma elites') in order to find professional realisation. Again, along the lines of the main idea of the thesis, I follow the plot of individuals in order to identify the many juxtaposed contexts, through which identification in social life is empirically negotiated. Crucially, I value the importance of understanding the lifeworlds of both the NGO employees and the people whom they help. The stories in this chapter contain reflections on change in social status, expectations from within and outside the community, acceptance, and identity choice. The individual stories, including my own, convey the multitude of complex social positions contained in the everyday. Undeniably, these narratives present contradictions and challenges

and I focus on these conflicting issues in order to continue shedding light on the process of 'becoming'.

**The 'Non-governmental category'**

There has been an increase in the study of NGOs by anthropologists in the wake of globalisation (Appadurai 1991). Fisher (1997) recognised NGOs as important political and civil actors applying Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' (1991), whereby states began to view NGOs as tools to increase their power. Ferguson and Gupta (2002) showed that the delegation of previous state responsibilities to NGOs is part of a specific system of 'governmentality'. Further, Lewis and Shuller 2017 assert that the interest in the NGO sector emerged as a result of the development of neoliberal policies. For example, the World Bank promoted 'good governance' among international development agencies in the 1980s and saw private civil society as service providers alongside the state or commissioned by the state (ibid). This was particularly important in the early post socialist period - the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and the American (and other western) government(s) pushed NGOs and the development of neoliberal ventures as an alternative to the socialist (welfare) state, including Bulgaria, which was being diminished in the most acute ways of re-structuring in the 90s (Kaneff 2019). The withdrawal of the state had to be balanced, if only to a miniscule extent, by the offer of something else, and this was the NGO and 'know how' sector (Lewis 2007; van Baar 2018). NGOs became the vehicle for collective action and social change. 'Non-governmentalism' was introduced as an integral part of neoliberalist policy (Lewis 2007).

In the post–Cold War period the scope of civil society in postsocialist countries in Eastern Europe increased dramatically and was an integral part of policy change (Hann and Dunn 1996, Comaroff and Comaroff 1998). Since 1989 there has been a massive development of

NGOs that focus energy on Roma populations' access to education, employment, housing and health, among other. Gheorghe and Mirga (1998) call this process the 'ethnic awakening' and the rise of Roma 'ethnonationalism'. Different research sources point to Roma activism first being recorded in the 1970s, although Hancock (2003) contends that there were forms of Roma activism prior to this. The World Roma Congress, the International Roma Union, and the Roma National Congress were established in the 1970s. In post-socialist societies Roma engaged in a process of political mobilisation and non-governmental organizations became increasingly important institutional actors. Since the burgeoning of Roma civil society, the term Gypsy or *tsiganin* in Bulgaria and across European countries has increasingly come to be seen as a pejorative term. Guy (2013) and Acton (2000) record that it was not until communism fell that the term 'Roma' began to be used widely, including in policy language.[22] Dunajeva (2017:61) calls this transition to be the construction of the image of the 'bad Gypsy' which historically has been an image reproduced by nation building efforts but also internalized by the community itself. Civil society played an important role in contributing to the replacement of 'Gypsy' or *tsigan(in)/ka* with 'Roma'. This in itself is a remarkable achievement, as in policy language and to a large degree in academia, on a wide geographical scale today communities are united under the umbrella term 'Roma', a term that has also come to be politically institutionalized by state and non-state practices. Presenting Roma as one identifiable group with common attributes such as language, culture and common experience of discrimination is meant to create empowerment and social change.

NGOs undertook an approach envisaging the engagement of Roma in order to make their voice heard as civil society actors. Today, concepts such as 'Roma integration' and 'social inclusion' have become the common vocabulary of international non-governmental and

[22] Amongst Roma who speak in the Romani language the word 'Roma' has been used since before the communist regime and the Ottoman rule in Bulgaria. 'Roma' in the Romani language means 'man' or 'human'.

governmental organisations alike. Roma identity is conceptualised as 'ethnoclass' and focuses on the alleviation of poverty and improvement of their socio-economic situation through education, housing and employment (Vermeersch 2012b). While Roma were not part of the official and expert discourse prior to 1989, they have become the main focus of the political and scientific scrutiny (Surdu 2014). "They have become more than simply the subject of discourses and programs of inclusion, development, and empowerment; they have now also become critical voices in debates about their status as European, national or ethnic minorities" (van Baar and Vermeersch 2017:121). So, in a sense, Roma NGO activism is seen as empowering because of its engagement with identity politics and focus on policy influences for 'Roma inclusion'.

Nevertheless, there has been a critique of NGO activism in Romani Studies also. Activism has been described as "ethnobusiness", "the Gypsy industry", "NGO-isation" (van Baar 2018:37). Roma activism can at times reify boundaries between Roma and nonRoma actors (Vermeersch 2012a; van Baar 2011). The process of Roma mobilization, including the creation of the 'Roma elite', consisting of well educated Roma professionals, politicians, artists and other 'who became increasingly articulate' (Vermeersch 2001:4) also brought forward tensions. In more recent years, although the number of activists has increased, authors suggest that they have disassociated from 'local knowledge' (Trehan 2009). These 'elites' are not likely to be found among local communities as their legitimacy for community representation is highly contested (ibid; Vermeersch 2006). The reason being that members of grassroots Roma communities may not necessarily know about the movement happening at higher policy levels, while the Roma individuals who partake in 'transnational mobilization' (van Baar 2011) are of higher-level positions, with access to financial, social and political resources (Barany 2002; McGarry 2010; Vermeersch 2006; Trehan and Kocze 2009). This was not necessarily true for my informants, who considered themselves to be part

of 'the Roma elite' and were intimately aware of the issues faced by their contemporaries, be they health, education, employment and other. Alienation and rejection of the grassroots however did happen also and I shall illustrate this through the life stories that follow. Taking into consideration the literature on Roma activism, I argue that creating binaries and categories of engaged versus non-engaged, elite versus grassroots, 'for' or 'against' NGOs (Van Baar 2018:28) may not be totally useful for theory and even more importantly in practice, for the actual positive effects in Roma lives. Through the very useful lens of ethnography we can understand how everyday activism is performed. 'Rather than attempting to fix the category or contest the boundaries implied by it' (Lewis and Schuller 2017:634), I am interested in interrogating the meanings behind the contestations themselves.

**The 'hyperreal Roma', the 'stupidity of bureaucracy' and 'the gift'**

Peter Vermeersch ends one of his articles (2001:16) with the question "How to build a movement on a spoiled identity?", drawing on Goffman's term "spoiled identity" (1963) to refer to an identity that causes stigmatization. Vermeersch contends that some Roma communities have become somewhat 'ambivalent' towards being associated with a 'spoiled' or 'project identity' (Vermeersch 2001:16). What the author means is that Roma in political terms have come to be associated with vulnerability, marginality, poverty, in 'need of saving' – identity which is constructed not necessarily by the identity holders themselves. Trubeta (2013) also argues that while earlier state policies focused on the 'failure' of Roma to adapt to the norms of the state, the current tendencies are to view Roma as marginal, vulnerable and excluded. This allows institutions to justify the use of education, for example, as a policy for assimilation and 'civilising' (Clark 2008). Non-state initiatives alike have promoted a specific image of Roma, a kind of representation which stems from political discourses putting '*the Roma*' as represented in a single and homogeneous group, without internal differences and

struggles, or class, ethnic, and gender differences. This promotion of one identity representation is done in the hope to make 'the Roma problem' easier to solve (McGarry 2010). However, the heterogeneity of Roma communities causes tension between those who emphasise on unity of interests and those who do not feel represented by an identity constructed on negative associations. Timmer (2010) discusses how NGOs construct Roma as 'needy subjects' in a way that risks perpetuating their dependency on NGO support. She argues that despite their commitment to humanitarian goals, NGOs' reliance on external entities puts them under pressure to show that their work is needed. They adapt to the discourses of government and other funding agencies while continuing to reinforce the construct of 'the Roma as a problem population' (ibid: 265; see also Beck and Ivasiuc 2018). The author goes on to conclude that well-meaning NGOs must "highlight suffering, poverty and discrimination" (ibid) in order to achieve recognition and sustainability. Van Baar (2018) similarly describes how NGOs gradually depart from a movement of participating democracy and become service deliverers who contribute to, rather than challenge, mainstream discourses and prevailing notions on Roma. NGOs give the impression that they 'do good' (Fisher 1997) by taking the place of a retreating state. Moreover, support for the most vulnerable (especially Roma children and youth) provides a niche opportunity for 'specialist careers' (Trehan 2001) in the non-profit sector. Hence those who are keen to promote 'Roma inclusion' create a space of co-option (ibid). In my fieldwork I witnessed various aspects of the above interpretations and tendencies of NGO representation; however I would like to think of the 'emergence' of this 'problematic identity' as a more complex phenomenon, depending on individual choices, opportunities and sometimes caused by having no alternatives. I shall elaborate on this further by providing ethnographic examples.

'*We know each other. We are a circle of people who have learned the stories of exclusion very well and keep repeating them from different angles.'* Stoyan, the leader of the NGO I

volunteered for when I started fieldwork, seemed to prefer being with the locals, on the ground, working with his staff and being with his family. Unfortunately, he could not express these frustrations with state and non-state actors alike, inside and outside the community, as he was part of '*a system, which feeds itself from the Roma problems'* and being Roma himself he could not admit this to his community either. Participants from Roma and pro-Roma NGOs[23], '*the usual suspects'* as he called them, often gathered together to focus on the major areas for achieving 'Roma inclusion' – housing , health, education, etc. presented their experiences, asks and protests. Stoyan was frustrated: *'No change is happening. We speak but have no voice in a house of wolves who see Roma either as lambs or monsters. We use the same language. If we had good anti-discrimination laws, inclusive curriculums in schools, empowered young people, jobs accessible to everyone. We only talk…'*.

Stoyan's NGO was facing financial difficulties when I joined as a volunteer. Only three people were full-time staff members, including Stoyan himself, and two were working on a part-time basis. The NGO relied on volunteers as well as on the education and health mediators who were paid by the local authorities. The local government was largely not funding his work and Stoyan needed to raise funds from independent, mostly international grant making organisations such as the Open Society Foundations, various embassies in Bulgaria, state funding wherever avilable and European Union projects. This meant that the NGO was in competition with every other Roma-related Bulgarian/and international NGO pursuing social development causes. It was difficult for Stoyan to juggle the management of the organisation, because he took an active part in the community outreach and the fundraising to sustain his staff members. Most of the project funding was on a short-term basis- from six months to two years. The stability of many NGOs in Bulgaria was similar,

[23] According to Stoyan, the Roma-led NGOs who had over 50% Roma staff were regarded as Roma NGOs and those who did not have a Roma leader or Roma staff but focused on Roma inclusion were seen as pro-Roma NGOs.

according to Stoyan, since there were very few self-sustaining organisations who could afford to '*speak for the people and not for someone else's interests'*. To be independent was Stoyan's dream and he worked tirelessly to find ways to sustain his organisation, including through venturing local business ideas. Nevertheless, most of Stoyan's NGO funders were from Western Europe and he doubted that the reliance on them would ever stop. After Bulgaria joined the European Union some of the international NGOs based in the country left to support countries of a higher priority to development agencies. This is when Stoyan lost some of his most generous and flexible donors who did not require too rigorous reporting.

I joined Stoyan's meetings with the Bulgarian branch of a well-known international children rights organisation[24] (INGO) which was funding one of Stoyan's educational projects. The INGO was the lead applicant on a European Commission project which required extensive reporting. The INGO translated this accountability by requesting three-monthly financial and narrative reporting from Stoyan as well as by organising weekly calls with him. Stoyan felt that although the INGO was the lead project applicant the actual work with the community was ultimately left to him to lead on, so he asked for less emphasis on reporting in order to focus on the results of the project. Stoyan, an economics graduate himself, also found the reporting requirements tedious, not relevant and simply '*stupid'*. The INGO, on the other hand, kept insisting that Stoyan's organisation needed to report regularly to be able to achieve accountability to the larger donor, and to gain the trust of the sub-donor, including ensuring further funding. Stoyan thought that the frequency of the reporting was unnecessary and his donor/partner saw his reaction as a sign of non-professionalism. The report form required information such as the number of Roma children and parents reached, stories of positive developments from children and parents, photographs and videos. Earlier in the project Stoyan had sent detailed information and was now asking the INGO to space the reporting so

[24] For confidentiality purpose I do not disclose the name of the organisation.

he could focus on his 'project deliverables'. The officer responsible for Stoyan's project required the approval of his manager, the director of the INGO. Unfortunately, the director was not available to speak to Stoyan and we were assured that a decision would be communicated to Stoyan. He assumed that in the meantime the frequent reporting requirement had been dropped. This was not the case because later Stoyan understood that the INGO had decided to suspend project funding. Apparently, the officer had forgotten to ask the director for approval and funding was suspended based on the missed reporting. Stoyan apologised profusely and asked for renewal of funding. At the end of the day, it was his NGO that was not trusted and was seen as vulnerable, not sufficiently professional, needing more experience and capacity in order to comply with the 'bureaucratic' world of the INGO. Stoyan needed to create partnerships with well-established NGOs in Bulgaria and internationally, even though they did not necessarily know his community well, in order to be able to comply with funding requirements. No staff member of the INGO was Roma, however its core mission was to 'alleviate poverty and achieve social inclusion through the provision of education to minority children'. Stoyan also had to meet the INGO staff in their office, in the 'central' not the marginal territory of the Roma neighbourhood. Of course, the INGO needed to sustain itself and NGOs like Stoyan's, working on the ground and providing 'real stories' were vital for their continuous existence.

Here I think of Graeber's work on bureaucracy and its 'stupidity' (2015) in which he presents how "bureaucratic principles are extended to every aspect of our existence" (ibid:27), and how "filling out forms" has become the "bureaucratization of everyday life" (ibid:32). Graeber's work analyses the procedures used by the state. He talks about the police forces "who are empowered to impose arbitrary resolutions backed by the threat of force" (ibid:32) but his analysis can be extended to non-state institutions in order to illustrate how NGOs enact 'the idea of the state' (Navaro-Yashin 2002) through documentation and in a way

impose arbitrary 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu 1998b; 2007). Perhaps, Graeber is right in summarising that bureaucracy represents "a kind of war against the human imagination" (Graeber 2015:82). The real issue in Stoyan's reporting conundrum was power; he was the 'unequal' partner in the project proposal. There was no understanding of the local context, and although the bureaucratic detail of reporting looked rational and ensuring accountability and efficiency, it was arbitrary and indeed '*stupid*'. Ironically, the reporting for the larger European donor was more flexible, but the sub-donor needed to exert influence and control. "Bureaucratic procedure invariably means ignoring all of the subtleties of real social existence and reducing everything to […] forms, rules, statistics, or questionnaires" (Graeber 2015:75).

Little did the local Roma beneficiaries know that they were elaborated in a range of images, from 'victims' (Gheorge 2013), 'people on the margins', to 'ignorant' subjects – people who needed parenting classes because they didn't know how to look after their children and children who needed to be helped and educated, to be saved from poverty, discrimination and illiteracy. They were the passive recipients of support and this 'support' game was an NGO tactical display to ensure sustainability. Not that poverty and discrimination were nonexistent but the very existence of these was the survival path of the NGOs on a mission to 'Roma inclusion'. *'We have created our own NGO industry and we depend on it.'* - Stoyan admitted, '*and since everyone is concerned about us Roma - international institutions, United Nations, European Union, governments, the West, you name it, we give them what they want.'*

Of course, Stoyan's insightful position is not unique. Anthropologists have explored this NGO/humanitarian phenomenon elsewhere. Alcida Ramos (1994) explains how the efforts for self-preservation of NGO actors in Brasil have led to the establishment of the 'Hyperreal Indian', a social construction which ensures that the Indian population is perpetually presented as 'in need of saving', as vulnerable but also super real, something that transcends

everyday life. 'But for most [NGOs], especially the well-established, defending Indians has become a sort of business enterprise, complete with market competition and publicity' (Ramos 1994:162).

The theory of 'performativity' (Butler 1993) can be applied to the positions of NGO workers because they, as in the concept of 'gender', similarly may perform 'doing good' (Fisher 1997). Ticktin (2011) also uses this approach to explain how humanitarian aid works. Her fieldwork concerns the legal status of undocumented immigrants in France who suffer from life-threatening illnesses. On the one hand, the humanitarian aid representatives, the health workers, nurses, doctors and social workers, see their profession as 'gatekeepers' about who is legitimate and who isn't to be served by the nation-state and how moral it is to help or not help those in need. On the other hand, humanitarian aid recipients also have to 'perform' to be able to fit into state, cultural and social expectations. This performance creates more inequalities, complications, zones of greyness which solutions ultimately boil down to the support of bureaucratic procedures. Where inequalities reach high levels, humanitarianism (NGO-ism) provides a certain moral stance, solidarity of sort, "redeeming powers […,] sudden consciousness of the […] necessity not to remain passive […] however ephemeral this consciousness is, and whatever limited impact this necessity has" (Fassin 2013:37). Humanitarian reasons such as helping children living in poverty, especially those who are not accessing the 'vital' provision of state education such as Roma children, are perfectly fitting within the bureaucratic condition called "vulnerability […], a condition which invokes solidarity, a sense of fraternity and 'affect by virtue" (ibid). Exactly because of this moral stance humanitarianism/ 'the non-governmental (van Baar 2018) has become "untouchable" whereby the moral intentions of NGO workers are justifiable. Such is "the hyperreal" Roma of many NGOs, "an appropriate working hypothesis", the ultimate "ethical hologram" (Ramos 1994:163).

In spite of the increasingly audible voice of Roma themselves, there is still dependence on funding (Trehan and Kocze 2009), assistance, aid and humanitarian support. But ultimately, NGOs depend on external funding and they are accountable to their funders, not so much to the people they work with and for. As Stoyan himself suggests Roma NGO representatives are not themselves immune to the process of convincing funding institutions to support the solution to Roma 'problems'. Despite meaning well they also find themselves in a precarious situation, being forced to 'co-opt' (Trehan 2001, Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2018), to cooperate in creating 'the hyperreal' Roma in order to ensure financial sustainability. I must clarify that here I am not including the many grassroots Roma-led initiatives, such as the mother's centre in Sastipe and active volunteer groups, which somehow are still not captured by the bureaucratic complex network of NGOs and international agencies. The everyday Roma exists and is in close contact with them.

One may ask what of the role of the donors/funders? Having worked for the largest private philanthropy investing in 'Roma inclusion' I feel that I need to add the donor perspective here too. Donors have interests, be it to satisfy accountability criteria, or to satisfy compassion, solidarity, emotions, organisational strategies, state plans, etc. Furia (2015), for example, conceptualizes foreign aid as a gift by taking Mauss' gift theory (Mauss 2002) and applying it as an analytical tool to critique donors for reinforcing social inequalities through foreign aid. Being interested in community development, social justice, human rights and other causes donors use grant-making/project funding strategically, always in relation to organisational, personal and emotional reasons. Behind these reasons are different but powerful forces that guide activism. Even though Mauss' (2002) analysis applies to 'functions of exchange in archaic societies', it is highly useful in helping us understand the relationship between the giver and the receiver - 'gifting' as always relational and carrying

consequences. European Union funding may broadly aim to achieve social cohesion, equality and wellbeing of European citizens but it also comes with specific rules and regulations for funding applications. These can often require a higher degree of accountability mechanisms, including strong financial and administrative capacities. This explains why Stoyan's NGO had to have a 'strong' leadning partner for his educational project. Private philanthropies may justify their moral, humanitarian emotions and beliefs through elaborate strategies, requiring flexibility and efficient social change to prove possibilities to national governments. Government funds may have specific criteria for size, administrative capacity and influence of the NGOs they fund. Often what these have in common is that they look for the 'elites', those who can eloquently speak 'local knowledge' (after Geertz 1985) and can deliver donor goals, i.e. reciprocate "gifts" (Mauss 2002). In return those who are given must reciprocate stories of misfortune, of 'victimhood', images and documentation of poverty. The function of documentation is not only about accountability, auditing and following administrative procedures; it is also about reciprocity, the returning of the "gifts" and securing further "gifts" or grants in the future. Much can be traced in documents, such as project funding proposals for 'Roma inclusion', reports, photos and so on. These can be sites that can provide more information on the aspect of "gifting", humanitarianism and bureaucracy.

If we look through the prism of humanitarianism (Fassin 2013) we can also see the connection between NGO/donor work and politics, although they may seem to be distinct or in opposition to each other. Humanitarianism (NGO-ism) shapes practices that support the development of policies and the power relations to ultimately 'mimic' (Bhabha 1984:127), to correct, to 'better', to be accepted by the state. This is how activism recreates its work vis-à-vis state processes, including by emphasising bureaucratic practices. As Herzfeld (1997) has pointed out, states are integral to rather than separate from or outside of social life, hence the boundaries between state and non-state entities and activities may be blurred and the two are

mutually reinforcing. Just as the state is not monolithic (Abrahms 1988) neither is the 'non-governmental'. Roma activism is performed by many actors: at grassroots/local and higher/global level; by Roma and nonRoma; people of different gender and class, beliefs, etc. The diversity of narratives 'within' the 'non-governmental' can inform us. Therefore, rather than creating binaries, polarising and taking sides we can question those positions in order to understand their meaning and impacts on Roma lives.

**Activism, Authenticity and Identity**

I began this chapter with my personal story and what led me to Roma activism. The reasons were complex. On the one hand, there were the expectations of my family and community. On the other hand, my own aspirations, the desire to 'do good', to see change in the lives of my contemporaries, the expectations of my teachers and the lack of local employment opportunities, all created the social conditions for me to be involved in activism. I chose to identify as Roma and I was identified as such. Reflexively, perhaps I also strived to be authentic by responding to my own expectations and those of my community, family and friends. The question '*Are you really Roma?*' externally, and the motivation within my community and kin to 'show that Roma can study and do well also' conditioned me to think of my activism as being genuine, as exemplifying authenticity (Acton 1998; Theodosiou 2008) and proving that my achievements and my Roma-ness were authentic. Authenticity, however, is impossible to theorise as it can have a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations (Lindholm 2008; Acton 1998; Theodosiou 2008). It can also be contradictory as one searches for their identification, relying on a singular understanding of one self, without considering multiple identifications existing simultaneously (Lindholm 2008). I argue that activism, just as academia, is occupied with the survival of the 'group', the 'community', and the shared Roma/Gypsy identity (Gay y Blasco 2011) in pursuing

authenticity to counter negative preconceptions of the community. Hence the tendency is to focus on the individual as part of 'the group' rather than on the individual as an exemplar. In this section I follow the individual, somewhat highly personal, stories of my informants in order to identify the many realities through which identification in social life is negotiated. I believe that just as I did, my informants are motivated by 'altruistic values', by care, consideration and compassion for others but they also strive to prove their 'authenticity' (with its various meanings, see also Theodosiou 2008) inside kin and community and externally, with friends, peers, colleagues, funders, state and non-state. Because it is only when we are recognized by others, and by that we acquire a positive understanding of ourselves, are we able to freely express who we are or, to put it in other words, to realize ourselves, to achieve 'personhood' by countering discrimination, repression and extreme intervention through the mode of activism. So, being engaged in Roma activism can come as a predisposition, in a way as a 'middle ground' whereby a person can satisfy and comply with the requirements of community belonging, of the personal conviction to counter discrimination, while having an opportunity to work in a well-known 'insider' terrain and realising self-potential. Of course, this can be contested, but not listening to the personal narratives of activists and not considering their motivations renders discussions of activism one-sided and limiting.

Here I present the internal struggles for education; employment and how being educated can present contradictions. The stories of the students, graduates and professionals, often seen as 'the elites', show similarities and differences, a diversity of social situations that we can learn from. I shall also show that being a Roma university student or graduate represents an opportunity as well as a challenge. These Roma navigate the separate and often isolated spheres of 'home' – within kinship relationships and community life; and at school/university/work – outside the kin and in the state domain. While Roma students may

be expected to sustain and reproduce their Roma-ness inside the community, where there may be fears of assimilation and culture loss, externally they can be rejected or find that they need to negotiate access by identifying differently, including by rejecting Roma identification. Roma can choose to hide their origin – from classmates, peers, colleagues, teachers in order to achieve their aspirations without encountering discrimination to simply 'become different', 'act Bulgarian' or completely cease connections with anything to do with 'being Roma'. Becoming an activist does not necessarily guarantee cultural alienation from the community and being an activist does not always guarantee upward social mobility, either. These professionals can also choose to leave activism, work for the state, go abroad, return to activism and so on. Choice is important here; and it is agency that we need to consider when discussing Roma activism (Beck and Ivasiuc 2018).

**Stoyan's ideology**

'*People don't realise how hard I had to work to get to where I am. My motivation is to help because I have been there.'*

Stoyan obtained an Economics degree and was the first university graduate in his family with a diploma from the prestigious 'Karl Marx' Higher Institute of Economics in Sofia. The fall of communism meant that after he graduated he was free to own a business and he set up a profitable pastry-making venture. However, in a short period of time Stoyan's business had grown so significantly that his competition in the region began to lobby the local authorities to intervene with his success. His factory was inspected more often than usual, the administrative burdens increased and he began to receive personal threats from people who he believed were his business competition. One morning on the way to work he saw a note on the broken window of his car saying '*Gypsy, give up. Think of your family! We will break*

*you.*' Stoyan had two daughters and a wife whom he needed to protect. Not long after this threat the local authority health and safety inspectors put impossibly high sanctions on his pastry-making business and he was forced to go into administration. This is when Stoyan vowed to become an activist for Roma rights. He set up an organisation which focused on access to education. He was able to obtain initial funding from various embassies in Bulgaria and managed to visit other countries on experience exchange. In the first years of post-socialism Stoyan's NGO focused on improving literacy in one of Bulgaria's largest Roma neighbourhoods. Schools began to be seen not as the only provider of education as in socialist times and non-state actors began to provide alternative forms of education (Dunajeva 2017) to support Roma children to achieve well in schools. These changes led to states no longer being the exclusive 'educator' which previously was entirely a state domain. The collapse of communism affected many Roma children and *'the system simply wasn't working anymore. No schools looked for the absent children and the parents were more concerned with what their children were going to eat than sending them to school. Many went hungry for days.'* Stoyan gradually involved his wife in helping him and they managed to reach a high number of Roma children who were not attending school. Stoyan's work expanded into the region and his NGO team became a first contact of point for both the local authorities and the community.

For Stoyan, being engaged in Roma activism was a 'natural' development following his experience. He endured criticism internally because he was seen to be 'too close to the Bulgarians'. But activism for him was imagined as work intended to bring about social and political change, no matter how he was perceived. It was his experience that counted and he was willing to sacrifice time and risk rejection internally and externally. His 'sacrifice' of involvement in activism was also 'personal'. '*I am so used to being an activist. It will be nearly 25 years since I began this work. I wake up thinking of the struggles of my people and*

*go to bed with their problems. At times this is too much for my family. But for me what I do gives me the chance to work and do what I love…to help.*' Indeed, activism was the result of the nexus between his personal life experiences and the ideologies he believed in, those of defending human rights, or simply to 'do good'.

**Neli's commitment**

Neli worked for Stoyan's NGO and, in Stoyan's words, was his 'most committed employee'. She worked tirelessly to see the children in her Roma neighbourhood achieve well at school. Wherever Neli went, children would follow her. Children knocked on her door at all times of day, including late in the evening, to ask for help with homework, to show her their student books, to ask her for food or simply to greet her. I knew this because I shared accommodation with Neli at her parents' house in Radost.

Neli was not always this way, however. It was hard for me to believe that there was a time when she did not want to hear about any Roma, that she would be identified as Roma or that she lived in a Roma neighbourhood. '*When I used to play with the Bulgarian children at school I would tell them that my mother is Bulgarian and that's why I am not like the other tsigani. Some children believed me and other children laughed at me.'* Neli chose not to play with other Roma children and since she had 'a Bulgarian' mother who was light-skinned (meaning she would be more accepted as a Bulgarian) children rarely questioned her half-Bulgarian origin. In reality, both of her parents were Roma but Neli's wish to disassociate from anything Roma caused her to reject everything that she thought of as Roma while she grew up. She avoided having Roma friends, enrolled into a traditional Bulgarian folklore group to ensure 'that her Bulgarian-ness' (*bulgarshtina*) is well accepted' and began to study Bulgarian language and literature at university. 'Becoming Bulgarian' had to manifest in

every area of her life, including how she looked. She cut her hair short because long hair was 'typical of the *tsiganski* women', she wore expensive, not too colourful clothes because *tsiganite* liked 'loud colours'; wearing gold jewellery was a '*big no'* because this is how '*tsiganite showed off'*. She lost weight because Roma girls '*were plump'*, she found a job in an accountancy company where no one knew that she was Roma and began saving money towards buying an apartment outside the Roma neighbourhood. Eventually, she got a Bulgarian boyfriend to whom she got engaged until her perspective changed and turned her life upside down.

*'I thought that I had nothing to do with the people who I grew up with, including my own family. I despised everything Roma. Things started to change, when my Bulgarian fiancé told me that he didn't want my relatives to come to our wedding. He thought that since I hardly associated with them, there was no point in inviting them. I didn't react immediately but in the next couple of months something changed in me. I was hurt. It's silly that I hadn't thought about this before, but suddenly I began considering how I would tell my children that their grandparents live in a Roma quarter and also how would my husband treat me in the future if he didn't think much of my parents now. We separated not long after but this experience taught me that I needed to embrace who I was, my family, my community…'*

Neli 'passed' as a Bulgarian for a long time. Her parents were concerned. To her family Neli 'acted Bulgarian' (*pravi se na bulgarka*), and they were worried that she had grown apart from them, navigating in a different world isolated from their own. They never knew that she was engaged. Although they were suspicious, Neli presented her boyfriend as a colleague. Once her relationship broke down, Neli began to spend more time in the Roma neighbourhood. She had graduated from university with a degree in Bulgarian linguistics and commenced helping the neighbour's children with their homework. Stoyan was looking for

volunteers in his NGO and this is how she found herself '*involved in what people now call activism but it is commitment*'. Gradually she involved her nonRoma business and education contacts in contributing to the work of the NGO, including by organising fundraising events, ensuring access to the local nonRoma *chitalishte* for performances by Roma children and liaising for business loans to the local Roma entrepreneurs. For Neli activism was a way of life which was consciously chosen in relation to her past of denying her Roma-ness and what she thought this entailed.

**Sasha's passion**

Sasha graduated as the *otlichnik* (excellent/lead student) of her Public Relations university course. It had been two years since she graduated and after a number of job applications she found a six-month internship opportunity through the support of Stoyan's NGO. The internship was based in the communications department of the city council. Although initially she was promised to be hired on a permanent contract once her internship finished she was not hired. She later learned from the cleaner of the building, whom she befriended due to her early starts and late finishes, that the Mayor's secretary '*could not bear the thought of having a tsiganka in the most representative office in the city*'.

Sasha was later elected as the youngest (aged 22) municipality councillor by the locals. Her participation in local government was seen as a positive and encouraging step by the Radost community but she felt that 'being a role model' was a huge burden of representation, which meant that she always needed to consider the interests of the community before her own. Internally in her family and community, Sasha felt that '*the pressure is too high. If you fail you disappoint your community. You need to be a role model for the children, for the youth, everyone basically. People think that when one finishes university, they can find a job and do*

*better. I got education and I was doing all these community tasks but didn't have any money in my pocket, relying on my parents to help me.*' For Sasha, to be educated against the odds proved to the 'external' world that she as a Roma woman can be educated but not being able to secure employment following her studies was not only seen as her individual 'failure', it was as if she had failed all Roma. Sasha did not have a scholarship and relied on her parents to help her financially. She had also taken a loan and this put her in a worst financial situation than before she began studying. Sasha's situation is not unique, unfortunately. While there has been an increase in access to higher education for Roma students, social inequalities persist. As Durst et al (2014) show the expectation that higher education expansion would accommodate social mobility and that this would provide employment access to Roma students, does not necessarily happen in reality. Durst et al (2019) also analysed the influence and the costs of upward social mobility to Roma women university graduates in Hungary and the difficulties they find in negotiating internal and external demands. Elsewhere Garaz and Torotcoi (2017) discuss the employment prospects of Roma university students in Eastern and South-eastern Europe and how elitist elements are preserved in higher education despite the increased access to Roma students. Minorities who manage to achieve upward mobility in terms of education can still face socio-economic disadvantage, including paying some 'hidden costs' such as the detrimental effects on their well-being (Nyiro and Durst 2019).

When I first met her she was considering leaving Bulgaria for an agricultural job in the Netherlands. She saw that the lack of job opportunities and realization after graduation was the main deterrent to continue her activism. Transnational migration for Sasha was a choice as it is for many inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe (Kaneff and Pine 2011). Research on Roma in a number of European countries illustrates how migration affects kinship, household economy and social relations (Sigona 2008; Grill 2012; Roman 2014), and also how migration within the European Union can represent contestations of identification and

citizenship (Vermeersh 2012a,b; van Bar 2015; Yildiz and De Genova 2018). Sasha eventually got hired on a part-time basis in Stoyan's NGO, which was also her professional realisation, but more than that it was Sasha's way to counter discrimination. Through acquiring this job she was now able to continue to be a municipality councillor and do what she perceived as her passion '*to communicate against the negative Roma images in the media and to prove that we are not what we are perceived to be'*. She was hopeful for the future. She had gathered a number of young Roma university volunteers and was working on a media campaign against racism. In fact, there has been an increase in Roma youth activism in recent years. Mirga-Kruszelnicka (2018) contends that while Roma youth activism is exposed to a number of challenges; there is a shift in paradigm and an emergence of future possibilities for rejuvenation of Roma activism.

**Ekaterina's choice**

Activism existed in communist times, although all communal activities were regulated and had to comply with the spread of the communist ideologies. Pre-socialist community organisations, focusing on minority language classes and folklore initiatives, were ceased during communism (Valkov 2009) and were transformed into different forms of activism, largely manifesting through the so called 'house of culture' (*chitalishte*). In Chapter 2 I reflected on the importance of the "house of culture" (Kaneff 2004; Donahoe and Habek 2011), an idea dating back to the Ottoman rule of Bulgaria, and originally established on a voluntary basis as an educational institution to promote democracy (Valkov 2009). In socialist times the "*chitalishte*" in Bulgaria followed the Russian model of the "house of culture" - *dom kulturyi* (Donahoe and Habek 2011) which became the locus of all forms of communal activity (Savova 2007:194-201). The Party had the ambitious goal to modernise and change the life of the 'backward' Roma (Marushiakova et al 1993). So an active

involvement in the "house of culture", the communal way of displaying the allegiance to the communist ideologies, was a prerequisite, a guarantee for upward social mobility achievement. Ekaterina's case provides insights into this process.

Ekaterina was one of the four children of Sherifa, a woman who was known to have come from a different part of Bulgaria and who was of 'different soy (kin)' of a *tsiganka*. Sherifa was seen as a 'tough' woman, which I naively thought was because she rarely smiled. Sherifa told me that Ekaterina was a studious child. She excelled at school and expressed a wish to become a doctor. Her high school teacher, the wife of the Radost communist leader, helped her to prepare for the exams and arranged for a university reference from her husband. Ekaterina also needed to be involved in the local *chitalishte* in order to receive a reference from the Radost mayor and to secure a scholarship to go to medical school. In the 1960s the communist party had introduced a policy stipulating to encourage more minority students in Bulgaria to study medicine. In the weekends and in her summer vacations Ekaterina set out to support the leader of the Roma "*chitalishte*". She helped with the preparations for the Bulgarian folklore concerts in the neighbourhood, some of which coincided with Roma traditional celebrations on these days (Hederlezi, Vasilitsa and other) and were attended by the local dignitaries. She was seen by both Roma and nonRoma as a young representative of the community. She was also chosen to be the Komsomole[25] secretary of her class and became '*the pride of our people'*. In due course, Ekaterina was accepted to study medicine in Sofia. Although state education was free of charge Ekaterina's parents could not afford to visit her or help her financially. Her father was a shepherd and hardly came back home and her mother was a cleaner in the local grocery store. *'I never believed that Katia (Ekaterina) was going to be a doctor. I thought the whole thing was just a joke and that the teachers were*

[25] The Komsomol was a political structure entirely involved with the organisation and indoctrination of youth. The Komsomol or the Communist Leage of Youth was established for young people aged 14 to 28 who would eventually become the future members of the Communist Party (Read 2011)

*simply lying to her that she can study. They said good things about her at school but neither I nor her father went to school, so we couldn't understand and help her in any way. We couldn't give her money or help her with school. I couldn't read… Then she just forgot about us. She took us, her sisters, her father and me, out of her heart and stamped on us as if we never existed.*' Ekaterina never came back home. Her father sold some sheep and asked her mother to visit her in Sofia. *'I asked and asked many people how to find her school but finally I was there. I asked the cleaner how to find Katia and she asked me to wait. I waited on the stairs while the passersby looked at me as if I had fallen from the sky. At last she came out of the room, she took my hand, took me out of the building, hugged me and then she said that I should never visit her again. You see, she was well dressed, beautiful, white and clean like a Bulgarian and I was wearing my rugs of clothes, dirty tsiganka who couldn't say two words properly'.* Ekaterina pursued her studies and became a doctor; however she vowed to never come back to Radost or contact her parents, sisters and relatives. Sherifa never saw her daughter again. This is why the locals thought of her as a 'tough' woman - she had lost not only a child but endured the embarrassment of her daughter's '*forgetting about who she was*'. Ekaterina's sister once traced her in the hospital where she worked but she told her to never look for her again. Ekaterina married another doctor and no one knew more about her.

I heard the story of Ekaterina a number of times from different people in the neighbourhood, largely because her story was given as a terrible example. It had left a lasting impression not only on her family, but also on her friends and community. It was obvious that this was a success story in one way, yet an utterly tragic example in another. This communal memory, this 'wound', as her friend Elza called it, was not to be forgotten. '*She will never prosper if she has forgotten her own. You can have anything you want – money, children, everything but forgetting where you came from - that is the same as killing.'* Amongst the Roma of Radost Ekaterina became the anti-thesis, the opposite of what one was supposed to do and 'to

become'. Becoming someone else and forgetting one's roots were equal to a crime even death (see also Okely 1983:229). Ekaterina's example also affected the locals' predisposition to activism and education. Parents whose children were doing well at school, including Neli's and Sasha's, would make sure to tell them Ekaterina's story. Indeed, when Neli decided to downplay and '*erase her Roma-ness*' (and what this entailed) she followed Ekaterina's example. '*I was rebelling against anything and everything that people had made to be Roma*' – she told me.

This story of de-kinning highlights a number of elements and contradictions – Ekaterina's family response to support her studies, the obligation and the pressure on her to represent her community, or simply because she did not want to have much in common with her Roma past, all show how intricate identification can be. For the neighbourhood/within the kin Ekaterina had not achieved well, in fact, she had achieved the worst possible attainment, the outcome of 'culture closure' (see also Gay y Blasco 2011). One thing she was successful at was at 'erasing' her Roma-ness. Yet, in another way she was a pioneer. She was the first Roma woman in Radost to go to university, the first Roma doctor from Radost, a person who managed to defy poverty, a professional who rose in the higher ranks of communist life and beyond. Ekaterina's story is an example of a professional Roma who could 'pass' as nonRoma, perhaps from fear of being discriminated and being different or simply to defy her family. Perhaps identification was a contradiction to her or perhaps, to her identification meant that 'being Roma' is that of 'no halfway position' described by Williams (2003:1). One can only presume. Ekaterina's story speaks to the story of Gay Blasco's Agata (2011) whose literal and symbolic escape from the Gitano life and law is dictated by her yearning for a different life. Agata's position poses contradictions, even confusion. As I search for those positions of ambiguity, of being 'neither here, nor there', of the liminality of life, Ekaterina's case is a puzzle to me but I am certain there are more stories like hers and Agata's.

Ekaterina's story provoked me not because it is unusual for a Roma to become a doctor but because she managed to achieve a complete breakaway with an incredible force and rupture of relationships. I wanted to visit Ekaterina in Sofia, only to share that she was not alone, that there were other Roma who managed to navigate the world of the Radost neighbourhood and outside it, these other people were doing their best to consolidate their pasts and futures. Unfortunately, I understood that she had died of cancer alone, with no family around her.

There are many ideas that can be inferred from Stoyan's, Neli's, Sasha's and Ekaterina's narratives. For brevity's purposes I would like to point at one immediate thought that has occupied my mind while writing up this chapter. Being educated is strongly linked to activism. Being 'educated' is a loose term here and can encompass not only university students/graduates but it is also about being literate and possessing features and skills seen by the dominant culture as enablers of societal inclusion. It is the educated professionals that are expected to 'give back' to the community, they are those seen as and called upon to be the Roma 'elite' (Vermeersh 2001, 2006; Mirga and Gheorghe 1997). In fact, there has been a tendency in both activism and academia to presume that 'the Roma elite' must go back to their communities and 'give back' (ibid) without contesting their representation 'for' or 'of' the community (McGarry 2014:10) or considering the narratives of those Roma who have chosen to represent themselves differently (Gay y Blasco 2011; Gay y Blasco and Hernandez 2020). Certainly, indeed undeniably, there are activists who have enforced their self-representation (McGarry 2014:8). However, there are also those everyday Roma who cannot bear the 'burden of representation' (borrowed from visual and cultural studies; also see McGarry 2014), including its hyper-reality, inscribed on them either internally within kin/community or externally. And there are also those of us, as researchers and activists, who have not considered the agency that Roma can have in choosing 'to become' what they aspire to.

## Conclusion

This chapter can be seen as providing only a fragment, a partial, rather a miniscule, open-ended, piece meal picture of Roma activism. There is a multiplicity of struggles, issues which I haven't touched upon here such as anti-Gypsyism (van Baar 2011; Stewart 2012; Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2018; Surdu and Kovac 2015), Roma policy-making and policy contribution (McGarry 2010; 2011; Trehan and Sigona 2010; Acton 1998), migration (Yildiz and DeGenova 2018; Grill 2012; Tervonen and Enache 2017), gender (Gay y Blasco 2001; 2011; Tessar 2012; Kóczé et al 2019;), etc. However, as in other chapters I find that I am drawn towards the density of experience, the complex webs of meaning-making, the richness of open-endedness in the local. Understanding people whose situations are different from our own may be difficult but through the ingeniousness of the ethnographic tool here I show that we need to engage in understanding the motives of Roma activism better. Stuart Hall (1996) explains that identification is not 'as transparent or unproblematic as we think'. He encourages us to see identity as a 'production', never completed and always evolving, and questions the term 'cultural identity' (ibid:222). Activism draws heavily on identification. My informants made choices, crossed boundaries, achieved dreams and goals, and although they were discriminated against, they received education (and some rejected state education), negotiated acceptance inside and outside kinship and community, etc. Some decided to pursue opportunities elsewhere, outside of the NGO world and others saw this as their motivation to contribute, to 'do good'. Yet others decided to cut their social networks and estrange themselves from kin and anything seen to be and viewed as Roma. Ultimately, what I surmise here is that when we discuss Roma activism we need to give a choice, agency, 'ways out' for self-determination and self-realisation.

My allegiance is with the activists and volunteer initiatives at grassroots level but surely I needn't privilege one context, one experience, one story over another. In examining the above narratives I would like to challenge assumptions that Roma NGO moralities may be selfish acts of accumulation but I would also like to point that taking the side of the 'good local Roma' versus the 'bad Roma elite' or the 'bad outsider' isn't productive either. Offering insights from "biographical ethnography" (Werbner 2004:10), the experiences of the individual, the detailed, the spaces of contradictions but also illustrating the nexus of conditions, of one's ability 'to become' can be illuminating.

# Chapter 5. 'Home' and the 'Kinning' State

## Introduction

I often think of what home means. Home is not just about the country in which one was born, nor it is only about the buildings, the spaces, the rooms, the furnishings, and the materiality of a space. Home is also about the people, the memories, and the secrets that inhabit and make those material spaces 'feel like home'. Home does not have a single meaning – "a unique eternal truth of a place" (Massey 1994:119). Home can refer to beginnings, memories and past and as such is in flux. As well as a place or a point in time, home can be an existential position and an emotional arrival. Home can be about "cultural norms and individual fantasies" (Rapport and Dawson 1998:8). Home can also be connected to the notion of what it means to be away from home (Hannerz 2002). Home can be a space of intimacy, joy, family, social relationships and "stillness of place" (Pine 2008; Howarth 2018). Home can be a place of sadness, raw emotions, loneliness, abuse, arguments, secrets, all things pertaining to the private domain, to the household, that which composes kin relationships and autonomy. But what happens when 'home' is literary and symbolically built and taken over by the state? Does the state become privatised (Creed 1998; 2010) or kinship becomes public? What if one has to live their life in the public domain, with no recourse to all the privileges, intimacy, responsibilities, highs and lows, to the privacy of kin relations (as understood in the West) and, instead, the state becomes their kin? Is home and the private "a myth" (Warner 2002)? "How do people transform givenness into choice so that the world into which they are thrown becomes a world that they can call their own?" (Jackson 1995:123).

As I think about home in the context of this chapter there is one childhood memory that springs to mind. '*Mum, I can't go any further. I am tired*.' – I said. '*Only a few more steps, you can do it.'*- my mother said, breathing heavily while carrying my younger sister. We were

climbing some broken concrete steps on a steep hill leading towards a place called 'the home'. It looked like this place was in a small forest, or at least this is how it seemed to me at age ten. From afar I remember seeing walls covered in patches of peeling dark blue, white and grey paint and large graffiti letters next to signs which I was not supposed to see. The old building was empty, its doors and windows were broken. A man in a digger was working on the site and he shouted at us to stay away. We sat on a broken wooden bench outside for what seemed to be an incredibly long time. My mother stared at 'the home' while tears were rolling down her cheeks. Her 'home' was being demolished. Suddenly, this decrepit looking building, once called 'home' not only by my mother but by thousands of other children, had become part of my own sense of home and family history.

The subject of this chapter reflects on the dramatic overrepresentation of Roma children who lived and continue to live in care institutions in Bulgaria. The ethnographic material is based on observations and interviews with children in care homes, parents, state professionals and care leavers.[26] I reached some of them through the organization I worked for, others I reached through friends, family and through local community initiatives. Here I return to the interrelationship of kinship and state as I illustrate how policies targeted to help the children seen as most vulnerable in a population can marginalise those children even further. The chapter is structured as a journey of historical phases that have characterised Bulgaria to date – socialism, post-socialism and neoliberalisation.[27] The first half presents the development of state care in socialist times and the ideologies that influenced the process. I begin with the contexts from which state care began in order to examine the decontextualization of state

[26] Information for the research participants under the age of 18 was presented to the child and their guardian/representative. Informed consent for each specific interview with adults such as public officials, NGO staff, parents and other was obtained by asking them to sign a consent form. The names of any children and adults included in this work have been changed to provide anonymity.

[27] I use 'neoliberalisation' (Springer 2013) to emphasize that these processes were also resisted, rather than rigidly accepted by the people of the Central and Eastern European region. *I am mindful that this split in phases can be blurry and also incorrect; however, the purpose of this chapter is not to delineate what constitutes them.*

care; and while presenting these histories I weave in my informants narratives of life in state care in socialist times. Methodologically, I draw on Jackson's (2002) argument that people obtain "a sense of agency, voice, and belonging" (ibid:185) through composing their own stories as an empowering act and in order to connect those realities with the wider history. In historical terms I also echo Verdery's request (in Hann 2002:20) to "give voice to the natives" to analyse their own experiences and Pine's (2018) reminder that "people's lives, even in the most barren of settings and contexts, involve hope as well as despair, agency and choice as well as coercion" (Ibid:4).

In a similar vein, the second half of the chapter presents the narratives of children in residential care, parents and professionals in post-socialist times. There are differences as a result of the regime change and I reflect on these. I also continue to look at identification and social characteristics which affect Roma children's everyday. In the rest of the thesis I follow the 'unexpected' stories as told by children who are rarely reflected in research. These stories may also be a way of experiencing oneself "not as a creature of circumstance but as someone who has some claim, some creative say, over how those circumstances may be grasped, borne, and even forgiven" (Jackson 2002: 132-33). These life stories present contradictions, pain, estrangement, unexpectedness but also resilience and hope 'to become' (Biehl and Locke 2017).

**The concrete care of the socialist state**

The 'home' in which my mother grew up - a large, monolithic concrete building with tall windows and wide doors- was purposed for hundreds of children who came from different parts of Bulgaria. Building such homes, indeed the building of all homes –identical blocks of apartments, vast housing estates, virtually the same looking buildings for the proletariat, were

part of the grandiose industrialization and urbanisation projects of socialist Bulgaria (and elsewhere in the region). The aim was to build the socialist nation (Kelleher 2009; see also Kaneff et al 1995; Verdery 1996; Kaneff 2019) and this was thought through in details, including what the architecture style was going to be. In the beginning of socialism building was dictated by a specific architecture style called Socialist Realism or Stalinist architecture, which was a combination of art and design forms to "educate and inspire" the proletariat (Kelleher 2009:62). Such examples of buildings are still accommodating government officials in Sofia today. Later, after Stalinism was denounced in the Soviet Union, Socialist Realism architecture was seen as excessive and exchanged in favour of Modernism, whereby communist states increased quicker and cheaper construction with the help of massive amounts of concrete (ibid). The Bulgarian landscape (as in other Eastern European countries) was transformed – the green agricultural land shaft of the cities was now dominated by the high-rise buildings of concrete apartment blocks (*panelki)*. Concrete was going to house the proletariat and to strengthen socialism (ibid); and the strengthening of socialism required the moving of the masses from the villages of rural Bulgaria to the cities to begin mass production rather that serve self-economy (Stoykova 2006).

The totalitarian state was not only building people's material homes, it was also working on influencing what was happening inside their homes, within the kin domain (Pine 2002; 2003; Humphrey 1998). The construction of socialist society (including its literal concrete mass building) involved the creation of an "extended family" and "a new type of kinship, social kinship through institutions and ideology" (Khlinovskaya-Rockhill 2010:15). For example, one of the very first legislative documents adopted by the Bulgarian socialist government was *The Act to Equal Rights of Persons of Both Sexes* (1944) whereby "both sexes have equal rights in all spheres of economy, state, culture and socio-political life" (Stoykova 2006:1). Dealing with women's economic independence and liberation from the grip of the

bourgeoisie ideology became a priority. Indeed, by the 1960s pressing demands for improved living and working conditions propelled the issue of work-care integration onto the political agendas of all Eastern European socialist states (Rajkai 2014). Engels' [1972] argument that women had to become equal to men, i.e. be freed to participate in the labour market, helped the promotion of the so called "socially responsible parenthood" (ibid). The family came to be viewed as being incapable of providing proper childcare and raising children as 'approved' socialist citizens. Childcare needed to be shared between the family and numerous public institutions whereby children would be looked after by professionally trained, non-related adults (ibid).

As part of socialist educational theories prominent family theoreticians such as Vygotski, Makarenko and others insisted on the inadequacy of sole family upbringing, which justified and legitimized the roles of school and kindergarten teachers, 'trained specialists' and 'good' adults (Khlinovskaya-Rockhill 2010:25). Indeed, as once famously put by the pedagogue Makarenko, these state agents were the "engineers of human souls" in working along with the parents and through the parents (Bowen 1962). The state provided not only education - *obrazovanie* for the children, but also directly assisted parents in child upbringing- *vazpitanie* (Khlinovskaya-Rockhill 2010:22). The state agents (think of teachers, nurses, politicians, etc.) but also neighbours and society, the many faces of the state (Navaro-Yashin 2002) and its "auditing mechanisms" (after Strathern 2000) were allowed to sanction, report and see parents, specifically mothers, as "unfit" and "inadequate" (Khlinovskaya- Rockhill 2010:97). The ideology of the time asserted that the inequality of the family partners (a man and a woman) will be destroyed and the family as an institution will no longer be a contract in capitalist terms rather it will operate in the spirit of comradeship between two equal persons (Stoykova 2006:2). In practice this reinforced the differences of families and persons who did not fit within the socialist family ideology. Single parents, those living in poverty, and those

with children born out of wedlock, amongst others, were deemed 'inadequate'.[28] Consequently child protection authorities began to favour a "rescue and remove" policy towards such children who needed to be 'homed' elsewhere. Many Roma parents and their children found themselves in that position of 'unfit', imperfect families, being vulnerable, 'not strong enough' to cement the moral future of the nation. There was no place for imperfection and weakness - the moral and physical concrete and strength building of socialism was paramount.

The memories, traces, and experiences embedded in the buildings of socialist Bulgaria were noticed by my informants. A large grey concrete building must have looked rather terrifying to a young child. Kiril (aged 53) was five years old when he was taken to a children's home approximately 70 km away from the place where his single mother lived. His first memory of the institution was the large building. '*I would often get lost in the corridors until an older child finds me and takes me back to my classroom… I hated the winters there. They were very cold because the building was so big. We slept in one large bedroom with more than fifty beds and with only one small stove to warm us. The younger children had to put firewood in the stove and the older children were taking their blankets, leaving the little ones without covers.'*

Just as the massive concrete and metal statues and monuments raised across the country were there to remind people of the socialist progress and the powerful Soviet Bloc, so were the children's 'homes'. They were there to remind families that inadequate child upbringing has its consequences and that the state can do kinship better and bigger. These communal

[28] At the time of the revolution, party ideologues, for example Alexandra Kollantai, argued for free love, abolition of marriage, public responsibility for house work and child care to free women. These ideologies got reversed in the 20s, particularly after Lenin's death and as Stalin embarked on new economic policies, the socialist family replaced the ideal of the "free woman" (Roelofs 2018).

buildings were essentially positioning a community of stranger children with no common ties or kin into one space, one home, and one private/intimate realm. The building itself was meant to foster community creation but its materiality, such as how insulated or accessible it was did not matter as much. What mattered was what 'the home' was going to produce – community, comradeship and moral citizenship. In reality, inside the building, what Kiril experienced was somewhat different:

*'I remember the beatings and harassment of the older children towards the younger children. The younger children had to make the beds of the older children, to wash their underwear and socks by hand, and there was no hot water. Those slippery concrete floors in the bathroom in the winter were so dangerous.'*

Still, Kiril believed that the state gave him more opportunities than his mother would have been able to provide if he stayed with her in the Roma neighbourhood. Safka, Kiril's mother, went to school in the 1940s but never finished elementary education. She married early and at the age of twenty one she had three children in addition to looking after her ill husband. When Kiril was three months old Safka's husband died and she was forced to return home to her maternal family.

*'I was left without a choice. I was a widow with three young children and the only thing the state (dyrzavata) offered me was to look after them. After the death of my husband I had to go back to my family but I could not stay there for long. My brother had his own family and my children and I shared a room with my mother. I began working in the local agriculture cooperative but money was so little. My only choice was to send my children to the home and start saving to build my own home. The director (of the home) assured me that they will be looked after.'*

Care often carries a moralizing connotation which is related to people's social lives, to the political and legal regulation of life, and to society in general (Thelen et al 2010). The economic and symbolic value of the state's decision to look after children was meant to serve a purpose – to provide safety, refuge, food and education. These homes, called 'orphanages', whose child population was largely accommodating social orphans (i.e. children who have at least one living parent and all children without parental care[29]), were created to provide safety for children and this process was not unique for Bulgaria.[30] In response to the high infant mortality and poverty at the beginning of socialism (1944) and after the Second World War, following in the footsteps of the Russian Bolshevik government, the newly formed Bulgarian socialist government also sought to feed and raise the nation's children (Ball 1993; Mihaylov 2020). Although the state envisioned itself as a welfare state concerned with the care for its subjects, it was in the formation of socialist childhoods, in other words the upbringing of loyal socialist workers of the future, where its other aim lay (ibid). The rapid building and development of children's homes (*detski domove*) was also dictated by a political ideology which encouraged the disintegration of patriarchy and the withdrawal from the household economy (Pine 2002). These institutions were seen as far better equipped than the "bourgeois" family to fashion children into productive, devoted members of a communist society (Khlinovskaya-Rockhill 2010; Mihaylov 2020). Single Roma mothers like Safka, who lacked education, far from fitting the bourgeoisie image, were seen as highly

[29] Social orphanhood is an idiom which is often seen as interchangeable with the term "children left without parents care" (see Khlinovskaya-Rockhill 2010) but it implies that children are looked after by the state due to social reasons.

[30] Institutions existed elsewhere in North America and Western Europe and historically served the same purpose – to provide safety, refuge, food and education to children. In the UK, for example, the rapid increase in both population and poverty in the 18th century provoked the establishment of orphanages. One of the responses to this was the growth of what became known as 'Victorian Philanthropy' whereby rich personalities provided for the poor through charity (Higginbotham 2017). Children were seen to be in need of rescue from the desperate conditions in which they lived (ibid). Later, state initiatives to safeguard the health and well-being of children began to view children as having an economic and emotional value (Zelizer 1985). Eventually, the state's involvement in childcare was seen as a non-problematic intervention aiming to improve the social conditions of those children who were exposed to 'bad' parenting, poverty and illiteracy. In Australia, for example, once rejected as 'incapable' of taking 'proper care' for their children Aboriginal families were subjected to the assimilation policies of the state (McComsey 2010) and this became central to public debates on welfare services.

'inadequate' to produce the socialist moral citizens. Although Safka's children were reunited with her when Kiril was ten years old, it was not unusual for children to remain in care until they reach the age of eighteen. Long-term placements, dictated by the supposition that the child was not going to be returned to the family, were the norm (ibid). The state commenced the creation of a system of homes - baby homes (age 0- 3), children's homes (age 3 to7), homes for children with disabilities, homes for children and adolescents (age 7 to 18) and others in order to ensure transition from one home to another (Mihaylov 2020). There were thousands of children at hand. Safka recalled that there was no child in her Roma neighbourhood not going to some form of a *'pansion'*, a term which encompassed special schools for children with intellectual disabilities, also dubbed "schools for children with inferior lifestyle and culture" (Marushiakova and Popov 1993), or orphanages where food and accommodation was provided. But how would parents yield their children to the state so straightforwardly? The state needed to use 'kinning' strategies (Howell 2003) - note the use of kinship language such as 'home' (*dom*) and 'the mother state' (*darzhavata majka*), to draw on the powerfully evocative language of kinship (Kaneff 2002; Pine 2018) and to prove its moral character. The word 'home' was appropriated as guise for care and wellbeing. The lines between personal and political had to be blurred.

Adoption was possible, mostly for what were known to be 'healthy' and 'light-skinned' children from the baby homes according to Julian (aged 45), a teacher who told me: *'Children with any issues* (meaning children with disabilities) *were out of question for adoption. I think I was not adopted because I was born in tsigansko family, so I was darker, and I also suffered with problems in my feet.'* Managing disability was by confinement and placement in "homes", initially in baby homes and then homes for children and adults with disabilities. Disability was seen as the inability to work and engage in wage labour (Mladenov 2015), so the state took over the care for those people deemed unproductive.

There was no place for uproductiveness, self-production, self-realisation, private interests and household economy, everything capitalist in nature, i.e. bourgeois individualism, had to be uprooted. Every sphere needed to produce for the common good. Those 18 year olds who were deemed productive, in other words those without disabilities or approved social behaviour, were allowed to venture in the outside socialist world on their own. Consider the case of Violeta, who was in care in the late 1960s and who is now a senior teacher:

> '*When I finished high school my class teacher asked me to go to her office. She was clearly worried about something. She sat me down and said that I was an excellent student and that she doesn't want to document me as a tsiganka on my student record. I will write that you are of Bulgarian origin so that this doesn't prevent you from going to university. You didn't grow up amongst the gypsies anyway, you grew up in a home and it is fair that I don't write this down. I need you to promise me that what I do will not be discussed further'.*

The socialist *vazpitanie* (upbringing) was a purposeful intellectual, cultural and moral development, and it involved the moulding of children's worldviews into the socialist values (Khlinovskaya-Rockhill 2010). But it also de-reified identification. Anyone who would identify differently in terms of ethnicity, gender, ability and so on was risking not only being audited by the state but also their successful integration in socialist society. Violeta was given a 'blank card', a sort of tabula rasa, to venture in the world as something other than being Roma, as an adequate, moral socialist citizen – qualities not seen as '*tsiganski'*. The formation of an individual was envisioned to become completely inseparable from societal goals, with the state existing not only outside but also inside each individual (Verdery 1996; Pine 2002). If Violeta was to identify as Roma, as she did, she would have risked estrangement from the values of socialism, ideologically postulating that there were no

differences between people as they were all equal and strived to contribute to the common good. At the forefront of the ideologically minded socialists was not only to support individuals like Violeta, the progeny of *'tsigani'* parents, but also to supplant their identification with that of the socialist ideal. In practice, Violeta's identification as Roma came down to her genetic make-up, she was called '*the tsiganka teacher'* because of her darker skin and because she had returned to her home in the Roma neighbourhood. Socialism was not devoid of racism, even if certain state agents (consider Violeta's teacher above) may have seen ethnicity, skin colour and address not as blocks to individual achievement of societal positions of influence. And since even Marx was perplexed by the subject of race in his 'Eastern Question' (1891[2013]), and thought that the Balkans were populated by a "conglomerate of different races and nationalities, of which it is hard to say which is the least fit for progress and civilization" (ibid:4), what could be expected of the ordinary followers of socialism in Bulgaria?

> *'And of course I appreciate the good things that influenced my life. I am Roma and if I was in the neighbourhood during my early years, possibly I could not realize my dreams for the future.'*

Violeta was appreciative of what 'the home' gave her. She took part in an array of well-organized, state-run extra-curricular activities, such as free summer camps, excursions and afterschool classes. She also participated in compulsory agricultural harvest brigades, involving heavy physical labour but incurring small pay, so that this was not seen as a capitalist venture but all in the name of social service. The main goal was to raise a person in whom 'the norms of communist morals turned into personal beliefs, and formed the basis of everyday behaviour" (Mihaylov 2020:10). Violeta's 'home' was there to "provide cultural and living conditions, necessary for the comprehensive development of the graduates

accommodated in them; to educate children in organized life in the spirit of communist morality and to render comprehensive assistance in their preparation for builders of communist society; to instil in children a communist attitude to work, to build in them work skills and habits and to direct them to a certain profession" (ibid).

*'We had rotas, everything was done in order. We washed dishes in the kitchen, cleaned the canteen premises, the yard, collected firewood, and maintained the fire in the stoves and many other tasks. We were busy in the day, doing all sorts of activities…'*

This "biopower" of the state was fulfilled through the organization of its subjects for the sake of dominance and production, but under the more acceptable moral semblance of care (Foucault 1984, 1994). In turn, the adherence to these morals was recorded and "audited" by the agents of the state in order to release the child back to the parent (Khlinovskaya-Rockhill 2010). Paradoxically, this "audit culture" (Strathern 2000) was relevant for monitoring the family setting but not fit for auditing the experiences of children themselves. While everyone and anything was audited because the spheres of home, private, communal and public converged (Gerasimova 2002), inside the so called 'homes' children like Violeta witnessed the imperfect side of the moral socialist state.

*'…but the nights we spend in silent sobs under the cold covers. The fear of the dark after the designated curfew; the shouting of the educator in the morning, slamming the wooden door of the packed bedroom, and the stressed, half-awake children rushing and bumping into each other to go wash. There were only five sinks with ice cold water for all the hundred and twenty children who lived on the ground floor. Imagine the same picture on all five floors of the building. It was as if you are in a jungle but in minutes everyone and everything had to*

*look immaculate– we had to be dressed and washed standing next to our perfectly made beds.'*

Perfection, strength and moral character had to be lived through "self-government" (*samoupravlenie*) which meant that children took on daily chores to acquire a sense of control over their lives and an instinct for collectivism and comradeship (Ball 1993). The capacity for self-governance was a concept widely applied to the education of Roma children during socialism but also later in post-socialism. This aspect is not unique for Bulgaria, 'self-governance' was the driver concept behind educational segregation of Gitano children in Spain (Gay y Blasco 2016) and elsewhere (Horton and Barker 2009: 784) whereby self-governance is treated as an index of 'fitness for citizenship' (ibid). All this was done to prepare children for the life of production in the modern state as "labour should be a need, like the desire for food and drink; this need must be instilled and developed in the communist school" (Ball 1993: 231). Inside 'the homes', though, this perfection was compromised and achieved through qualities rather more pertinent to the loathed capitalism. Incongruously, the characteristics of capitalism and that of survival of the fittest were rampant in children's dormitories.

*'We were made to steal bread from the kitchen, hiding it under clothing or in our pockets, so that when the evening came we would give this to the older children in our bedrooms. If we told an educator about what was happening, we would be punished by the older children. The older children forced the younger ones to put wet clothes under their bed sheets and sleep on them throughout the night so that the clothes can be "flattened" by their body's heat in the morning. There were children with diseased kidneys, who fell into terrible crises... Nobody checked whether children were bedwetting or whether something else was going on...'*

But who else would be in a greater need of salvation, disciplining and civilising than the children of *'the tsigani"*? The main goal of 'the home' was to raise a person in whom the norms of socialist morals turned into personal beliefs but the children were also 'programmed' to mute their negative experiences as there was no alternative. The state's discipline and training in self-control or "self-governance" (see Gay y Blasco 2016) did not instil a sense of security in my interlocutors, rather the opposite. The rules removed much of the need for interaction, leaving them feeling highly vulnerable and alone. Not that the staff were not aware of such practices, it was the children of the 'inadequate' *tsigani* parents that they were looking after, so those tendencies for such 'natural behaviour' and 'culture' of their descendants were overlooked. 'The homess' acquired the label of housing "society's dregs" (Balls 1993: 246) which children carried with them at school, outside 'the home' and in their souls.

> *'I didn't have a mother like the other children at school and I was not defended. For example, one day we were taken to the seaside on an excursion and some of the children with families and who didn't live in the home decided to go buy some souvenirs without informing the teacher. The teacher got very angry and instead of telling them off when they returned, he took me in front of everyone and slapped me to show the rest of the children what was going to happen to them if they decided to go shopping again. I cried so much not only because of the slap but because there was no one there to defend me.'*

Paradoxically, the state was supposed to look after these children, yet their status as 'children of the state' signalled to the local community, both Roma and nonRoma, to the authorities, to the schools, to the employers, to their peers, that somehow their upbringing was inadequate. Julian lived in different 'homes' for eighteen years where he managed to navigate his way

almost as he would within a family, but externally, in the town where he lived he was mostly identified as '*tsiganin',* hence still not accepted. When he left the institution for university he encountered hostility from other students and even what was supposed to be his Roma kin. "*People wanted nothing to do with one, a tsiganin, and two, a child of the state. When I finally met my real relatives in the Roma neighbourhood, I was not accepted there either. I was an imposition, a stranger. My birth mother had died and I was not on anyone's mind. The only thing I had left was the education that the state gave me'.*

Still, the state was the only salvation as they were 'the children of the state' – "their father is the state and their mother is the whole of worker-peasant society" (Ball 1993: 231 citing Tizanov's Pedagogika). Violeta saw the director of 'the home' as her 'second mother' who helped her to apply for a scholarship, to be accepted at university and to find a job. She felt that she owed the state for the access to education, accommodation and food but also because she formed vital relationships with staff and peers. Julian also believed that he was able to become a teacher and establish his own family because of his time in 'the home': *'I am grateful to the state for the chances I was given. I am not sure I would have amounted to much if I stayed in the Roma quarter".*

Somehow to be a 'child of the state' represented both a privilege and a missed opportunity. The state, this "depersonified and disembodied collage of all the faces of adults who have ever participated in the child's upbringing over the years"(Khlinovskaya-Rockhill 2010:232) was both a political representation, one that carried out the parental responsibility in an abstract way and in economic terms, and one emotional - relational, that of an embodied state, represented by the adults who worked in 'the home' (ibid). Eventually, however, the residents were 'orphaned twice' (see Khlinovskaya-Rockhill 2010: 252) and the relationship they forged with institutional staff was ruptured when they left the institution. Violeta and

Julian were youths who, upon graduation from 'the home', were deemed valuable for the production of socialist society. But there were others who were deemed not capable of reproducing the socialist moral citizen ideology, amongst them were Roma children and adults, who were destined to homes for adults with disabilities, penitentiaries and psychiatric clinics. The state had built, literally and symbolically, its own cement apparatus, its own boxes and categories, part of a care machine with a production line difficult to disrupt.

**"The Changes" (*Promenite*)**

The post-socialist period is often referred to as '*Promenite*' (The Changes) in people's narratives. Bulgaria ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)[31] in 1991 but it was not until nearly a decade later when the child welfare reforms began (Mihaylov 2020). After the fall of communism and throughout the 1990s state residential childcare institutions in Central and Eastern Europe continued to be generally viewed as an acceptable alternative for children exposed to 'inadequate' parenting. This lapse in time coincided with a tumultuous economic and social upheaval for the countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Bloc (Hann 2002; Pine 2002; 2003; Verdery 1996; Kaneff and Leonard 2002; Gal and Kligman 2000). Unemployment rose to unprecedented levels, inflation was high, food was difficult to come by, and the economy collapsed. My personal memories of the time are linked to queuing in front of food stores from morning until evening to be able to buy bread holding tightly to the so valuable rationing coupons. Employment

[31] 'Institutionalisation' is seen as a breach of human rights by a number of European countries. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that it is the primary responsibility of the parents to raise their children and it the responsibility of the state to support parents in order to fulfil their parenting duties (art. 9, 18). The European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights outlines that in 'all actions relating to children, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration' and that every child has the right to maintain on a regular basis a personal relationship and direct contact with both his or her parents, unless that is contrary to his or her interests (art.24). In order to comply with these requirements a number of countries in Central and Eastern Europe have embarked on the process of transforming their care systems. Although efforts are being made to reduce the number of children in care in Bulgaria, the overrepresentation of Roma children in care persists.

activities in the informal sector increased and those who remained employed (whether in the informal or formal sector) faced low pay, reduced benefits and declining work conditions (Pine 2002; Gal and Kligman 2000). The rise of such types of work also resulted in state policies to counter disorder resulting from mass unemployment and insecure patterns of work (Wacquant 2012: 127). This new, "alien and incomprehensible social, political, or economic order" (Kaneff 2002:103) was dangerously overtaking the old and familiar social order of state protection and involvement. The state was withdrawing while people retreated to the household (Pine 2002) and "what comes next was anyone's guess" (Verdery 1996:38). Yourchak's (2006) book title summarises this well: "Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More". The transition from planned to market economy brought the reduction of state expenditures such as social services and benefits and while poverty levels increased so did the numbers of children in care homes. The upheaval was not only political, as the children's homes remained the responsibility of the state, it was also "cognitive" (Verdery 1996: 4) because they were no longer a priority of the state's changed ideology and its diminishing economic resources.

Nasko, now in his early 40s, who lived in a care home during 'the Changes', remembers this transition period:

*'Suddenly, all the staff in the home got worried about their jobs. We said goodbye to the assistant-cook, to the cleaner, to the driver because they were made redundant. Not that the food was great before, but now it was so little. At school no one cared any more whether we studied or not. People had other problems to think about. The children from the home were on nobody's radar anymore.'*

Leading international NGOs began working in Bulgaria, following United Nations recommendations to the Bulgarian government, to introduce different models of child protection (Mihaylov 2020). The state's inability to afford sufficient financial commitment, combined with less emphasis on local context relevance by international donors and NGOs, led to patchy and non-implementable models of childcare (ibid). Increasingly in the 2000s, media stories began to reveal the poor state of childcare institutions and the horrific incidents of child abuse. Media investigations uncovered the state of children in care in Romania's orphanages.[32] A BBC documentary on Bulgaria's abandoned children[33] exposed a vicious system of care for children with disabilities. This resulted in an international outcry in response to the images of malnourished and mistreated children. Similarly, media reports in the Czech Republic with images of children in caged beds provoked action on the part of the international civil society sector.[34] A number of international organizations commenced lobbying the Bulgarian, the Romanian and Czech governments. Eventually, when these countries joined the European Union, recommendations and funds for the restructuring of the old system of care were also issued. The so called process of 'deinstitutionalisation'[35], a "period of radical reform related to the closure of institutions" (ibid) had begun. By the time I conducted research with care residents, Bulgaria had adopted its National Strategy "Vision

[32] By 1989, when Nikolae Causescu was killed, up to 20,000 had died in Romania's children's homes. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/15/romania-orphanage-child-abusers-may-face-justice-30-years-on (accessed on 3 Nov 2020)

[33] Bulgaria had the highest number of children in institutions across Europe in 1989. Kate Blewett's award-winning documentary 'Bulgaria's Abandoned Children' caused an outcry in response to her film. In the film she followed the life trajectories of a handful of the 75 disabled children living in the Mogilino institution. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8307256.stm (accessed on 3 Nov 2020)

[34] BBC reported on the use of 'caged' beds in institutions for disabled children in the Czech Republic. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7189556.stm#:~:text=The%20Czech%20Republic%20banned%20the,of%20the%20beds%20goes%20on (accessed on 3rd Nov 2020)

[35] Deinstitutionalisation is the process of reforming child care systems and closing down orphanages and children's institutions, finding new alternative placements for children currently resident within their own families, foster families or adoptive parents and setting up replacement services to support vulnerable families in non-institutional ways. It has been taking place in Central and Eastern Europe since the fall of communism and it is part of EU policies. New systems generally cost less than those they replace as many more children are kept within their own family.

for deinstitutionalization of children in the Republic of Bulgaria" (2010) and the NGO I worked for was providing advice to the government for its care system reform. The research access was secured by my employer, who was interested in finding out more information about Roma children and their identification preferences, which in turn was going to support the planning actions towards the reuniting of children with birth families, foster care placements and their adoption. I obtained a Disclosure and Barring Service check to comply with all necessary requirements for ethical and safe research practice and conducted interviews and participant observation with Roma children in care and parents whose children were under child protection measures. I also talked to professionals, including social workers and NGO representatives.

The process of deinstitutionalization represented an enormous change for the staff in the institutions and for the state overall. This change was talked about, resisted and even mourned in nostalgic terms. One of the directors in a 'home' kindergarten told me:

'*We used to have many more children than we have now. But these were different times. Now the loud government strategies and European investments are not doing much for the children and their future. The so-called deinstitutionalisation is a good idea, but an impossible one to achieve in my opinion. Foster care and adoption all sound well but this is at the expense of the children themselves. We all want the children to be out as soon as possible so we fill in the statistical forms and that's how it is done on paper. But who cares whether the next party, i.e. the birth family, foster care or adoptive parents, are capable enough to look after these children. If we compare the children's outcomes now with the outcomes we used to achieve in pre-democracy times, we will be ashamed".*

The director's nostalgia of past times was almost visceral and it was as if this "yearning for what is now unattainable" (Pickering and Keightley 2006: 920; see also Bedahl 1999; Todorova et al 2012) was exemplified in the kindergarten building. Such buildings were intended to free women to work and educate young children as the future vehicles for the implementation of the ambitious political philosophy of socialism. This kindergarten used to house one hundred and fifty children split into different groups and according to age. On the day I visited it had thirty children in attendance. One side of the building was uninhabited, dust had settled on the old furniture and the walls were ornate with portraits of ex-dignitaries. Still larger than what was needed for two playgroups of 15 children each, the inhabited part of the building was freshly painted and the dark corridor walls were decorated in children's paintings. If nostalgia is (simply put) about different forms of remembrance (Todorova 2012:2), this building may have well served as a memorial, a symbol of division into past and present, old and new, socialism and post-socialism (and what it entails). Perhaps, the director's nostalgia was about belonging, about the position of influence she used to have, the pride of producing the future of the state. Perhaps, her nostalgia was "an invocation of a past in order to contrast it with, and thereby criticize, the present. Social memory is selective and contextual" (Pine 2002:111). In the same fashion, perhaps, the nostalgic notes in the narratives of my interlocutors who lived in care during socialist times were not necessarily related to the past, to the intrusions, the lack of parental care, the abuse in the 'homes' and so on, they were yearning for the "irreplaceable", namely their childhoods and youth.

It was not long into my participation process in the daily activities of the 'home' kindergarten when Martin, aged 5, plucked up the courage to tell me that he liked the picture on one of the books I brought with me. *I like him.* (He shows me a child with blond hair). *My hair is black. I would like to have yellow hair like him. Sasho* (one of the older children) *colours his hair and his hair is yellow.* (I ask: Why would you like to have yellow hair?) *My mummy put*

*black on my skin and on my hair, wait…my skin is brown.* (He pauses). *My mummy lives with tsiganite. They are black and they made me black too.*

His teacher seemed somewhat embarrassed and corrected Martin. "*Don't say this. There are no tsigani.*" and then she whispered to me: "*Children know that they are different at an early age. Martin's mother left him with her mother and went to work in Germany. They have children and never look after them. So when the grandmother passed away he was given to us. He lived with her until he was three, so he knows who the tsigani are."*

The sentiments echoed by Martin's teacher were similar to those of prominent politicians who refer to Roma women as having multitudes of children only to depend on the generosity of the state.[36] In essence, people in post-socialist times were now freed to say what they wanted. The democratic changes brought many different developments, including the sacred freedom of expression and the end of the dreaded repression and control over people's individual lives. Nonetheless, whereas socialism, mostly on ideological level, attempted to erase all differences between people for the common good, and to ensure its economic survival, the neoliberalisation in post-socialist times, this new economic realm of individual survival, did not require of the state to create the members of the future proletariat. Now the 'kinning' of Roma children was of no interest. Care became private again and needed to be returned to the family domain (or elsewhere outside of state function), to the mothers specifically. Care could now be openly ethicised and gendered. Suddenly, identification differences – be they in terms of race, gender, class and age, became more apparent in people's everyday expressions. The end of the collectivist era also brought higher bureaucratic requirements from care staff, social workers and other state agents. Social

[36] One example was the Bulgarian Defence Minister K. Karakachanov who regularly refers to Roma women as "breeding machines" in media and proposes various measures for birth control directed at them.

protection began to be based on protecting children by distinguishing between individual families and their circumstances, but also failing to see the similarities and the challenges for parents facing poverty and exclusion. Hence, the historical associations of Roma with crime, idleness, and excessive fertility and production, surfaced publically.

Whereas before mothers were encouraged to to produce the proletariat of the nation, in other words to have more children and to become *mnogodetni majki* (mothers of three or more children)[37] who were awarded with medals (such as the one my mother received in the picture below); now the higher Roma birth-rate (Tomova 2004) was endangering the nation's future.

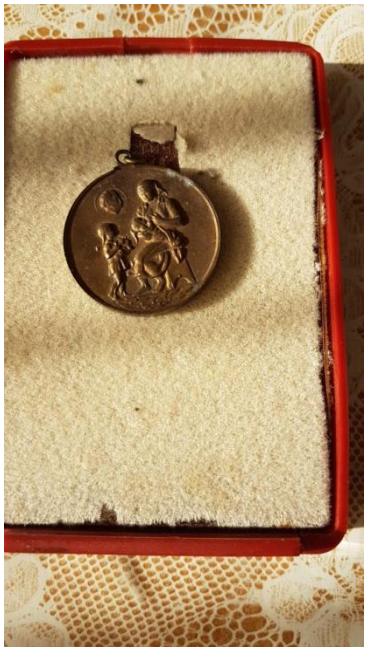

Image 25 Medal for *mnogodetni majki* (mothers of multiple children) in socialist times

Whereas before the increased re-"production of the body" (Guéry, Deleule et al 2014) was necessary for the demographic and ideological survival of the nation; now the excessiveness of Roma re-"production" had to be limited for the survival of the nation. This 'demographic

[37] Bulgaria followed the Soviet model of "Mother-Heroines"- (Bridger et al 1996) who were awarded this title for raising large families (ten or more children) to increase birthrate and demographic developments (ibid).

threat' was also the concern of Ms Irinina, a social worker whom I met after a recommendation from Mr Janakiev (see chapter 3), a school director who worked closely with the social work department to provide support to his pupils.

'*As a social worker with over 15 years' experience I see more Roma children in my practice than at any other time. They have more children than we* (Bulgarians) *do. The level of poverty I see is indescribable and yet, they continue to have children. I need to think carefully every single day whether these children should be taken away or be left with their parents. If you don't have enough money to eat, why would you have children? Their homes don't have heating, electricity, and any basic amenities. How could someone raise children in these conditions? It is irresponsible if we continue their dependence on the state by giving them social assistance… They need to have jobs, education, to contribute to society.'*

Ms Irinina had the state's legal and moral authority, high social position, education, access to information and connectedness to other state institutions, to authorise the use of administrative and bureaucratic procedures legitimately and in moral terms (Fassin 2015), including by taking children away from their parents. She could also decide to recommend further social support to families, including social benefits, help with accommodation and employment. The ethnicised nature of social benefits, however, directed her attention, work and accountability towards not perpetuating Roma dependence on the state. Bureaucracy is part of the "larger universe that we might call, quite simply, the ideology and practice of accountability" (Herzfeld 1991:3). Needless to say that the high resources and time necessary for administrative procedures, judicial, foster care and other services, would incur more bureaucracy and most importantly, may not be 'in the best interest of the child'. This concept is closely linked with the concept of 'good motherhood' or 'good parenthood' (Allen et al 2018; Khlinovskaya-Rockhill 2010) and it is not unique to Bulgaria. Viewing childhood as

embedded in the family and separating the best interest of the child from those of the parents is also about "measuring, identifying, categorizing and distinguishing between those who are good enough and those who are not" (Khlinovskaya-Rockhill 2010:309) and as such is rooted in the understanding of middle-class motherhood as an example to follow.

Throughout the focus group which I conducted with Roma parents whose children were in care I heard analogue messages – the inability to cover expenses, accommodation costs, the pressure to 'give children away' temporarily, the prejudice of social protection professionals, lack of transportation and healthcare access – all reasons for taking Roma children into care in other Central and Eastern European countries (see also ERRC et al 2011). Maria, for example, firmly believed that her two young children should remain with her, despite the warning from the social services that they will be placed in residential care unless her social situation changes.

*'Unpaved roads, dust, noise...barefoot children roaming in the street...houses that don't have good furniture...this is what the social services see. But this is our life, this is our place, this is our home and our children, this is us...they cannot change us by taking our children away.'*

She was a single mother who struggled to provide for her children. Her partner left when she was pregnant with her second child. Maria's mother helped her with the limited resources she had but it was still impossible to find enough money for food, clothes, and shoes. Maria had to find a job urgently. She wanted to be hired by the local sewing company. The provision of material resources counted as 'good parenthood' and the placement of children in care was regarded as the traditional response to 'protecting' and 'rescuing' children from harm and 'poor' parenting. However, by taking material circumstances in consideration first, child care professionals tend to overlook kinship relationships.

Consider also Ana's case and how baby homes used to be called 'Home: Mother and Child' or '*Dom: majka i dete'* (note the language use), ensure their functionality. Ana was one of the parents who participated in the focus group I conducted. She got pregnant with her first child at eighteen. The father of the baby, who was not Roma, did not recognise the child as his own and their relationship broke up. However, Ana did not want to leave her baby. When she gave birth a social worker visited her in the hospital and asked her whether she would consider giving her child up for adoption. '*I was a young, single mother, and tsiganka. And my baby was this beautiful and white child. She later visited me at home and saw that my parents didn't have a lot in the way of money, so she thought I would not be able to look after my child. My son's father isn't tsiganin so she thought that a mixed* (ethnicity) *child does not have a place amongst the tsigani'.* The social worker recommended that the child remains under social protection observation and a number of visits established that Ana did not have the resources to look after her son, meaning she needed income and proper accommodation. The child was eventually placed in a baby home and then looked after by foster parents. To succeed in motherhood, Ana had to demonstrate that she was responsible, in other words not 'dangerous' to her fragile infant.

Blago, one of the parents in the focus group, the only father present, expressed his frustration as follows: *'Who cares that you cannot pay your bills, that you lost your stupid job, that nobody wants to hire you because you are tsiganin? Who cares that I stole food from the store to feed my child and not because I did it for fun? Who, in their right mind, wants to give their children to someone else?'* Blago's wife had married someone else and he decided to look after their son. After the loss of his job, he found himself struggling financially and resorted to shoplifting from grocery shops. The police and the social services got involved and his son was placed into foster care. Blago found another job, however the social services

needed a proof of permanent change in his circumstances in addition to the times the legal and administrative proceedings were going to take (see also Allen et al 2018: 31-33).

Here, I would like to clarify that there are instances in which child protection measures may indeed be in the best interest of children. However, situations of enforcing individual moralities, "intuition, sentiment and tacit knowledge rather than empirically and theoretically informed judgement (Allen et al 2018:6)", constructions of what constitutes appropriate care, 'good' or 'bad' motherhood and parenthood, in addition to the stereotypical view of "excessive childbearing", or because 'it's in their culture' (Allen 2016) need to be discussed and interrogated rather than unquestionably accepted. Bearing the above stories in mind, it can be inferred that, be it covertly or overtly, both the socialist and post-socialist state acted from a similar starting point, a common 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1997) as such, the same moral views in regards to Roma children and their parents. Moreover, the state agents, including many of the currently acting child protection professionals, teachers, nurses, midwives, doctors, kindergarten directors, tutors etc. were brought up and acquired their training, education and *vaspitanie* (upbringing), their 'habitus' (ibid), during socialism.

**Homes and Reunions**

Like other Eastern European countries, Bulgaria commenced the removal of symbols of the former regime. These were monuments and statutes of Lenin, the mausoleum of the first communist prime-minister Georgi Dimitrov and others, which were considered incommensurable with the "post-socialist sensibilities" (Kelleher 2009). However, other architectural and design remnants of the communist era, such as the large care homes, government buildings and the concrete apartment blocks (*panelki*) survived. The mnemonics of these 'homes', symbols of an era characterised with massive building efforts, all done in

the name of care for the socialist citizen, still linger on. Some of these material spaces house children today but their materiality is not sufficient to warrant 'good' care. Feelings of trust, integration into communities of care and informal networks of support, as well as emotional or existential forms of security, are equally as significant as the material aspects of care (Benda-Beckman et al, 2000). Care is not only about the access to material resources; it is also about the relationships which one turns to in times of need (Read and Thelen 2007). It is about the "emotional worlds", the "emotions in actions" (Beatty 2019:37) and the relationships between individuals. Care is about the change that has happened inside these 'homes', not only the material and physical change (refreshment of facilities for example) but also the ideological transition that happened when socialism collapsed. In these final few paragraphs of the chapter I present stories of the bereft, tales of longing for a reunion with parents, narratives of anger, shock and 'separation constrains' (Stafford 2000). The children distrust the system of care, despite the material resources provided, and just as the staff are able to freely express prejudices towards 'bad' mothers, ethnicity, etc., so do the children in objecting to being called Roma or being the children of Roma parents.

On a cold day in January, over twenty years after my mother showed me 'the home' where she grew up, I was walking up the concrete steps leading to another 'home'. This was a building located on the cusp of town and one could easily imagine that at the time when 'the home' was built it did not have much access to the city in which it was built. Many of 'the homes' (not only children's homes but also those for adults) in Central and Eastern Europe are located in the outskirts of towns or in small villages. Often these 'homes' provide subsistence and represent the only source of employment opportunity for the locals – usually the director, deputies, kitchen staff, cleaners, teachers, drivers, maintenance, all from the same locality. One could easily imagine how the deinstitutionalisation process became 'a danger' to the livelihoods of all of these state professionals. In fact, the job loss was one of

the main reasons to oppose the deinstitutionalisation process in Bulgaria (personal conversations with NGO workers). The socialist regime had constructed, employed and integrated an army of employees who were now facing changes to their lives. Whereas before it was usual for a staff member to remain in a job for life in an economy of nil unemployment, now the care staff of institutions needed to find employment elsewhere or work on a part-time basis, an utterly new concept. The director of 'the home' told me that for years she saw the children in care as different from her own. She didn't want to see the closure of 'the home' and fought against it because she couldn't see an alternative for the children. This 'home' was also a source of income of significant proportion of the local population, not only the direct care staff but the people who supplied the food, the doctors, the dentists, the barbers, etc. in town. Eventually, she realised that the process of care transformation in Bulgaria was highly necessary and children needed family care. Now her effort was focused to ensure that the staff of 'the home' were going to obtain the training required to be employed in other care services such as the family-type homes which were going to be built nearby, early intervention services and other. So, the local state actors used this period of change to construct a survival network for their kin.

The 'home' building was eerily quiet but the air had traces of cigarette smoke which meant the building was inhabited. Deinstitutionalisation had already begun and a number of children were adopted, reunited with their relatives or placed in foster care. I was first introduced to the director and the social worker who in turn introduced me to the children. It was the afternoon; the children were back from school and were supposed to do their homework but instead everyone was gathered in the activity room, consisting of old computers on desks (gifted by a nearby bank office), chairs, one sofa, a table and a desk for the educator. The central heating was not working, so the corridor and the children's bedrooms were cold, hence everyone, including the educators, was gathered around the electric heater in the centre

of the room. The younger children were playing solitaire on the old computers and the older children, mostly teenagers, went in and out of the room to smoke cigarettes.

Life in the institution revolved around family, or more precisely around the lack of it, and the children were eager to speak about their lives without family. One of the concerns I had before the research was about how to address questions that I wanted to ask in an empathetic way, of doing no harm and making sure children could express their "sense of agency, voice, and belonging" (Jackson 2002:185) as an empowering act. There were many questions which I thought would be difficult to ask and I remained open to what I was going to hear, see, feel, and 'embody' (Okely et al 1992). However, most of the children did not need prompting; they spoke openly and expressed anger and frustration towards their families, their teachers, and the entire world.

Lilia (age 14): '*I wonder why my mother abandoned me. I don't know how she looks or how she speaks. My father came to see me when I was little. I liked that and I would like to see him again. We often talk with my friends here about why we think we were abandoned. If I could only ask my mother why she abandoned me…that mad* (luda) *woman that is my mother that had a child and left it in the pit.'*

Elis (age 16): *'I am here because I wasn't going to school, I was causing problems to my mother and I was hitting other children. It would be better to be at home, but I don't want to cause any more problems, I just want to get through this time and go home. My childhood is running away, my best time is passing…'*

Nena (age 15): *What and who is outside of the home? I don't have anyone outside. All I have are my friends who are here. They are my family. This is sad, isn't it? Why is it that someone would give birth to a child and then leave them?'*

Mario (age 13): *'I'm not happy here. I would like to be with my family. My mum is very ill and I don't have a father so she left me here. I kept on running away from 'the home' to see mum but the police bring me back here. I do things that I shouldn't do and I am punished for it. I can't watch TV, do sports or be with my friends.'*

A study on the overrepresentation of Roma children in care illustrated that the main reasons, among others, were poverty and material conditions, school absenteeism and single parenthood (ERRC et al 2011). Research also found that the majority of parents do not want to leave their children in care (Browne 2009). However, when confronted with poverty, illness or social exclusion, parents decide in favour of state childcare, believing that they are acting in the best interests of their children (Browne 2009). This was expressed in the language used by the parents in the focus group to explain why their children were under child protection measures. The parents used the expression 'give [a child] to the home' (*davam na dom*), rather than 'abandon' or 'leave [a child] in the home". 'Abandonment'[38], as such was commonly used by state agents but also by children in 'the home' themselves. These narratives of 'abandonment', which Biehl (2001) calls "zones of abandonment" are determined by 'formal governance' and state imposition. They also affect the realities of

[38] There is no consistent definition in the social work literature regarding what constitutes child abandonment (Browne 2009). Often children in care are grouped in one category called 'abandoned children' (Ibid). However, in some cases the child's parents may plan to take their children back, and in others the child and his/her parents may have been forced apart by matters beyond their control, such as migration, war, etc. Therefore, the category 'abandoned' does not necessarily indicate that parents want to abandon their children. Research in a sample of 10 EU countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and the United Kingdom), found that only one (Poland) had clear legal definition of child abandonment (Browne 2009).

children and young people "caught as they are between encompassment and abandonment, memory and nonmemory" (ibid:4).

Most of the children did not recognize themselves as Roma but they were directed to speak to me because the staff recognized them as such. The main identifier was skin colour. Marisa (age 13) had just returned to the care home after escaping from the home of her adoptive parents.

*'My adoptive Mum tells me that I am Bulgarian but I know I am not. I just know it. People here call me tsiganka. I cannot pretend that I am someone else. Why should I live with a family that doesn't like tsigani and I am a tsiganka? They want me to be someone else. It is so difficult.'*

Iva (age 5): *'I want to be white because my teacher will like me better. I think my teacher likes white children better. They call me tsiganka at school and tsiganite are not nice.'*

Some children who identified as Roma had developed a sense of family and unity with other Roma children in the home. The prejudices that they experienced united them. Children also wanted to talk about what they dreamed of, who their friends were and what their lifeworlds were composed of.

Christian (age 10): *I can't speak in Romanes because the teachers think we hide secrets from them. But Mila and I speak to each other in Romanes secretly.'*

*Mila (age 15): 'I have friends here and they are my family now. I am not sure what I will do when I grow up, maybe I will become a cook… then I can help aunty Bozhka* (the cook) *in the kitchen here.'*

Lidia (age 8): *I would like to become a teacher when I grow up. Are you a teacher? Can I see your pen?* (I give it to her and tell her that she writes beautifully). *Thank you. Ms Ivanova* (Bulgarian language teacher) *tells me this too. I want to be like her.* (I ask why). *She looks nice and she has beautiful dresses and shoes.* (I tell her that she can do this). *Yes, I can.*

Not all of the children were preparing for change but change in their cirscustances was inevitable. The youngest children were likely to be adopted and the oldest ones were going into foster care. There were also children, those whose placement care or adoption had fallen through, who were going to be taken to the family-type homes being built closer to the more populated part of the city.

The narratives in this section are brief, as is my interpretation, which is poignant, of the methodological limits of my research visit to 'the homes'. Although I tried to convey "the multiple layers of sensibility and intelligibility" (Jackson 1995:123) of lived experience in a written account, there are times when ethnography can be challenged to identify, to gather, to inscribe (Biehl 2001), "to bring the ethnographic moment back […] of what we saw and heard and our inability, finally, to do justice to it in our representations" (Behar 1996:9). I listened, absorbed and made sense, but ultimately it is the very words of my interlocutors that matter the most, not so much how I interpreted them. To understand the lifeworlds of these children will require a full emersion, a long-term participant observation, ethnographic accounts that are able to convey the meaning-making of their everyday. Yet, even the short

report of what these children thought and felt can be elucidating. Research within state institutions may be challenging to negotiate but not impossible.

**Conclusion**

Sharma and Gupta (2006) presented the challenge faced by anthropologists in studying states through the lens of primarily local communities while resisting the state (ibid:27). The lack of ethnographic focus on states may at times "undermine anthropologists' capacity to deal satisfactorily with important forms of power and politics" (Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005:21). So, what I sought to capture in this chapter is a snapshot of child protection interventions which provide clues to understanding the micropolitics of the work of the state, how state authorities and governments operate in people's daily lives, and how the state comes to be imagined, encountered, and reimagined by its subjects as regards to care, discipline and regulation (Ball 1993; Foucault 1984).

The current childcare system in Bulgaria cannot be understood without its historical setting and effects on people's understanding of what constitutes 'home', 'good' or 'bad' parenting, individual and community. This chapter is about the material and ideological change that happened in socialist and postsocialist times. Although one can find traces of nostalgia for the past, the purpose of the chapter is not to argue that things were somehow better before; rather, simply put, my effort is to mark the fact that there are Roma persons whose identification is shaped not only by the circumstances in the Roma neighbourhood and community, but also by the state within a different domain of 'home' and within different time frameworks. Just as the concept of home can have different meanings, so does identification. There is much more to be included in the topic of this chapter, such as what happens to Roma children when they are adopted or placed in foster care as well as what happens once and if they are reunited with

their families. As such I would like to suggest that anthropologists can and should write about experiences from the margins of Roma-ness, employing sensitive frameworks to account for attachment and displacement, for acceptance and rejection.

Finally, I also write as I do because of the idiosyncrasies that have shaped me. Reflexively speaking, my struggle to interpret, 'to read the ethnography' (Gay y Blasco and Wardle 2019), to present what I think I needed to write about, is because I am also attempting to understand my "parallel quest to recover my own, and my family's past" (Behar 1996:98). Going back to the memory of my mother's 'home' I presented two stories here, one of an anthropologist and one of a daughter to a woman whose experiences resembled those that I attempted to voice.

# PART 3: Adulthood and Becoming

# Chapter 6. Gendered Strategies – kin and state

## Introduction

In this chapter I pay close attention to the subject which was my original exploration as I embarked on fieldwork. No matter how precise and 'scientific' my pre-fieldwork plan was, its implementation was dependent on innumerable contingencies and unexpectedness. Armed with theories about gender intersections with racial, class and regional modalities of identities as well as gender as a relational concept (Butler 1990; 1993; Oprea 2004, 2005; Lorde 2007; Yuval-Davis 2011; Kóczé 2011; 2019) I hypothesized about gender as a social, political, and cultural category. Indeed, gender relationships permeated much of my fieldwork. But no universalizing theory would have prepared me for the negotiations of the existential everyday realities I witnessed and experienced (Callaway 1992). I reminisce on my first encounters in Radost when my parents ensured that I was going to be safe as an unmarried Roma woman living with non-kin. The job of looking after my safety and respectability was then transferred to Neli's parents and fortunately for me, Neli and I were in the same 'unmarried' boat and just as she had, I settled into the position of a daughter (see also Abu-Lughod 1988). I was assigned to the women's domain but I was not entirely seen as a 'complete' woman; discussing sexuality and intimate relationships with me was avoided to a certain degree due to my attributed innocence and expected ignorance on these matters. Later, as the oldest daughter of my parents, it was utterly normal for my informants to accept that it was indeed necessary to interrupt fieldwork and look after my sick parents. Having become a mother when I returned to the field in Sastipe gave me greater entry into the women's world. The presence of my baby daughter also generated much interest amongst my interlocutors and it shaped the research process and its findings (Mose Brown & Casanova 2009; Castaneda et al 2013). I was not the only one studying people in my field, people studied me also. As a

mother I was meant to be nurturing and conform to the locals' ideals of femininity and motherhood and it was in the gendered kinship practices (Pine 2002:98) that I was able to access deeper understandings of gendered moralities and women's aspirations. Finally, I had more access to the themes that interested me in the first place. My situated approach, motivation and "personal problematic" (Cohen 1992:223) played a role in what I write here. The subject of this chapter can easily expand beyond the limits of the thesis; indeed it is 'unfinished' (Biehl and Locke 2017) as are the identities of my informants and arguably, as is Roma-ness. However by following the main argument of the thesis and by employing ethnography I tease out two themes, or rather two stories, which illustrate how singularity of experience is worth considering when accounting for gender relationships.

The first theme is marriage. Marriage accommodates and represents the culmination of gender and identity performance and research has focused on this aspect (Silverman 1988; Oprea 2005; Gay y Blasco 2012a; Tesar 2012). Marriage is paramount and its celebration is full of symbolic cues. But behind the 'performative' (Butler 1990; Gay y Blasco 1999) character of marriage I shall also show that marriage practices are purposed for creation of alliances and social networks based on reciprocity and community-based economy, an economy placed or situated outside of the formal state economy, yet still 'mirroring' the state because the state is hard to avoid (Pine 2018:100). Highly controversial early marriages are widely viewed, externally, as transgression (Oprea 2005) and as something 'typical' of Roma. Importantly for my argument, I will show that there are internal struggles, within kin and community, which may not necessarily be exhibited, but nevertheless are there and are painfully present.

The second theme I touch upon is childbearing, again a highly politicised and ethnicised topic. As other authors have done I shall illustrate that gender and reproduction are a primary

component of Roma kin relationships (Durst 2002; 2010; Gay y Blasco 1999; Engebrigsten 2007; Tesar 2012) and they affect trust and entitlements. One does not automatically acquire positions; there are strategies and meanings assigned to 'becoming' a woman, a mother, a mother in law, a matriarch (Pamporov 2006, 2007; Cupelin 2017). Female bodies and reproduction can be a model for the unity and distinctiveness of Roma-ness, while the body comes to symbolise boundaries- between women and men, between Roma and nonRoma (Okely 1983; Gay y Blasco 1999; see also Goddard 1996:15). But there is more. Under this conflated surface of rituals and in some cases taboos, women also navigate within these boundaries, devising strategies and reproducing meanings. They may often do so because they are left without alternative but, as womanhood becomes entwined with group identity (Goddard 1996:16), women are not only "passive and subordinate" (ibid:15); they can be decision-makers. They may not always be endowed with agency, yet they are striving to achieve it.

Like other authors I show that by employing certain tactics, sometimes essentialist in nature, the group positions itself differently from the dominant population (Okely 1983; Stewart 1997) but ***not only***. These strategies are a direct response to the sense of identity, belonging, and personal value (Pine 2008) of the locals which they derive from the moralities they live by (Gay y Blasco 2012a). By employing strategic 'mimesis' (Irigaray 1984), in other words the subversion of the established wider social order, by adhering to patriarchal stereotypes (and risking being misunderstood, labelled and vilified), they necessitate Roma-ness but ultimately, I argue, it is for securing socio-economic survival and future. Spivak takes the 'mimesis' concept further and presents essentialising as "strategic" (Spivak 1996) in order to serve a purpose (Jackson 1996), again not without risking marginalisation. This entails struggles. Spivak recognised the inappropriate use of 'strategic essentialism' after she coined the concept to warn against the justification of pernicious actions (Kurzwelly et al 2020).

Kóczé et al (2019), Kóczé a Roma woman herself who employs Spivak's subaltern studies actively in her research, assert that its use may generate controversies because it imposes unification and homogeneity (ibid:9). Most recently van Bar and Kóczé (2020:29), drawing on Bhabha (1994), suggested a shift towards moving beyond the essentialism versus constructivism debate in Romani Studies, and proposed "the understanding of Roma agency through the lens of mimicry", not simply as 'copying' or opposing but as a way of subverting the dominant authority. By cautiously re-employing the concept of "strategic essentialism", being mindful that it is reductionist and may generate populism, as well as being useful in deconstructing historical subjugation, I argue that community/ies which are largely rejected by both the dominant population and the state create their own strategies for various reasons: to escape the burden of kinship relationships; to achieve recognition within the community; to reach self-realisation; to survive socio-economically within or outside structures mirroring the state. The latter happens because there is an "ideology that undervalues or devalues the domestic domain in favour of a particular public" (Pine 2018:98) and a view of the "family", or the community, as antisocial, where "the visible" politics of the state provides social value, but the domestic/kinship world, seen largely as the world and the priority of women, is less valorised (ibid 2018:99). These strategies operate at times under the auspices of culture reproduction and essentialism (and by the same token under constructivism as I have shown in previous chapters), and are often based on women's roles as culture bearers (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Okely 1975, 1983). However, this does not occur without causing an internal community/kin struggle. This chapter can be read in some way as a continuation of Chapter 3 where I presented the contradictions outside the community/within the state domain in regards to education. Here I turn my ethnographic gaze inside out by seeing how kinship resists the state and the struggles that entail. Of course, as Pine (2018) contends, I only present "a part picture, and one we should handle with some care […] the inside or domestic (which are not the same thing but associated often with the same or similar

characteristics) is both the site of trust and intimacy and a hierarchical, often patriarchal, and violent place, where questions of power and its abuse are as complicated as they are in contexts defined as statist" (ibid: 98).

The two stories I discuss here are seen as 'typical' by nonRoma and I argue seemingly internalised, in other words mimicked (not copied) by Roma themselves. These two stories can easily feed populist imaginary discourses for further Roma labelling and marginalisation. Early marriage and having multiple children are often seen as a 'package', part of a 'backward Roma culture' and form the basis for numerous sensationalist media frenzies (see for example Oprea 2005 discussing the 'outrageous' marriage of twelve year old Ana Maria Cioba). Indeed the 'Gypsyness picturing' (Gay y Blasco 2008) of young Roma girls who have given birth to babies at a tender age pervades obsessive discussions of Gypsyness in media, policy, state and non-state. However, if we are to account for marriage and reproduction inside Roma communities, I would like to point out that we cannot exclude the general contexts in which they live. It is undeniable that the shift between historical regimes (Ottoman rule, socialism, postsocialism, etc.) has had an impact on changes in societal norms and values. In Bulgaria under socialism women were an integral part of building the nation's economy (Kaneff 2002) and played a highly public role in creating the modern statehood including by taking a central role as the "educated elite" (Nestorova 1996), as the mothers (Kostova 1998) and the activists[39] (Kaneff 2002). Closely examined, though, this 'equal position' was largely relevant for the domains of public work and reproduction; women were valued as labourers and mothers (Gal and Kligman 2000; Pine 2001, 2002, 2003). This was essential in order to encourage childbearing as a remedy of the falling national birth-rate (Dimitrova 2012). Of course, patriarchal attitudes still existed inside households because domestic work and childcare (outside of state facilities) was assigned to women (ibid;

[39] Through the 'house of culture' (chitalishte) for example.

Pilkington 1992). The extraordinary changes post 1989 brought shifts in every area of lived life, including in public gender relationships (Gal and Kligman 2000; Pine 2001; 2002). The highly educated women were assigned to low-paid sectors or to the grey economy (Verdery 1996; Pine 2002). The household became the women's domain but the 'nostalgia' for the past ideologies (not practices) of equally educated men and women remained. Those such as Roma who did not have the education, or the cultural and economic capital, to survive in this crisis were pushed to the bottom of the "underclass" (Ladányi and Szelényi 2003) as social inequalities grew disproportionately (Dimitrova 2012). In such strained socio-economic circumstances the previously encouraged education and higher birth-rate (not without its disadvantages) of all women became openly ethicised and gendered. Roma early marriages and childbirth became the anti-nation epitome.[40]

I also need to address how the issues of marriage and reproduction in Roma contexts are seen by feminists. While there has been a growing interest in Romani Studies in regards to Roma women's activism, feminism and movements (Oprea 2005; Brooks 2012; Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2015; Kocze et al 2019) in a highly necessary attempt to theorise Roma women's experiences and include those into the wider pool of feminisms, I find that the discussion of Roma women's everyday (at grassroots level and beyond) is somewhat insufficient. Perhaps, we, knowingly or not, have focused so intensely on the neoliberal meritocracy model of looking for the 'role models', those who 'made it' in the world of unequal distribution of resources, that we forget to bring forward the agency of those whom we may see as having succumbed to patriarchy and discrimination. Thus, in choosing to discuss the two stories below I would like to invite further considerations of the everyday, of

[40] I would like to clarify that prejudice and discriminative attitudes towards Roma existed previously under communism but they were hidden under the practice of an ideology which had to make use of everyone capable for the production of labour. This in itself excluded groups who were seen an unproductive (single mothers, children and adults with disabilities and other).

the agency of our informants and of the boundaries that we as researchers may be reluctant to cross.

**Marriage**

I come back to Mirka's story (Chapter 3). My initial encounter with Mirka was through the education projects in Radost. She was one of Neli's volunteers who helped the younger children with homework. After Mirka's alleged abduction her volunteering and school attendance ceased. The perceived '*uninterest'* of Mirka's parents in her education once again affirmed that *'Roma culture'* is focused on marrying early with '*lavish*' marriage celebrations. Roma early marriages, as expressed in Mrs Stoyanova's sentiments, are seen as a cause for high concern not only by teachers but by social workers, politicians and NGO workers (Kolev et al 2011). It is often assumed that young Roma girls are coerced into marrying by their families at a cost to their schooling (ibid) but there is little research to explore what the locals' perceptions of early marriage are or whether there are any personal and community gains as a result of early marriages. Ironically, the locals, both Roma and nonRoma had accepted early marriage as a "*Roma thing*", in fact Roma were even singing this in popular songs. See, for example, the words of this song in Romanes (my translation) at the time when I first embarked on fieldwork:

*I will make a big wedding. Many people I will invite.*

*Ref: Everyone will be looking at my beautiful young daughter-in-law. They will love her. Dance, dance my beautiful daughter-in-law. She dances and never stops.*

*Ref: I love her. I live for her. A big wedding, a big wedding. I'll do a wedding. Many people I will invite.*

*We are Roma, we are Roma and Roma will die. We marry our children early.*

Apart from the song's focus on the beautiful daughter in law, anthropologically, we can easily conclude that early marriage is a given and is socially true. "After all, we anthropologists have made something of a specialty out of dealing with the rituals surrounding birth, marriage, death, and similar rites of passage. We are particularly concerned with ritual gestures that are socially efficacious: where the mere act of saying or doing something makes it socially true" (Graeber 2012:108). Jackson also warns: "Even with the best will in the world, human beings seldom speak their minds or say exactly what is in their hearts. Rather, we express what is in our best interests, both personal and interpersonal […] Yet anthropologists often claim that a peoples' shared symbols and vernacular images […] may be taken literally" (Jackson 2013b:5). Were the locals so scrupulously honest that they left the anthropologist so vulnerable to admitting that Roma parents marry their young girls and boys early? My personal experience of growing up in a Roma neighbourhood had left my positionality on early marriage somewhat wavering between employing activism to stop it, denying it or admitting that it could not be ceased. I had also taken early marriage for granted, being the offspring of my parents' early marriage. Here was my opportunity to scratch deeper ethnographically and find out more about the reasons behind 'the practice'. Did the locals hide behind their narratives and songs? Did they lie about being carefree? Ethnographies can "traffic in lies" (Metcalf 2002:1). But how do we deal with this? I believe there is a dissonance between what is spoken and what happens in reality, it is a metonymy of sort. Something may be spoken, even sung, indeed internalised, but it may not be necessarily literally true (ibid; see also Stewart 1997). Okely (1994) has argued that Traveller-Gypsy culture is "created by selective choices and oppositions" (ibid:55). Perhaps it was this quest for opposition, authenticity and "inventive originality" (Okely 2010), the persuit to be differentiated from the dominant group that the locals were exemplifying in their narratives. Perhaps, it was what Spivak calls "strategic essentialism" (1996) or Herzfeld's "cultural

intimacy" (1997) that the locals employed in presenting themselves to the outside world, including the state domain, no matter how damaging for their image this was.

Practically speaking, it was easier for Mirka's parents to follow the mainstream stereotypes, namely that they supposedly thought of Mirka's education as useless, than having to explain what honour meant to the outside world. They knew that they were going to be criticised externally, particularly because Mirka's grades at school were promising, yet, they needed to succumb to what (little and negative) was expected of them externally and what '*had to be done'* internally. Witnessing their despair in the evenings, within the intimacy of their home, was an eye-opener. The regret and the emotional burden of the situation revolved around crying, being cross at Mirka and thinking of organising a feud against Boyan's family. Kinship, the "prime site of trust and affection" but also of "power, violence, and inequality" (Pine 2018:100) was taking the role of the state (the police, the school, the social services, etc). The state could not be trusted. Outside the household, however, Mirka's kin appeared well composed and disregarding of what the school opinion was. "Speech act" (Metcalf 2002:4) and performance (Butler 1993; Gay y Blasco 1999) can be radically different to what the observer hears and sees (Metcalf 2002:4). Whilst they settled for the external community macabre image, acquired a long time ago anyhow– of parents who 'did not care much about their children's future', within the community Mirka's parents were bearing the burden of honour as the most important aspect of their being and adhered to the communal morality. Was this act subversive, immoral even? Yes, it was to one person's understanding but not to another's. Mirka's parents were in fact considering their daughter's future, albeit through the communal lens of understanding gender relationships, and this was the contradicting moral of the story.

Whilst there have been attempts to regulate early marriage, such as limiting the practice during socialism, or by introducing legal action against anyone who marries a minor (under 18 years old) in postsocialism, Roma early marriages in Bulgaria (and elsewhere) persist. More importantly, however, they continue to be poorly understood (Tesar 2018). Considering how marriage practices among Roma are of essence for the preservation of the social order and gender hierarchies is paramount to understanding what influences decision-making (ibid). This creates contradictions and moral clashes. But this clash of expectations, ideals and desires can be traced not only externally within the school (state) domain; it can be found internally also. Ideally, Mirka, who was sixteen and hence not far from graduating from High School, would have waited to finish her education and then ventured into marriage. Ideally, Mirka would have been accepted at university. Again, ideally, her husband would be the only male child in the family, who would inherit his parents' house, preferably a dwelling that would accommodate a separate unit for the young couple. These ideals, at times narrated differently, were somewhat shared by Mirka's parents and her school. These were also two different vantage points with one imagined ideal arrival point – Mirka's good future. However, Mirka's marriage caused a moral clash between the two domains – kin and state - and Mirka's future turned out to be a rather more complicated trajectory.

*'She must eat bread with honour and dignity in her husband's house'* – Mirka's father told me. Parents had a particular responsibility to teach their children, both male and female, how important women's honour was. Surely Mirka's mother took an active role in advising, admonishing and intervening but it was Mirka's father and brothers who took on the role of guarding her from going out late and being unaccompanied. Still, why was honour more important than attending school? Dignity and honour were of crucial importance, in other words Mirka's virginity until marriage was intrinsically connected to her respectability, but not only. Mirka's virginity, respectfulness, reputation and shame (see also Stewart 1997;

Tesar 2012) were not individual; they were shared by her family and community group (Gay y Blasco 1999). Her respectability was translated as the honour of her kin, their name, their belonging and their (plural) acceptance in the community. One must note the use of language. The word 'virginity' (*девственост/devstvenost*) was hardly used when people spoke of Mirka. Virginity per se relates to something intimate, personal, physical, biological and individual. Instead, both men and women referred to it as honour (*чест/chest*), which is relational, sharable, collective, abstract even. Honour does not belong only to the individual; it belongs to the communal, the family's "desire" and ideals; honour belongs to a "different body" (Gay y Blasco 1999: 517-35). Gender is central here since women in particular are given the role of establishing and carrying Roma-ness through their embodiment of chastity and decency (ibid; Okely 1999; Cupelin 2017). Mirka's honour had become the centre of discussion by all. This surveillance of sexuality has been theorised by Foucault (1987) who argues that an understanding of power is essential, and discussing women's experiences and their spaces for agency and choice are important.

What did Mirka think? Mirka knew Boyan (her alleged abductor) because she secretly met with him after school. So, Mirka and Boyan devised a plan to stage an elopement. Pamporov (2006, 2007) provides some possible answers to the different practices called 'elopement' (Fraser, 1992), 'kidnapping of a girl' and 'simulated larceny' (Marushiakova & Popov 1993) as strategies which may help to avoid group endogamy or bride-price payment (Liegeois 1994; Pamporov 2007). Mirka was also in love but she knew that her kin was not going to approve of her secret boyfriend. Eventually, Mirka let her family know about her secret relationship and that Boyan's parents were going to ask for her hand 'properly'. Mirka's parents were distraught. Her brothers were angry and her grandparents cried irreconcilably. They had spent years thinking of her future, including seeing her graduate and dreaming of her ideal marriage partner. Moreover, Boyan was not the ideal future son in law. '*She is*

*beautiful as a teardrop. She could become who she wanted to be. She deserves someone from a good soy* (kin), *someone handsome but also someone who will look after her.'* – Nevena, her mother, told me. Mirka was tall, slender and light-skinned. What Mirka's mother was referring to was a standard of beauty. The lighter the skin colour of a person was, the less exclusion they were likely to face outside the community. Mirka's new husband was dark and tall and by different aesthetic standards he would have been referred to as handsome. His skin colour, however, was seen as an impediment, a harbinger of discrimination. Skin colour was not simply a matter of attractiveness, but it was also linked to status. Since Roma are largely (but not only) identified by skin colour Boyan's 'darkness' was seen as problematic. Nevena was concerned that Boyan would be recognised as Roma externally and that was going to affect his socio-economic position, such as finding a job and, in general, his functioning outside the community was going to be subjected to his visible 'race'. Nevena herself experienced racism due to her darker skin but she had internalised the popular perception of being 'dark' and 'black' as less desirable and equal to lower social status. This was a painful personal reminder of a time when my father, also dark-skinned, used to take me to school but never enter the school building to avoid other children ridiculing me. This is a conundrum, a contradiction and an injustice but not one that is unique for my informants (or for my family). Research has illustrated how colorism and racism can be problematic not only as imposed externally but also inside communities who share similar identification traits (Fannon 1967; Hunter 2005). Widely, beyond the Bulgarian context, globally, this 'politics of beauty' rooted in questions of power permeate many discussions from academia to the beauty industry. Could the skin colour preference be explained in Bourdieu's (2007) "symbolic violence concept? Was this the "false consciousness" with which Glenn (2008) explains internalised racism as exacerbated by the power of socio-economic forces?

There was, however, something more important than Boyan's looks and this was his current social position. Boyan (aged 18) was the eldest child of three and lived in a small house with his parents, which meant Mirka was to share a household with her mother in law. In Radost the general rule upon marriage was virilocal residence which leads to the formation of extended families consisting of parents, married sons and their wives and children. Once married Mirka was going to become a *bori* (daughter in law) whose place was in her mother in law's house and since Boyan was the oldest son he was not going to inherit his parents' house. The youngest or the only son was the one who would remain living in the house of his parents with his wife and take care of them in old age (Tesar 2012; Cupelin 2017). Although at first criticised, the marriage was eventually accepted. Once Mirka and Boyan eloped, which was successful in the sense that it left both sets of parents with no alternative but to allow their marriage, Nevena had to put her criticism of Boyan aside. When she called me to invite me to her daughter's wedding there was no trace of criticism. Boyan had become her kin.

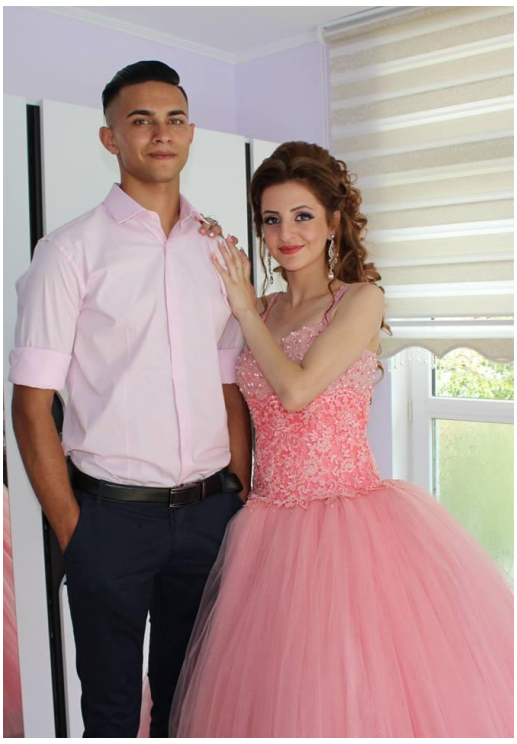

Image 26. Mirka and Boyan.

Marriage is central to understanding kinship (Carsten 2007). By the same token, marriage is essential when discussing Roma kinship and the meaning of relatedness (Wilems 1983; Gay y Blasco 1999; Engebrigtsen 2007, 2011; Williams 2011; Tessar 2012). Engebrigtsen (2007) for instance stresses that although Roma see biological kinship as the basis for constructing social groups, kinship in Roma terms needs to be considered as a practical construction drawing on Bourdieu's insight (1976) that "it is practical kin who make marriages; it is official kin who celebrate them" (Engebrigtsen 2007:79). Gender, virginity and the proof of honour, the stability of the extended kin need to be protected (Hastrup 1993: 41) for practical reasons. In other words, the kin may be more valued than the individual. Thus marriage is "a functional link in the chain" that connects two different families (Engebrigtsen 2007:79).

Ultimately, kinship is also formed by "seeking meaning and identity" (Stone 1997: 278) and I would add that it can be also about seeking to exert agency. Mirka exercised agency because she decided when and whom to marry. She dreamed but not according to her school expectations or according to what her parents wanted of her. Perhaps, it was the status she was going to receive as an adult, because it didn't matter how old she was, once she entered marriage she was going to grow up remarkably quickly. Perhaps, she craved autonomy. Perhaps, it was her way to show that she has the capacity to choose albeit within the limits of the communal environment. Perhaps, the reason was as simple as becoming a bride, to be the centre of attention (see the words of the song above), 'a Cinderella" of sort and a 'lavish' wedding was going to realise her dream (Otnes et al 2003). Growing up she saw multitudes of weddings in their full colour and the dresses, the makeup, the celebration, the excitement that they brought. Perhaps, she did not believe that education would enable her to be what she wanted to become – a lawyer. Indeed logically and sadly, Mirka's chances of creating a life outside her neighbourhood as a lawyer without experiencing discrimination were markedly

lower than her nonRoma counterparts. Perhaps, she married early simply because she was in love with Boyan. The reasons were manifold.

What did Boyan think? Boyan was in love with Mirka and with this came the urgency in establishing a match for him. Mirka was beautiful, from a 'good family' and very importantly virtuous and honourable. Boyan and his family evaluated and approved of her (see also Tesar 2012; Gamella 2018). Boyan knew what his role was going to entail once he got married. He needed to find employment, to look after his wife and save funds towards building a home. It was easier said than done. Once Mirka moved in with Boyan's parents they seemed happy with his choice but they also were not in a hurry to organise a wedding. Weddings in Radost were not private affairs; they were the celebrations of close kin and the whole community. The purpose of the time lapse was to prepare for the wedding day, which required the securing of financial resources for clothing, the organization of wedding venues, food, the invitation of guests, who may be abroad, and to ensure good weather to accommodate the dancing and the large gathering outside (Silverman 2012). After all, weddings mark the culmination of a range of activities involved in establishing a marriage alliance and social recognition (ibid; Gay y Blasco 1999; Engebrigtsen 2007). Apart from these practical matters, the time lapse had another purpose. The passing of time also gave a chance to the new bride to get pregnant (see also Cupelin 2017). Marriage and reproduction go hand in hand. This also reminds of how kin/community in its striving for reproducing Roma-ness can mirror state and its need for reproducing citizens (Pine 2018; Thelen et al 2018), albeit 'rightful' ones. Just as the long lines of *horo*[41] loops (composed mainly of dancing women) at the wedding were unceasing at Mirka's wedding so were the expectations of future offspring looming in people's minds.

[41] A popular circle dance in the Balkans and other countries.

Image 27. The bride in front of her dowry [42]

Image 28. Holding the bride's attire and inviting guests from the neighbourhood.

[42] Cheiz (dowry) can be displayed for the groom's kin and all community members to see. Nearly everyone in the neighbourhood comes to view the dowry and whoever visits brings gifts and puts money on the pile of dowry articles. The bride's family would have been laboriously accumulating dowry, mostly handmade knit-work, quilts, pillows, sheets and carpets. Dowry also consists of new bedroom furniture, ovens, washing machines, kitchens and other. The size of dowry is usually determined by the wealth of the bride's family. Trends in dowry, 'bride price' and 'bride service' are different in the locations of my research and marriage payments changed in terms of which the beneficiary was - the bride's family, the groom and/or his family (Tambiah 1973; Goody 1980).

Image 29. Taking the wedding dress to the bride's parental home and henna night [43].

Anthropologists recognise marriage as a way to describe how different societies organise and understand kinship, production, reproduction and property relationships (Goody et al 1973; Goody 1976; Comaroff 1980). Marriages mobilise economic activity and create alliance networks which operate within a specific space of morality (Gay y Blasco 1999; Daskalaki 2004; see also Goddard 1996). Mirka's wedding was an important ritual event in itself. Young and old, women, men and children in the kindred were allocated specific roles to perform but it was immediately noticeable that women were the organisers, the dancers, the helpers; they were 'the face' of the wedding. Weddings re-affirm, celebrate and present a platform for the performance of gendered moralities. Weddings celebrate the ideology of gender and the values ascribed to chastity and women's responsibility to continue the Roma-ness of the community. Moreover, the bride brings honour to her husband's household and to her father's household but she also carries shame and virtues seen as female traits such as subordination, shyness and domesticity. Of course, honour and shame as virtues exist within a wider context, beyond this of the Roma in Radost, and in comparison with other

[43] The Henna Ceremony - *Kana* (henna night, kina – Turkish). The day of the henna is known as 'carnival' day. One of the highlights of the Kana ceremony is the painting of the bride's face and hands (seen in the photo above). Ethnographers point out that it is hard to date the bridal painting ritual, as the communist regime did not encourage studies into minority ethnic and religious groups and the traditional Roma wedding was banned ((Marushiakova et al 2000).

communities, it becomes clear that the differentiation between honourable and dishonourable women exists elsewhere (Pine 2002; du Bouley 1983; Goddard 1987). Mirka's wedding exhibited all of the above, including the focus on continuing what was seen as Roma attributes (the dress, the dances, the music, the crowds albeit not unique) not only to position itself as a different wedding from those of nonRoma but also to introduce Mirka and Boyan as members of the community. In fact, the parents referred to the weddings as "creating authority and respect" (*да създадем авторитет и уважение*/ *da sazdadem avtoritet i uvazenie*) for the young couple and the wedding guests referred to their attendance at the wedding as 'paying respect' (уважение/*uvazenie*). In other words, their unit, kin, honour were going to ensure belonging to the group.

Marriages are seen as means to strengthen relationships between different kin but also to ensure that wealth remains within the family (Tesar 2012). Mirka's marriage was related to wealth transfer between the bride's and the groom's families; it was closely tied to the distribution of property and gift exchange within and between close kin and other members of the community. Apart from being a sociable occasion, entertainment and enjoyment; the wedding involved economic transactions, exchange of money, property, gifts, borrowing and lending (see also Silverman 2011). Money was given to the musicians, the bride and the groom. But this had a meaning. It is on that day that the couple and their kin had to be seen as prosperous, and the wedding in a way was less about the emotion and the fuzziness of the young couple's relationship as it was about the appearance and the dream of a life that is not limited by lack of resources. It was as if the present celebration was a projected future dream and it was this future of joy, dance, wealth, togetherness and "brotherhood" (Stewart 1997) that the kin and guests were attempting to perform – a couple, a kin, a community, "a people yet to come" ( Biehl and Locke 2010:317).

Mirka's wedding was a substantial financial commitment for both her parents and Boyan's parents. The amount of resources invested in the pre-wedding preparations and the actual wedding by each family varied depending on the family's economic condition and the kind of relationship they have or wanted to build with close kin. From the moment their children are born, Roma in Radost and in Sastipe begin devising plans for creating and sustaining stable socio-economic network of relationships around them, which in turn will help them deal with the inequalities that life in the neighbourhood can bring. There was an unwritten and unuttered expectation of the members of the community as well as close kin for gift giving. Gift giving and reciprocating at the actual wedding was audited and observed, it was a sign of respect. Anthropologists and other social theorists have long stressed the role of reciprocity in establishing and strengthening social bonds (Mauss 1925; Sahlins 1972). People invest in other people's weddings, birthdays and many other social occasions, and not only those of close and distant relatives, but also those of neighbours' and friends' weddings, as a long-term strategy hoping that this investment will be returned to them later when they celebrate. This "mutual indebtedness" and a way for "money to make them relatives" (White 1994), of keeping relationships open-ended results in "group membership and solidarity" (ibid:xii). To have a reliable kin and community support networks is important and weddings represent a moment where wealth transfer or gift giving provide another way to survive. These are welfare exchanges and transactions of informal support networks and mutual acknowledgement based on kinship and friendship and the logic of reciprocity similar to that of Mauss (1925). However, informal networks may not be always reliable. Mirka's parents were disappointed by the financial outcome of their daughter's wedding as some of the people they expected to give back did not attend the celebration. More importantly, this informal social network underlines the precariousness of access to formal life outside the neighbourhood and the necessity of informal socio-economic networks, based on kinship for the survival of the locals.

Marriage can also reflect state ideologies. Kinship recreates itself "in opposition to the state as an alternative form of identification and belonging" […] "Kinship may be portrayed as morally legitimate, while the state is portrayed as illegitimate." (Pine 2018:100). Mirka and Boyan's marriage was seen more as a mutual *contract* than as a *certificate* from the state (which they could not obtain because Mirka was under 18 years old). Both Mirka and Boyan achieved a certain status of maturity after marriage, no matter how old they were, because marriage was a matter of custom rather than of formal rules. Their relationship required permission from the parents but it did not require the legitimisation and the order of the state. The permission for Mirka's and Boyan's marriage came not from the state or from a court, it came from kin and community because family received the greatest amount of loyalty (Sutherland 1975; Okely 1983; Stewart 1997; Liegeois 1994; Gay y Blasco 1999; Williams 2003; Engebrigtsen 2007). Where state (in this case the school) and the communal practice conflicted, it was the communal practice/the kinship that won (Pine 2018). Nevertheless, even in these situations where the state was mostly absent, marriage was not a random matter. The standards for determining a valid marriage were audited, to use Strathern's term (2000), by the community. Although Mirka and Boyan were not counted as married before the law, their marriage operated on the assumption that by cohabitating, otherwise acting as married, their union was legitimate before the community. More pertinently, marriage, following the loss of virginity and its connection to respectability of kin and community, was a way to ensure that the couple were going to survive economically. Living on the margins, literally due to the external nature of the Roma neighbourhood and its socio-economic conditions, and symbolically, because of the dominant discriminatory practices externally, and the importance of respectability internally, pushed the emphasis on marriage as a way of providing an economic partnership for organizing production at the centre of negotiation. Marriage strategies as such cannot be seen in the abstract, unrelated to inheritance strategies,

fertility strategies, and even pedagogical strategies. In other words, they must be seen as one element in the entire system of biological, cultural and social reproduction (Bourdieu 1976).

One may ask whether there was another way for Mirka to achieve what she wanted. Perhaps there was. Indeed, there are many Roma women today, often university graduates, who defy patriarchal structures. One needs to account for class differentiation in the Roma neighbourhood. In Sastipe's Lower Mahala, which was wealthier and had better access to mainstream amenities, early marriages (meaning marriages under 18 years old) were rare and frowned upon. Young girls were dreaming of their graduation ball gowns and the travel destinations they were going to explore, rather than becoming brides. Kolev et al (2011:57) also show that there are differences in attitudes towards early marriages in different Roma communities. Here again, the heterogeneity of Roma communities cannot be underestimated. Going back to Mirka, although married, she did enrol back into high school and graduate. This must have been challenging to negotiate with kin and with school (I had left Radost) but her persistence and choice have to be accounted for and commended.

One may ask why is it that Roma have chosen marriage to make Roma-ness distinct. Firstly, I would argue that it is the histories of discrimination and socio-economic circumstances that have shaped Roma choices. Secondly, I have partial glimpses into the answer through the lens of marriage rituals. Take wedding celebration for example. Weddings connect the past and the future, they are celebrations of life, honour, beauty and coming of age. Weddings are also performances, strategies and ways to reproduce status and identity, to 'pay respect' and give agency. If marriages are about building a sense of family, celebrating the start of a new kin relationship, and respect for the kin, albeit at the expense of unequal gender hierarchies, they are also about performing a sense of belonging that resonates with the hope of a new future. Whilst most of the anthropological literature focuses on Roma, the reproduction of

Roma-ness and its gendered moralities as situated firmly in the present, Roma kinship is "resolutely oriented toward the future" (Tesar 2018) and in that sense marriages are also orientated towards a future 'becoming'. In choosing to make marriage practices distinct, Roma exhibit the universal yearning to 'become', not as expected and sometimes by resorting to reinforcing essentialist tactics and perpetuation of patriarchy (to add, not unique to Roma), yet, still displaying the human condition's desire to belong.

**Childbearing**

My first informants in Sastipe were the women in Neli's mothers'centre. Becoming a mother opened a new world to me. The presence of my baby daughter necessitated many conversations and the building of rapport (Mose Brown & Casanova 2009; Castaneda et al 2013). My intention was to study and write of Roma women's lives from the women's points of view and from a common 'standpoint' (Smith 1989; Abu Lughod 1993). So, in this section I present an individual story capturing power relations, resistance, the search for strong kin networks and belonging. So far, I illustrated that gender is a primary component of Roma kin relationships (Gay y Blasco 1999; Engebrigtsen 2007; Tesar 2012); it affects trust and entitlements. However, while womanhood becomes entwined with group identity (not only in Roma contexts but elsewhere, see for example Goddard 1996:16) women are not "passive and subordinate" (ibid:15). Admittedly, before I embarked on research I looked through "a double burden" (Hill Collins 2000; Oprea 2005) lens, meaning that Roma women are excluded as being Roma and as women, however, this framework did not leave space for women's agency and in itself the notion of 'women' per se assumes stable, unitary subjects which women are not. In the process of research I encountered communal practices that can be both beneficial and detrimental to women. So, bearing in mind that women may not always have the agency to choose and act in their own interest, I also looked for examples of

where they exerted agency 'to become'. Women navigate within boundaries and devise strategies and these are also questions of power (Foucault 1987). Power is both structured and enacted in everyday activities and through observing these seemingly mundane tasks I wanted to answer one question that had occupied my mind since the beginning of fieldwork. Not only how (through exploring and recording the 'thickness' of rituals and beliefs related to womanhood) but why is Roma women's personhood brought about by motherhood? There are strategies and meanings assigned to 'becoming' a woman, a mother, a mother in law, a matriarch and these provide clues.

Authors have argued that the highest level of achievement of the status of female personhood is to become a '*romni*', meaning a married Roma woman with a child (Sutherland 1975; Gropper 1975; Silverman 1981; Pamporov 2006; Tesar 2012; Cupelin 2017). Pamporov (2006) distinguishes between three levels/positions of womanhood in Bulgaria: 1) the '*chay'/'shey'* (unmarried girl) who is at the lowest rung of the hierarchy; 2) the '*djuvli'* (a wife without child) or '*bori*' (daughter in law); 3) the '*romni*' – referring to a Roma woman who has a child. This structure may not be representative of all Roma communities in Bulgaria but it does have semblances with the women's hierarchies in my fieldwork. One can argue of further differentiation between the *romni* who has a male child and the *romni* who does not have a male child (see also Tesar 2012) and I shall provide an example.

On an unusually cold spring evening in April I heard the *zurnas* and the drums outside playing. People wrapped in warm clothes, hats, scarves and blankets were walking towards Lyuba's house on the slippery icy pathways to see who was celebrating. Lyuba had given birth to her baby. '*What did she have?"* – asked someone in the slowly gathering crowd. Lyuba's mother in law was giving chocolates and inviting people to go towards her husband who was pouring *rakija* (alcoholic fruit brandy) to the well-wishers. '*We have a girl*!'

Another lady exclaimed '*Congratulations! Next year you will have a boy'*. When I met Lyuba's mother the next morning she was worried. '*She will have to be strong now. They* (the in-laws) *wanted to have a boy. Angel* (Lyuba's husband) *is a little upset but he will love his girl, I know. Life would have been easier for Lyuba with a boy but she is young, there will be more children*'. I noticed the language use - to have a girl is to have *momiche* (a girl) and to have a boy is to have *dete* – a child. In socio-economic terms this gender production has a purpose: to have a son is to have an asset (it remains) and can thus provide care for the parents (not necessarily always but still believed). To have a girl is to benefit someone else since upon marriage girls leave the household and become part of their husbands' households. An elderly Roma man, who had three daughters (and in his words had no regrets about this), explained to me the gender differences in this way: *"Girls are seen as willows because they can sprout everywhere. Boys are seen as oaks because they stay where you plant them".* So, there is another reason, not necessarily related to that of the individual interest; it is about how the local Roma necessitate difference between families/kin and as a group vis-à-vis nonRoma. While girls can become mothers, in other words, they can ensure the production of Roma individuals necessary for the continuation of Roma-ness, upon marriage they leave the kin and the community in which they grew up (preferably marrying into another Roma kin/community rather than a nonRoma one); boys who become fathers and heads of the kin remain with their parents, their wives move in with them and hence the reproduction of the kin/community/Roma-ness is ensured and remains. Just like Lyuba did, her little girl was going to leave her kin one day to become part of another.

Similar to Mirka's story above, Angel was Lyuba's first boyfriend. *'He kept waiting for me in front of my school, so this is how we started talking and then people began talking that he is my boyfriend. Sure, in about two months, we got married.'* Within a year of their marriage Lyuba got pregnant. She attended the mother's centre and close to her due date she appeared

worried. Her latest pregnancy scan showed that she was going to have a girl. Lyuba was afraid that Angel would leave her. She saw a message on his phone from an unrecognised number and someone (which she assumed was another woman) was asking to meet him at a nearby café. She believed that if she had a son this would make her position stronger within Angel's family. Going back to her parents' home was unthinkable, especially now that she was going to have a child.

In the first forty days after giving birth Lyuba was not to go out after sunset so that 'darkness doesn't go into the baby' and she was forbidden to attend her grandmother's funeral because breastfeeding women could not be in contact with the dead. She couldn't sleep in the same bed as her husband. She was not supposed to cook and give food to anyone. She was seen as unclean. How was I to interpret this? What was this conveying? Anthropologists have pointed to the constitution of womanhood and the role of the female body in gendered purity and pollution beliefs. Influenced by Mary Douglas (1966) and her purity and danger theorisation Sutherland (1975), Okely (1983), Miller (1998), Williams (2003) write of the '*mahrime*' concept in the Gypsy/Traveller/Manus world and the connection between body, pollution and wider communal identification. Growing up in a Roma family I was never made purposefully aware of pollution beliefs or at least this is not how my family thought of them. My grandmother would tell me off if I mixed male and female clothes together in the washing machine because it was '*melalo*' (dirty, unclean) but she hardly elaborated why. Although largely disappearing with the onset of globalisation and modernity, traces of some pollution beliefs linking with the '*mahrime*' concept can be found in some Roma communities in Bulgaria (for example the Kalaydjii in Cupelin 2017). Lyuba's story also provides examples of ritual purity beliefs related to women who give birth.

Drawing on Sutherland (1975) my immediate interpretation would be that there is a separation between the upper and the lower body (clean versus unclean). Employing Okely's (1983) assertion I can interpret that this represents a separation between the inside (clean/community) and outside (dirty nonRoma) worlds but it also shows that women are less pure than men because of their sexuality and they have the power to pollute (see Okely 1983:206). Stewart (1997) refers to this physical division of '*mahrime*' and interprets it as symbolic separation whereby Roma men deny or mask their physical involvement in reproduction (which keeps them dependent on nonRoma) hence this is their way of opposing the '*gadgo*'[44] world (ibid:203). When I asked my informants (all women) about the meanings behind impurity and physical separation during the first days of birth they referred to as '*this is our way*' and that it was passed down since '*the old days'*. They also spoke of shame and embarrassment from their male counterparts. For my informants the boundaries between pure and impure were a question of shame associated with women's sexuality (and anything that this entailed). Shame is related to respectability as one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class (Skeggs 1997:1) and "is usually the concern of those who are not seen to have it" (Skeggs 1997:2). Respectability is related to character and social standing. Here I return to the "strategic essentialism" (Spivak 1996) concept. The essentialising of the female body, although highly patriarchal in nature, serves not only a communal purpose in opposing nonRoma but also in differentiating between what is female, unclean and shameful and what is male, pure and honourable; a different social standing. This 'body politics' comes to symbolise boundaries- between women and men (Goddard 1996:15).

I saw Lyuba often in the mothers' centre and when her little girl was about three months old she was planning for her second child. '*I must have a son next time. I need my miracle*.' Lyuba knew that if she was to save her marriage and position within Angel's kin she had to

[44] NonRoma.

give them an heir and she was on a mission to do exactly this. But childbearing brought about not only her personhood (Cupelin 2017) in terms of Roma communal understanding, it brought stigma externally. Just as Roma marriage is highly politicised so is childbearing. Although childbirth is certainly a universal life-changing event, it is also shaped by how women who give birth are viewed by others. Childbearing and its natality are political (Arendt 2018:8) and as such are inevitably politicised. While childbirth is essential for belonging to the 'community' it also represents an exclusion from citizenship because Roma in Bulgaria (and elsewhere) are commonly seen as the epitome of degradation, a "menace" (Stewart 2012), producing children and feeding on the back of the nation (Tomova 2009). The communal internal focus on childbearing is taken as (mis)representation (Okely 1994) of Roma women in particular. Indeed, anyone that has multiple children in the Bulgarian context has come to be associated with Roma and represents the anti-thesis of Bulgarian-ness. Roma women are presented as "breeding machines"[45] (see also Pamporov 2013) and "stray bitches" (Pamporov 2016:41) working against the reproduction of the nation. They embody what is anti-Bulgarian.

Whilst Bulgaria has gradually reached the status of a country with the fastest shrinking population in the world (Vollset et al 2020), although Bulgaria isn't the only state with an unprecedented fertility dip (Koycheva and Philipov 2008), Roma are marked as a population of reproductive excesses and dangerous fertilities (Gamella 2018). This is against the backdrop of Western European countries being ever apprehensive about their aging population, and countries in Eastern Europe losing population to westward migration. The ethnic composition of these nation-states has changed (Gamella 2018) but there is one quality (for better or worse), one category, one topic, behaviour that has been ascribed ceaselessly to

[45] One example is the Bulgarian Defence Minister K. Karakachanov who regularly refers to Roma women as "breeding machines" in media and proposes various measures for birth control directed at them.

Roma women. It is their 'irresponsibly' high fertility. The preoccupation with the 'purity' of the race (also the preoccupation of eugenics) is that of emphasis on the sexual relationships between Roma. This 'dangerous' and in a way polluted (to use Douglas' terms) fertility of Roma women is framed in nationalist discourses as a threat to the future of the Bulgarian state not only by politicians; it trickles down to schools, state offices and hospitals.

It was past midnight when Lyuba reached the hospital. The midwife on the night shift saw Lyuba and her mother-in-law at the door and told her to wait until the morning. Women, usually mothers and mothers in law, accompany the pregnant woman for her scans, health checks and birth. Anything to do with women's reproductive physiology is usually (not always) a secret from males. Lyuba could not tell anyone else, apart from her mother-in-law, that she was going to give birth since first, this was a tabu subject to discuss with other members of the family and second, giving birth was related to shame, pollution and sexual relations. Lyuba did not have an identity card with her and the midwife refused to admit her in the delivery unit until she had a proof of identity. The mother in law had to go back home and look for Lyuba's identity card while she waited in the corridor.

> '*My waters broke on our way to the hospital and I could feel the head of the baby coming through, so I began screaming at the top of my voice. I didn't care anymore. The midwife was furious but she took me in. She shouted at me to push otherwise she would hit me and she began slapping me on the face. I gave birth quickly but my face was so painful afterwards. She left me on my own with no clothes in the delivery room until the morning when the doctor came. I asked for painkillers but he laughed at me and said that when the tsiganina* (the Gypsy man) *and I were making the baby I was not crying, so now I had to endure the pain.'*

In Foucault's terms (1987), childbirth presents itself as an opportunity for the state to control, encourage, limit and force life, to subject and regulate women's bodies in order to achieve certain quality of the nation, its health, education and aptitude to achieve (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995:730). But labour/reproduction is always raced (Rapp 2019). "For those marked as racially inferior by dominant groups and discourses, violence is always a possibility in reproductive dilemmas, whether structural, publicly micro-aggressive or fearsomely interpersonal" (ibid:730). While Bulgarian nonRoma women are targeted by pro-natalist discourses, Roma women's reproductive actions elicit political, moral, and expert scrutiny, so Roma reproductive vitality and the young Roma population is seen "as a problem but never as an opportunity" (Gamella 2018:59). Roma reproduction represents a symbolic crossing of borders as "the nation is reproduced through women's bodies" (Gal and Kligman 2000) but it cannot be reproduced by Roma ("other") women. 'Ain't *they* women?' (Hooks 1981 [2014]). Ironically, within the citizenship discourse (see also Bhabha 2017), Roma women, who are also Bulgarian citizens, give birth to Bulgarian children who are still seen as 'foreign'. In a way, Roma women threaten the nation by destabilising nationhood and producing insider foreigners from 'within' (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989).

Depending on the historical discourses which construct nationalist projects at specific moments in time, women (not Roma women only) were encouraged to have or discouraged from having, children. In Chapter 5 I presented how the socialist state focused on Stalinist pro-natalist policies to reflect the importance of the nation's reproduction. At different points in time women, including Roma women, were encouraged to have multiple children and the state provided childcare for these children in order to inculcate its ideology from an early age (Khlinovskaya-Rockhill 2010). Moreover, socialism's goal was the complete assimilation of all Bulgarian minorities (Marushiakova et al 2001; 2002), which to a certain degree succeeded in a sense that the industrialisation and the compulsory labour participation by

everyone affected also the population reproduction patterns and this is relevant for Roma families. In postsocialism, the retreat of the impoverished state from the private/ kin domain became apparent and again, as the change of regimes affected the reproduction patterns of the population. The lowest level of the hierarchy, the industrial workers and those in agriculture, amongst who were many Roma, were pushed into mass unemployment and into a position of unrecoverable downward social mobility (Dimitrova 2012). Some called this the communist creation of the "the underclass" (Ladányi and Szelényi 2003). Indeed, the ensued "ethnostratification" of Bulgarian postsocialist society stemmed from growing social inequalities between different ethnic groups (Dimitrova 2012). After 1989 childbirth (as well as childcare) became openly ethicised and gendered and the higher Roma birth-rate (Ringold et al. 2005; Tomova 2004, 2009; Durst 2010) 'endangered' the nation's future. Examples of state policies such as maternity pay, child benefits, nursery fee subsidies, including the requirement to have a birth certificate or identity card in order to give birth, confirm the legal and the ethical status of the citizen/parent/patient but also represent a direct intervention by the state in managing its population and economic production. Roma women's 'dangerous reproduction' (Strathern 1992) warrants actions towards state policies and social benefits that are constantly reformulated and controlled to address the population that 'deserves' to receive such 'privileges'.

Durst (2002) argued that one of the most important changes in terms of 'Roma reproduction' (she herself questions the term) in the ten years after the fall of communism was that the new generation of Roma women had their first child significantly earlier than their mothers and grandmothers did. Durst rejected the two mainstream explanations for higher birth-rates (which still persist in research today): first, that Roma women have more children to benefit from social assistance and second, it is in "in their culture". She explains that by having more children early, Roma in her Hungarian fieldwork site counteracted the downward social

mobility, including the limited access to education and employment opportunities (ibid) that they had fallen into after socialism. Later, Durst (2010) illustrated that —contrary to the widespread narratives—it was not the ethnic label that Roma lived under but the history of their kin and community integration into the local social order that determined the number of children they had. In other words, Roma-ness, with its contestations, may depend on Roma women for its reproduction but it is not Roma-ness (or Gypsyness) that can explain the differences in fertility between Roma and nonRoma. Roma-ness is also about the relationship between individuals within kin and community. It is the singular experiences such as those of Luyba and her counterparts that we need to hear and record to be able to make sense of why Roma childbearing has come to be controversial and cause such social unease.

This reproduction anxiety transpires also in academic research - medical research (literally hundreds of academic articles on Roma fertility), activism, family planning and policy towards the over-fertile Roma women who are overtaking the dominant 'culture'. In Bulgaria, this process is described as the 'gypsyisation' (*tsiganizatsiya*) of the nation and its decrease of quality human capital (Gamella 2018:58). Although there is focus on fertility in statistical and nation-building terms, there is not much analysis as to why Roma women have more children, and by the same token why some of them do not have more children or don't have children at all. Since reproduction is a key element of gender ideologies, and I have so far illustrated this, there is limited social science critique on the gendered experiences of reproduction as told by Roma women. There are policy reports and research, mainly in terms of human rights and activism that have accounted for the forced sterilizations of Roma women which occurred in former Czechoslovakia (see for example Albert and Szilvasi 2017). Kühlbrandt (2017; 2019) also presents ethnographic materials collected from Roma health mediators in Romania and illustrates how challenging it is to touch upon the subject of reproduction without encountering stereotypes amongst medical professionals as well as

difficulties in talking about the sexual character of reproduction inside the communities she researched. If reproduction is seen as essential for the continuation of Roma-ness but it is also a 'burden' on the nation-state, it needs further elaboration in research. Perhaps there is a reason for the avoidance of discussing reproduction as this is a subject that brings ethical sensitivity. However, if we are to talk about Roma women and their choice and 'capacity to aspire', the subject of reproduction cannot be avoided.

Appadurai (2004), in *The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition*, defines aspirations as "wants, preferences, choices, and calculations...formed in interaction and in the thick of social life" (ibid:70) and argues that all individuals possess the capacity to aspire, which is shaped through people's subscriptions to cultural 'norms' (ibid). Lyuba did give birth to her 'miracle' son. Becoming a 'mother' of a son she thought was an achievement status and it was going to establish her in her husband's kin. But it didn't because her relationship with Angel disintegrated. Becoming a 'lone' mother was never in her future plans and although marriages may seem to be done on a 'whim' (Tesar 2012), as controversial and frowned upon as they can be, they are also an expression of this capacity 'to aspire' not in mainstream terms but within the constraints of the kinship/community norm. Lyuba's only focus now was her two children whom she needed to look after as and however she could. It was as if her life was in the present but firmly oriented and lived through her children's futures. She dreamed through them. Perhaps, Nevena (Mirka's mother) also saw her future through Mirka's future, and its ideal disruption caused an incredible heartache. The future, in other words their children's future, remained a central theme in the narratives of the women in my fieldwork. Where there was no chance for self-realisation the only hope left was the 'potentiality' (Bryant and Knight 2019) of their children, the next generation that was going to live a life better than the one they had. We, as anthropologists, are obsessed with the past and the present because "anthropology is fundamentally concerned with the continuity of

tradition and culture" (ibid:3) but we tend to "shortchange the future" (ibid:7) in our efforts to recover the past and narrate the present. Even in the cases where the past is not talked about and the present seems like an inescapable reality, such as the one of my Roma informants, it was the human 'capacity to aspire', the dreams of a better future, the strife 'to become' that provided the answers I was looking for. So, why is it that Roma women's personhood is brought about by motherhood and how is this related to the reproduction of Roma-ness? The answer for me lies in the process of 'becoming' which relates to the future of the individual as well as his/her immediate community's future, and women's childbearing reproduces exactly this – children as better futures. This answer warrants further discussions on the relationship between Roma feminist projects, birthing and motherhood.

**Conclusion**

Gender relationships permeated my fieldwork. Women were the ones who mostly associated with the world outside the neighbourhood, and with state actors such as teachers, social workers, doctors and others. But accounting for their role inside kinship relationships is also important. This chapter presented only a limited analysis, an attempt at 'translation' of Roma women's worlds (Behar 2003), in comparison to the many forms of identification and negotiations of womanhood that exist within and outside Roma communities. There is a growing number of Roma women who defy popular stereotypes and whose everyday lives are worth exploring. But here I deviated from illustrating examples of the highly 'sought after' role models and 'elite' that challenge the status quo and the perceived 'Roma-ness' by choosing, not without my doubts and struggles, to focus on two life stories that are seen as 'ordinary', as 'typical' and 'everyday', two stories that would attract much attention, controversy and labelling in mainstream populist imaginations. I did not want to deny their existence because they were highly important and present in my fieldwork (and in my life).

More importantly, in presenting the circumstances behind the choices made by Mirka and Lyuba I attempted to illustrate that singular experiences can tell us much about how identification is negotiated and how contesting this process can be. Indeed, womanhood becomes entwined with group identity (Goddard 1996:16) and within patriarchal structures but women also negotiate their belonging within the group. Although 'strategic essentialism' or mimicry may be employed with its detrimental effects on Roma women, this having repercussions on all members of the community, women still strive to function and navigate status as best they can within the constraints and boundaries they face. Often there is no alternative. Inescapably, the strategies employed by the communities I researched are intrinsically linked to socio-economic survival due to the historical and continuous rejection by the dominant population. Vitally, beyond this separation of dominant versus dominated, the final conclusive argument of this chapter is as follows: below the surface "thickened" (Geertz 1973) by repeated ritual, spoken words, contradictory actions and complex kin relationships of the everyday seen as entirely focused on living in a 'bohemian' present lies a striving for a future, for agency, for choice and the human desire 'to become'.

# Chapter 7. Religion as Hope and 'Becoming'

## Introduction

When communism fell I was ten years old and became interested in attending Sunday 'church school'. This was highly unusual because I had grown up in a household which followed communist ideologies (see photo below) like many others before 1989. When I told my parents about the visit to the 'church school' they became incredibly upset. '*Religion is the opium of the people. There is no God*' my father told me. Not understanding but remembering what my father told me I never realised how influenced by Marxism his contemporaries were until I entered academia outside Bulgaria years later. The socialist ideologies indeed trickled down to all layers of society, including Roma households. Despite my parents' relentless opposition and atheist stance they followed me to church one day and since then they have been devout evangelicals.

Image 30. On the tribune of a communist celebration.

Marx's (1844) famous sentence 'Religion is the opium of the masses' is preceded by another sentence which I think is often ignored: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions". This sentence seems to

portray religion as an escape from pain and oppression, as hope, as a refuge from social inequalities. It is also about the ambiguity, uncertainty and fuzziness of life and religion being a response to these conditions. Without forming an argument that religion in its undefined entirety and Marxism can be similar (this dialectic analysis cannot be exhausted), nor entering into a debate about religion versus atheism, in this chapter I assert that hope in a 'soulless world' can be vital, indeed as medicines can be, notwithstanding their side effects.

Similarly to previous chapters I first take a look at historical and socio-cultural developments to argue that we cannot analyse Roma and religion without considering the historical embeddedness of this relationship. In a way the first part of the chapter can be read as a continuation of Chapter 2 because it presents histories which have a direct and continuous individual meaning to my informants. I must note that although I draw on anthropology and historiography (for example I use Marushiakova and Popov's writings on Roma history and ethnography in Bulgaria and beyond) my focus is on the value of the individual narrative as a life history rather than on the collective historical proof as 'objective' evidence. I draw on Bergson's (1911) concept of rotational history, of past "duration" in the present and used by Das (2007) to illustrate how the past can "descend" through memories, histories and "rumours" and then become sanctioning and forceful (ibid: 108). To create a sense of stability state and religious actors can turn to history and "the past becomes a resource used to forge meaning in the present" (Wanner 1998:203). What I argue is that historical re-definitions of Bulgarian-ness in the present are the result of a national search for unity that involved tapping into the religious past, often at the expense of isolating those not seen as part of the nation. Importantly, it is religion that is employed to negotiate nationhood and community.

In the second part of the chapter I build on my first argument that the past can be rotational, non-linear and can play a role in the present and the future. Drawing on comparisons with the historical past I look at how the past interplays with the present but also how my informants imagine and perform the future. I consider the current work of the evangelical church and its relationship to Roma kinship and argue that what is seen as 'marginal' can have a profound impact on agency and one's capacity 'to become'. Going back to the overarching idea of the thesis, I draw on the everyday lives of my informants and the way Roma live their beliefs in order to invite readers to inquire the existential presence, the constant evolution of faith in everyday life experiences and meaning-making (Jackson 1996).

Before I delve further in the chapter I must open a brief reflexive note. Being a Christian anthropologist raised some difficult questions that challenged me to think about cross-cultural issues and faith in a different way, not least through realising how culturally determined my knowledge and experience can be. Roma and Christianity have a long history, much of it consisting of persecution (Marushiakova et al 2000; Marinov 2019). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the term 'Christian anthropologist' may seem to be an oxymoron (Arnold 2006). Anthropology "was founded by freeing itself from the confines of religious authority" (Lambek 2012:1), it was seen "as an objective, empirical, neutral science of reason" (ibid). However, in doing so it created boundaries between religion and the secular, leaving behind its reasoning that this binary is mutually constituted and opens a space for the "meta-secular" which is hard to rationalise (ibid). Just as the visibility of religion in politics and in everyday life is hard to systematise (Pine & de Pina-Cabral 2008; Modood 2010; Hjelm 2015), so is secularism, which is seen to equal modernity and is difficult to disentangle (Lambek 2008, 2012; Asad 2003). This commitment to secularism and to liberalism still operates in the background of academic discourse and can exclude religiously based perspectives (Meneses et al 2014). Unfortunately, this excludes the ungraspable reason of individual belief, the hope

it generates and its desire to 'become', including the capacity to choose. Asad's (2003) work on the nature of secularism and its deconstruction provides excellent starting points in considering less secular knowledge productions as relevant. Therefore, the argumentation I develop here is influenced by what I found to be a strongly focused lens of analysis on religion as political (though undeniably important), as power relations, as systematic, as opposed to the secular or "meta-secular" (Lambek 2012); as the objectivism at a grand level versus the relativism of the miniscule everyday. Conversely, I view religion as hope to suggest an alternative way of consideration of religion in Romani Studies, where religion is laregely viewed as a communal construct but rarely discussed as an expression of individual agency. I do so by drawing on the life stories of three Roma women - Assuna, Tsvetana and Villy- and their strive to express their beliefs, hopes and desire 'to become'. The stories of these three Roma women have different life trajectories but they demonstrate the interconnectedness of the religious and the secular, the individual and the communal, the state and kinship, public and private and how these can be blurred in the everyday (Pine 2018).

**Histories of 'Becoming' – Sorcerers, Muslims, Atheists and Christians**

The past and its memory can have a profound effect on identity, on kinship, on nation-state creation, and on the future (Nora 1996; Pine 1998, 2014). The Balkans and their historical context have shaped who Roma are today (Marushiakova and Popov 2001:7). Although the time of Roma migrations in groups or 'waves' can be contested, and challenging to be recorded chronologically, there is a consensus that the largest group of Roma remained in the Balkans for at least five centuries before migrating elsewhere (ibid:13; Marsh 2008). Upon entering Byzantium, likely through Armenia and Persia (Soulis 1961:145; Marsh 2008), Roma, also called 'Adsincani', (similar to what Roma are called today across the Balkans

and elsewhere– tsigani / цигани) were seen as "the descendants of Simon the Magician […] renowned sorcerers and villains [who] exploited a naive public by displaying bears or other animals for amusement or by telling fortunes". So people who succumbed to these amusements were threatened with excommunication from Christian churches in order "to combat superstition" (Soulis 1961: 145- 156). The Byzantine Empire and the Balkan states attempted to "integrate" Roma "in various ways – as nomads, travelling actors, settled town craftsmen and traders", including through slavery and likely through conversion to Christianity (Marushiakova et al 2001:20).

Later, under Ottoman rule the Muslim Roma who entered the Balkans with the Ottomans "mainly as auxiliary soldiers or as craftsmen serving the army" were not allowed to mix with the local Christian Roma who had already settled in the Balkans (ibid:26). Higher taxes were imposed on the Christian population, called the infidels (*rayah*), and this included Christian Roma (Marushiakova et al 2001:29). Roma men were recruited into the Ottoman army and whoever was found to be 'wandering' had to be returned to where they came from in order to pay taxes regularly (p.35). Roma became "fully fledged subjects of the Sultan", in other words they were recognised as citizens and were defined as an ethnic minority (Kyuchukov, Marushiakova and Popov 2016:77). In the Balkans, conversion to Islam was a common practice and authors are contesting whether this was voluntary, forced or "a conversion for convenience" (Celik 2020:104). However there is one historical consensus amongst researchers today which supports the historical proof of the Bulgarian population resisting conversion to Islam under Ottoman rule and whereby Christianity became a 'common' Bulgarian identity (Mutafchieva 1995). In such circumstances the local Christian population saw Roma as traitors and the Ottomans considered them "to be a lesser category of people who did not merit any attention" (Marushiakova et al 2001:9). As such both Muslim and Christian Roma had a "peculiar" status - Muslim or infidels, they were accepted by neither

Christians nor the Ottomans, and this 'outsider' attitude towards them was reinforced by the Ottomans giving Muslim Roma a "special legal and tax status" (Marushiakova et al 2001:91). The separation between Christian and Muslim Roma (although they both were pushed to the peripheries of towns and cities) can be traced today in the spatial separation in Roma neighbourhoods. In Sastipe, for example, the separation of the Roma neighbourhood in Lower (consisting of population whose ancestors were predominantly Muslim) and Upper Mahala (Christian population) can be traced back to the formation of the first Roma neighbourhoods in Bulgaria during the Ottoman rule. This separation was based on ethnic differentiation as well as on bordering due to religious differences (Asenov 2018:89; 2020).

Religious developments in the 1800s, such as the separations of the Orthodox Church of Greece from the Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul, led to the establishment of the more independent Serbian, Romanian, Albanian and Bulgarian Orthodox churches (Celik 2020). Importantly, this development was inextricably connected to nationalist agendas for independence from Ottoman rule. Religious identity came to be associated with national identity and as resistance to the Ottomans (ibid). With the decline and withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire, Roma had to adjust to life in the newly formed Balkan nation-states "which set out on their own path […and had] different attitudes towards the Gypsies" (Marushiakova et al 2001: 89-90). The quest for national identity led to resettlements and uprooting.[46] Previously recognised as an ethnic minority by the Ottomans, Roma (and other national minorities) were no longer eligible to have a status of a minority in the newly established Balkan states, a strategy seen as vital for the nation-building process (Marushiakova et al 2001; Kitromilides 1989). After the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule in 1878 the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the state became crucial for the re-

[46] One such example is the overnight resettlement of over one million Greek Christians and 500,000 Muslims in the Anatolian and Greek lands as a result of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (Kitromilides 1989).

establishment of the Bulgarian nation. What was seen as 'Bulgarian-ness' was also closely linked to Orthodox Christianity. Consider this excerpt from *Education in the Spirit of Christianity* written by the Orthodox priest Metodiy Kusev (Metropolis) in 1895.

> 'Gypsies[47] […] have no faith, they are infidels or, if necessary, like socialists they can belong to any faith, but they are not believers. Coming from the point of view of the atheistic principle that there are no immoral means used to satisfy needs, to pursue goals, they lie as socialists, as Gypsies. The lie of a Gypsy is a social need, without which it is unthinkable for him to spend a social life – without fun, without work. Hence the saying: "he lies like a Gypsy." The Gypsy, as a consistent socialist, is the enemy of labour. Where can you see a Gypsy, a socialist - a plowman, a digger or a worker in a factory, or in the underground mines, or in the guild workshops? A Gypsy worker is never hired for a wage. […] And in family terms, the Gypsies are the embodiment of socialism. Restrictions in kinship do not make sense to them, as to the children of nature. In the social life of the Gypsies, the person has no significance in accordance with the teachings of socialism.' (Kusev 1895:9)

Roma came to be seen as both the 'godless' or 'belonging to any faith' people who could never be 'real' Orthodox Christians and for that matter they could never be 'real' Bulgarians either. Ironically, fifty years after the above excerpt was written, Bulgaria became a socialist state. This time round the socialist way of life was seen as the complete opposite of what Roma were perceived to be in the first place – 'vagrant', 'workshy' 'liars' who needed to produce labour. Although religion was suppressed in its various forms, the nationhood, the Bulgarian-ness and its connection to the Orthodox Church were kept alive by careful

[47] The original Bulgarian texts refers to Roma as *katunari/катунари*, which can be translated as Travellers. The text also refers to them as '*Gyipti*'/ гюпти or Egyptians. This text is my own translation.

communist historical constructions created in opposition to Bulgaria's previous five centuries of Islam under Ottoman rule (Kamusella 2019).

Assuna, the oldest resident in the Radost Roma neighbourhood, was a young child in the 1930s and was called '*mohamedanka*' (literally a follower of Mohammad or Muslim), a status which indicated that her mother tongue was Bulgarian but her religion was Islam.[48] This prevented her from participating in religion classes (*verouchenie*) together with the Bulgarian children. She would peek through the classroom door and secretly listen to the teachers and the children citing prayers. She had a Bulgarian friend who would show her how to pray. Eventually, as an adult, Assuna converted to Christianity and attended the Radost Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, by the 1940s with the establishment of communism her faith and church attendance became problematic. The socialist way of life had to become the only "proper life" (Brunnbauer 2008) and this concerned Assuna's religion in an unimaginable way for her. She, and for that matter all of her contemporaries, Roma and nonRoma alike, had to forget about their religions. The communist dealings with the suppression of religion were gradual but the 'utopian' ideology of communism had at its core the abolition of religion in its entirety (Wanner 2012). Anything that was remotely seen to resemble a religious or ethnic association, such as Roma women wearing head covers (see photo below) or *shalvari* (wide Turkish style trousers), or Roma men playing *zurnas* (an oboe instrument predominantly played by Muslim Roma in the Ottoman Empire) was forbidden (Silverman 2012). All Muslim Turks and Roma with Turko-Arab names such as Assuna had to change their names into Slavic names (Kyuchukov 2004; Marushiakova et al 2004). Building on the Ottoman ethnic and religious spatial segregation the communist regime had "quick-fix" housing solutions (Ivancheva 2015:49) and some of the previous Ottoman Mahalas (still called so today in both Sastipe and Radost) became the communist marginal and semi-legal

[48] 'Pomaks' (seen as a derogatory term) were also called *mohamedani*.

Roma-only neighbourhoods of today (Asenov 2018, 2020). Assuna and her family, who were living amongst the Bulgarian population of Radost, were resettled in the periphery of the town, which later became the industrial sector.

Image 31. Radost Muslim Roma women in the 1950s.

To quote Asad (2003), when we consider secularism we need to "start with a curiosity about the doctrine and practice of secularism regardless of where they have originated" (ibid:17). Forced secularization (Wanner 2012; Froese 2004) was an integral political tool of the communist regime. Following Nikita Khrushchev's campaign (1958-1964) in promoting 'scientific atheism' in the Soviet Union (ibid), Bulgaria also required of its subjects to learn the new behaviour of non-religion. Religion represented the interests of the bourgeoisie; it was an ideology that had to be erased if the proletariat was to succeed. Incongruously, the socialist model of promoting atheism was not only promoted through the education of the population, in order to rid it of the "bourgeois morality", it aimed to unify people in a manner resembling religious ritual (Benovska-Sabkova 2013). This was an ideology that suppressed religion but purposefully 'mimicked' (Froese 2004) its newly-established rituals to fill the

void created in people's souls after the 'death of God' (to use Nitsche's materialism). These religious people needed to be liberated of the 'opium' of religion as followed by Karl Marx's famous dictum. Marx's atheist romantic view of the abolition of religion paled in comparison to its later interpretations. When his writings were taken as 'the complete' knowledge and were implemented a few decades later this caused an incredibly profound change in people's lives and hopes. In fact Marxism-Leninism itself became the sacred worldview of society. This ideology that gave new meaning to the individual, family and social life came to pervade both public and private realms (Wanner 1998) but not without the resistance of the individual as I shall show later. The abolition of religion created new state rituals, ceremonies, structured events and celebrations of births, weddings, deaths in the public and replaced all religious sacred rituals (Benovska –Sabkova 2013; Brunnbauer 2008). In Trotsky's own words 'the problems of life' (1924) were going to be solved when people had the "right to be born, to marry, and to die without the mysterious gestures and exhortations of persons clad in cassocks, gowns, and other ecclesiastical vestments" (Trotsky 1924:62). People's careers also depended on the absence of religious belief. Villy, one of Assuna's granddaughters, for example, needed to make sure that she diligently studied the history of communism and its postulates for her university entry exam in order to become a pre-school teacher. There were no other more important subjects to study at university than historical materialism, Marxism-Leninism and the history of communism in Bulgaria. Religion was officially annihilated and those who were found to adhere and exhibit religious beliefs could not rise through the ranks of the socialist hierarchy. So did Villy's progress in her pre-school teaching job depend on her atheism and modernity.

Socialist ideology stepped into the private realm, the arena of supposed intimacy and that of the individual (Pine 2001, 2002; Humphrey 1998; Verdery 1996; Kaneff 2019). In fact, the boundary between private and public was blurred for the interest of the community, and the

Mother Nation (Pine 2002; 2018). One needs to consider the language used by communist nationalism, highly evocative of kinship relationships (Kaneff 2002; Pine 2018), to understand what was behind its ideology. Religion seen previously to belong to the private, intimate and 'naked' household realm, was now exposed to the public gaze, not for its public expression but rather for its public suppression and shaming. People and their progeny were no longer God's creation; they were simply the result of women's natural reproductive capacities. The socialist state as the "parent-state" (Verdery 1996) came to be represented by women, who previously belonged to the domestic privacy and who became an integral part of its 'liberating' public image. Women had to leave the household, publicly at least, to become an integral part of the proletariat (Pine 2002). This was an act to show the resistance of religion and its "feminization of piety" (Wanner 2012:14) which saw women as subordinate to men. The communist party, in other words the Mother of the Nation, had replaced God the Father of the person. Women, such as Assuna and my Roma grandmother (in the photo below) went on to march in events called 'manifestations'/*манифестация* (a word derived from Marx's and Engel's Communist *Manifesto*), in which workers celebrated the proletariat revolution and the nation's liberation from fascism. They had to be publically emancipated but privately domesticated (see also Pine 2002). Labour had to be produced in all domains after all.

Image 32. Manifestation. The child on the right is the researcher.

Paradoxically, it was the elderly women who resisted the communist suppression of religion (Lovell 2007). Religion and its old-fashioned 'opium' stood in contrast to communism's modernity and secularism. Ordinary and now elderly Assuna (officially called Assya after her renaming), just as her contemporaries, had to either erase religion from her everyday or secretly practice her faith by attending the Orthodox church in Radost together with other resisting elderly Bulgarian women (see also Lovell 2007). These women had no biological capacity to reproduce the nation; they had no modernity and future to aspire to. On a 'grander' state level the importance of surveillance was laid on the new, fresh and young generation who would bring the communist 'tomorrow' and reproduce the communist ideology of the Nation (Wanner 1998, 2012; Benovska-Sabkova 2013).

The Orthodox Church buildings became empty spaces, almost seen as museums. These rarely attended sites of memory became the sites of a superstitious national past (see also Wanner 1998), yet still necessary to keep the idea of the Mother Nation alive. This Mother Nation

would employ agents to look for the transgressors who enter these historical places where the Father God was once worshipped publically. In fact, Assuna knew that there might be secret agents in front of the town's Orthodox Church who would report her to the Chair of the Municipal Council but she had nothing to lose. She could not lose her job as a cleaner because there was no other lower ranking job in the worker's ladder of a society with zero unemployment. Her salary was decreased but this did not deter her and in time she was left alone. Attending church was seen as 'a thing of the backward' past and for the hopeless elderly women. Moreover, Assuna's Roma Muslim heritage, and its 'traitor' image against Bulgarian-ness and all things Christian Orthodox, could not possibly have been a real worship of God. The old expression of religious and ethnic differences never disappeared from the Bulgarian land (and its soul) after Byzantium and the Ottomans left. The national identity was closely interlinked with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church before communism and even though religion was suppressed under its rule, Roma were still seen as sorcerers and Muslim traitors (Marushiakova et al 2001).

Assuna had a sick granddaughter, so unwell that the doctors had given up on her and sent her home to die. Assuna prayed for her granddaughter and in hopeful faith a miracle happened. She became well and went on to have a family of her own. It was not the Communist party, the Mother of the Nation, that helped Assuna's granddaughter, she said; it was God the Father who healed her. Since then Assuna vowed never to miss a Sunday church service, to fast at Lent and at Christmas, to participate in the church vigils, to light candles for the sins of her family and pray for their blessing. She even expressed a desire to sing with the choir of elderly Bulgarian ladies and to clean the saints' icons but to her disappointment she was not allowed. It was not insufficient devotion to God, of which she had plenty, but her previous '*mohamedanka*' identity that was stuck to her like glue and there was no escape from it. A '*tsiganka*', an identity seen as different from the Bulgarian-ness of the Orthodox faith,

cleaning the treasured images of Christian saints and singing before the God of the Radost's Orthodox church was not only not permissible, it was an abomination. One may blame communism and its secularism but this would be only one-sided. Histories long before communism were interplaying with the locals' search for Bulgarian-ness and the inclusion of those who were seen to embody anti-Bulgarian-ness was unimaginable.

While Assuna was a devout Orthodox Christian, other members of the Radost Roma neighbourhood were becoming Protestants. The 'evangelical movement' began to spread among Roma groups in Bulgaria at the beginning of the 20th century, prior to communist rule.[49] An evangelical newspaper in 1927 recorded the baptism of three Muslim Roma women who had troubles with their husbands as a result of it (Slavkova 2017:320). Interestingly, the first Protestants in Radost and Sastipe were also women. Tsvetana was the first evangelical believer in Radost. After the birth of her youngest child she was diagnosed with a mental illness. Her baby was taken away and she was sent to an 'asylum', an institution which once entered was hard to leave. One of the psychiatrists in the clinic who was a protestant Christian, 'a man who had seen the pain of people's souls' in Tsvetana's words, told her that God could help her. Holding tightly to this seed of hope upon her return to Radost Tsvetana searched to join the secret evangelical house group in a nearby village. Like elsewhere in the Soviet Bloc people congregated into their homes and created home churches (Hann 2010). Religion became a secretly 'domesticated' affair under communism (Dragadze 1993). It shifted its unwanted presence from the public arena into the private, "from outside the home to its interior" (ibid: 150; Hann 2010:12). This was the ideology that undervalues the domestic domain (Pine 2018: 98) and its religion (my addition) "as antisocial and the politics of the state as providing added value" (Pine 2018:99). A small number of

[49] Scholars ascertain the start of the Protestant movement among Roma, Gypsy and Travellers in Europe to have begun in Northwestern France in the 1950s (Slavkova 2007).

women in the neighbourhood joined Tsvetana to attend the evangelical group located outside the Roma neighbourhood but this attracted the attention of the locals. So Tsvetana's beliefs had to be performed in her own domesticity.

Tsvetana and her friends did not need icons, candles and a priest with whom to pray. Evangelicalism postulated that prayer and song can be performed anywhere, including in her donkey's stable. Nevertheless, even this ambiguous allowance of 'domestic religion' (Dragadze 1993) was not sufficient for the communist party to quench people's thirst for religious belief. Tsvetana's 'deviant' beliefs and practices were swiftly noticed by the neighbourhood watchers and the women participating in Tsvetana's 'sect', as the locals called it, were reported to the communist party leaders in Radost. These protestant beliefs were not only seen as dangerous religiosities (Asad 2003) because they contravened the general atheist policies of the communist party; they were considered as the western capitalist subversion of the nation and as the western protestants' spying into the lives of the locals. This could not be allowed to persist for long. How could these uneducated 'backward *tsiganki*' dare to betray the modernist Mother Nation? One woman was fired from her job, another was beaten by her husband and a third had to publicly denounce her beliefs in the '*chitalishte'*. Tsvetana was arrested a number of times but she was dismissed as 'mentally ill'. Between 'asylum' admissions and returns to Radost Tsvetana persisted in gathering people in the nearby forest and this continued until the fall of communism. The day communism fell Tsvetana was both overwhelmed by joy that she could practice her so beleaguered faith freely but she was also burdened by the impoverishment that she saw around her. People were hungry physically and they were also hungry for hope and for future.

**'Becoming' Evangelical**

Throughout Eastern Europe there was resurgence in belief in God and religious ritual in the first years of post-socialism, particularly among the younger generations (Froese 2001). The collapse of the materiality of life caused an increase in the spirituality of the individual. As illustrated, elderly women like Assuna and Tsvetana continued to attend their churches as secretly as possible. However, the people from the younger generation like Villy who were taught to put their trust in the power of communal effort, in the state, the Party and the Mother Nation became highly disillusioned with the communist ideologies. Once the communist ritual celebrations of blurred secularism and 'mimicry' (Froese 2004) of sacredness disappeared people searched for new ways to celebrate life and death, including by restoring the beliefs of their ancestors. Irrespective of whether people had practised religion under socialism (within limitations) or not, many people in post-socialist Bulgaria along with other Eastern Europeans embarked on a 'quest' for re-establishing their faiths (Hann 2002, 2007; Kaneff, Pine and Haukanes 2004; Pelkmans 2006, 2009; Pine & de Pina-Cabral 2008; Tocheva 2011, 2014). The fall of communism and the consequent impoverishment caused by the collapse of the state system, the loss of jobs, and social entitlements caused utter havoc in people's lives (Hann 2002; Kaneff 2011; Pine 2001, 2002; 2014). The previous regime was "underpinned by a strong element of hope" (Pine 2014:95) but that hope had now collapsed and people searched for hope elsewhere. There was so much loss that in Villy's words:

> '*We didn't know what to do; we could not see any future for ourselves. We were hopeless. Suddenly we had nothing. There was no food…nothing. The state was crumbling. After forty-five years of putting our trust in the state, she* (referring to the state, *darzhavata/държавата) could not be found anywhere.'*

In such a world where all previous structures of national institutionalism had collapsed (Kalkandjieva 2010) the Orthodox Church came to be appropriated in nationalist terms of resistance and belonging. The Orthodox Church offered stability of nationhood, people saw it as "a custodian of true moral values" and the only institution which could "re-establish the broken continuity" with history in a world of post-socialist disappointments (Kalkandjieva 2010:94). Post-socialism in Bulgaria, indeed throughout the former Soviet Union and its satellite states, brought an enormous rise of religious expression which also became attached to national identity (Hann 2007; Pelkmans 2009), not only in re-creating historicity, but by visibly and publicly performing religion as a positioning vis-à-vis its previous suppression (Froese 2004). Wanner (2007) writes of a similar process in Ukraine, for example, where the resurgence in religious beliefs occurred simultaneously with political projects. Religion became a vital attribute of nationality (Wanner 2010:7).

Collective memory, "attachments to the histories people imagine they share", became "experiential knowledge" owned by the individual in the present (Wanner 1998:45). But this process of 'ethnicization' and 'folklorization' of religion excluded those who fell outside the boundaries of the imagined nation (Pelkmans 2009:5). Take, for example, the two historical pieces of evidence in the Radost Museum that had a clear connection to Roma and were presented as aspects of Bulgarian culture. The first object was a picture of Roma *zurna* players (an instrument forbidden in communist times because of its Oriental/Ottoman connection). This image was presented as "historical aspects of a Bulgarian wedding". The second historical piece was a regional ethnographic text which illustrated "The Bulgarian resistance and fight for freedom" through the story of a local noble Bulgarian man who was beaten by the Gypsy called Kajtaz, hired by the Ottomans to kill. This speaks clearly of a communal focus, a process of creating sites of memory (Nora 1996), which warn of the

danger of forgetting the past and the need to perpetuate a Bulgarian identity but in doing so it excludes those who were perceived to be siding with the oppressors of the Bulgarian nation. This is how the oppressed can become the oppressor not only because of class stratification but also because of ethnic and religious difference (Freire's 1972). The collective memory (Halbwachs 1992) of oppression during complex historical pasts towards the Bulgarian Christians, learned and constructed through historical accounts, memorials, national celebrations and everyday stories was recalled in opposition to anything that the previous oppressors (be they Byzantine, Ottomans, fascists and communists) had left behind.

The monopolization of the Orthodox Church and its central role in the formation of national identity enabled the Bulgarian population to continue to view Roma as undesirable and non-Bulgarian (Bogomilova 2003; Kalkandjieva 2010). This process advantaged latent nationalism set deeply into perceiving Orthodox Christianity as the national anchor of Bulgarian-ness and not 'imagining the community' (after Anderson 1983) inclusive of those who were perceived as different, as 'traitors' of 'the Bulgarian spirit'. This process had started long before communism had entered the state, the homes and the minds of the masses. When the former Soviet Bloc entered "a state of emergency" in 1989 (Pelkmans 2009:2) Roma who were at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder went into a status of complete marginalisation and poverty (Kligman 2001; Stewart 1997).

> '*Why didn't we convert to Orthodox Christianity?"* – Villy repeats my question. '*It's easy to answer. When someone isn't wanted somewhere they don't go there. No matter whether we were Bulgarian* (meaning Christian) *or Turkish* (meaning Muslim) *Roma, we were seen as the same traitors, the people who would never be part of the Bulgarian nation. We had to find faith elsewhere.'*

Pelkmans (2009) contends that "the most obvious answer" to why massive conversions happened in post-socialism is that when "under conditions of societal distress, social networks and institutional structures lose their strength or break down" (2009:5). In the first years of democratization the state withdrew not only institutionally, in terms of the high unemployment, the lack of state benefits provision and its focus on reviving Bulgarian-ness, it also retreated physically from the Roma neighbourhoods, most of which were spatially segregated already as illustrated earlier. These peripheral pockets became also the sites of evangelisation. In Radost and Sastipe, my two fieldwork sites, the spread of Evangelical Christianity grew rapidly. When Bulgaria became open to foreign missionaries post 1989, the two Roma neighbourhoods became 'the hotpots' of religious freedom. Moreover, beyond Radost and Sastipe, a large percentage of Roma are evangelical Christians today and in fact throughout Europe and the Americas there has been a change in Roma religious practice, including growing numbers of adherents to Pentecostal evangelism (Acton 1979, 1997; Fraser 1992; Gay y Blasco 2012b; Foszto 2006, 2007, 2009; Ries 2010; Thurnfjell and Marsh 2014; Slavkova 2007, 2017; Roman 2017; Canton-Delgado et al 2019).

> "*People saw foreign missionaries who embraced them, who stayed in the Roma neighbourhoods, laughed with them and were not afraid of them. It is incredibly rare for a nonRoma to come to our neighbourhood even today but especially in the first years of democracy in Bulgaria. These foreigners brought a message of hope that was so needed at the time. They saw us as humans."* – Villy tells me.

Image 33. Outside gathering (*evangelisation*) in Sastipe (2010)

It was the seach for being recognised as humans, individually and collectively, in Villy's words, that attracted the Radost population to evangelism. "Human beings seek individuation and autonomy as much as they seek union and connection with others (Jackson 2013:6). People's humanity is both shared and singular (ibid). Similarly, Roma evangelical conversion can be both singular and shared. Slavkova (2017) who writes extensively on Roma evangelism in Bulgaria follows Hancock (2008), a Roma scholar, in arguing that there are two reasons for Roma mass conversions. First, there is a communal aspect of religion whereby Roma, including Roma church leaders, are re-creating a form of community representation. Second, evangelical conversion has a personal aspect, namely that God cares for the individual and helps them in their personal circumstances.

The literature presents the communal aspect of evangelical identification. Acton (1979) writes of Roma evangelicals "that can be better Gypsies for being Christian—and better Christians for being Gypsies" (Acton 1979:13) in striving for their autonomy (ibid:14).

Foszto (2009: 107-146) considers the communal aspect of the Pentecostal missionary rituals which have intensified in Eastern Europe (Romania) as a distinctive form of revitalization. Foszto (2006, 2007, 2009) writes of the communal nature of the church. Church members are mobilised 'to attract' adherents and there is a change in 'village traditions' according to the 'new' religious rules (Foszto 2007:130). In other words he sees conversion as an example of religious communal mobilization (Foszto 2009). Ries (2007, 2011, 2014) contends that Pentecostalism references Roma ethnicity consistently. Pentecostalism becomes "a strategy to manage their ethnicity" (Ries 2011:276) and it is not only "a strategy to receive material aid but also a strategy of self-help to break the cycle of poverty" (Ries 2007: 141). The churches had become a place to identify Roma-ness whilst being "transethnic" congregations which open up space for interaction with nonRoma, including state representatives (Ries 2011; Foszto 2009; Thurfjell et al 2014). Slavkova (2007) writes of the communal self-regulation ability of the evangelical church. Atanasov (2010), a Pentecostal Bulgarian scholar, writes of the positive aspects of conversion such as solidarity and the development of a 'Gypsy theology'.

I shall illustrate the communal aspect of Roma evangelical identification also by taking the reader back to the description of the Radost Roma neighbourhood which I provided in the introduction of the thesis. The Roma neighbourhood is located in the outskirts of Radost, close to an industrial sector. The division and separateness from the rest of the neighbourhoods in Radost is highly noticeable. Space can be produced in economic terms and constructed in memories, images, social interactions, everyday life (Clifford 1997; see also Tauber 2008). Michel Foucault (1984) approaches the relationship of power and space by arguing that buildings, landscapes, architecture work through the power of the state to implement its ideology in everyday life. My informants talked of '*the mahala'* (the neighbourhood) as 'home'. Space is composed of bodies whose acts illustrate and internalise

social status and class, morality and intentions (Bourdieu 2005; Mahmood 2005). It is undeniable that space, identity and social inequalities are interconnected (Madanipour 2003). The '*mahala*' is both 'a problem' because of its inadequate infrastructure and a solution because it is 'home'. The eye catches a white tall building with well-maintained façade, a painted fence and a cross on its roof. This is the local evangelical church which is in contrast with the rest of the grey and unkempt buildings. It is indeed symbolic that this white building in contrast to the greyness surrounding it is where people bring their pain, hope, joy, dreams, families and community. Space is important and communal place-making is vital for my informants. It is no coincidence that the brightest well-kept building in the Radost Roma neighbourhood is the church. This represents a production of space, as belonging, as a sense of place and identity (Howarth 2018). Evangelical Christianity has become this sense of belonging for my informants and it has manifested in the space that they produce. It is 'our church', they say, as opposed to the 'Orthodox' church in the centre of Radost. The local evangelical church has a particular role in this space – aesthetically and morally. Aesthetically, because in the background of the greyness and inadequacy of infrastructure the church is physically the most 'presentable' building in the neighbourhood. Morally, the church represents a public space for sociality; this is where spiritual sisterhood and brotherhood are created, and concepts of Christian morality are narrated, developed and implemented, where one becomes a person and is seen as human.

Howarth (2018) provides analysis not considered before in regards to Travellers' sense of place and I parallel this here. Being seen as people who live in the present only and not caring for the past and future (Gmelch 1985; Stewart 1997; Buckler 2007) traps Travellers, Gypsies and other "in one temporal domain" without considering that past, present and future are relational (Howarth 2018:140). Roma sense of place has come to be essentialised in terms of viewing them as nomads, as people on the move (Howarth 2018:140) and I would add as

'spiritual' migrants, as people who cannot 'stick' to one religion. Howarth suggests that this "qualitative experience of time […] was produced by the state's powerful ability to impose temporal regimes" (ibid). Such was the case in Radost also. There is a clear spatial delineation between the Roma and nonRoma part of town. There is no clear infrastructure, there are no pavements, no street lights, no street signs or labels. Some of the houses have broken or missing windows; broken gates; partially painted walls. Yet, amongst this unfinished picture one sees seeds of 'making space', of a sense of place. The church building and the space around it are envisaged as a place of return (Massey 2005). The 'stillness of place' (Pine 2007), its stability and how one treats it, cares for it, shows also a negotiation of a sense of belonging. Arguably this space is also produced in evoking a better future, of showing, proving, imagining and performing a better communal and personal life.

Image 34. Women from the evangelical church cleaning the children's playground.

Inside the church there are no candles and icons. People sing, pray and worship. Sunday morning is a busy day in the neighbourhood. People are dressed in their best attire and

encourage all their family members to go to church. '*This has become our tradition'* someone tells me. The church service starts with songs of worship – the congregation sings, led by a worship group at the front. People clap, close their eyes, kneel, lift their hands, sing, some weep. The pastor reads passages from the Bible and interprets them into a sermon. These sermons discuss different aspects of life – relationships, finances, health, and education. When a child is born, the parents (believers and non-believers) take the child to the local church where the child in presented to God and to the community of believers. After each school year the pastor gives a chance to each child to bring their school results.

Image 35. Children with their school reports (*belezhnitsi*) in the church.

At Christmas the church hall bursts at its seams. Children are excited and recite verses and songs. People celebrate together, they sing in Romanes and in Bulgarian. In a way these occasions are also a chance to perform identity. Children are given a chance to perform, to be seen, to be appreciated, to be voiced, to be part of a community.

My informants also saw the church as a form of being connected to the rest of the world (see also Ries 2010; Thurfjell et al 2014). Similarly Lakauskas (2009) illustrates the work of a Pentecostal church in Lithuania where the church has come to represent modernity, and to speak of the relevance of the Bible as well as the moral stance of its congregation in terms of criticising corruption, drug abuse and alcoholism (see also Slavkova 2019). Pelkmans (2009:9), commenting on Lakauskas chapter (2009), suggests that this exemplifies the church's 'civility' and confrontation with the "amorality of capitalist change" and that its "strength is to be able to establish locally tight networks of faith within which people find refuge from insecurity and destitution in the outside world […] by effectively channelling sentiments of hope and resentment in a morally laden worldview directed towards a brighter future."

The state representatives gradually became aware of the influence of the Radost Roma church also. Teachers would often call the pastors to intervene when a child has ceased attending school or is underperforming. A primary school teacher came to the church service one Sunday in order to express her gratitude for the impact of the church onto the children's school life. The picture below presents the adult literacy classes provided by the church upon a request from the local job centre. The Mayor of Radost also became a regular visitor in the church before the start of the local elections.

Image 36. Church literacy classes.

However, since evangelism is not only a Roma religious movement, how do nonRoma evangelicals relate to this development? Krasteva 2014 talks of the illiteracy of Roma pastors and this being an opportunity for nonRoma pastors to access foreign aid (Krasteva-McCauley 2014). Benovska et al (2009) record the views of a long-term overseer of one of the largest evangelical churches in Bulgaria who talks of "a process of encapsulation in ethnically homogeneous churches" (see also Ripka 2015). The overseer talks of Roma pastors who 'do not appreciate education' and deviate from the modern values of the Bulgarian evangelical church and this resulting the church being '*gypsified/tsiganizirana/циганизирана'* (Benovska et al 2009). In academia, there is also much focus on analysing the narratives and the stories of Roma pastors and leaders as contributing to reinforcing hierarchies within the church and externally, deconstructing the 'egalitarian kinship' structures in the community or asserting their positions as leaders (Ripka 2015). Krasteva-Mcauley (2014) writes of Roma pastors in Bulgaria who pursue foreign missionaries to ask for material benefits while dis-empowering their congregations of Roma women. In the same vein, the Orthodox Church views Roma conversions as a consequence of international aid access (Benovska et al 2009). Bogomilova (2003) writes that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church accepts the evangelical conversion

phenomenon as nothing new, referring to Roma conversions to Islam during the Ottoman rule as explained earlier. This, of course is not unique for Bulgaria; Pelkmans (2006: 32-37) writes of similar accusations of Protestants in other post-socialist countries.

So far in reviewing the literature there has been less emphasis on the individual aspect of conversion as opposed to the communal one. It is my opinion that to disregard individual agency to believe produces biased opinions. Canton-Delgado et al (2019:457) warn of the view that those who study religion (especially charismatic Roma Pentecostalism) are under "certain suspicion" but that also the individuals whom they study are viewed as "coerced" into conversion and being "eternal victims" (Marushiakova and Popov 2005: 805-826). This brings us again to the wider discussion of focusing on 'one' community, 'one' faith, and in "treating individuals primarily as exemplars [...] the ethnographic literature consistently describes them [Roma] as amorphous aggregates of archetypes, groups of moral beings equally positioned vis-à-vis the world" (Gay y Blasco 2011: 445). Attempting to keep to the widely accepted 'Roma versus nonRoma' construction and ignoring the individual aspect as not necessarily part of the group we risk not only essentilising but also producing one-sided arguments. Gay y Blasco (2012c) talks of the potential of the individual, the person who performs his/her identity amongst Spanish Gitanos. Slavkova (2017:319) describes how Bulgarian Roma evangelicals experience religious conversion as not a once -in-a-life event only but as a continuum, in the act of baptism and in telling a personal testimony. She asserts that "by exploring the individual conversion and different involvement of men and women, so we can correctly understand the experiences of Roma Evangelicalism" (ibid:324). Roman (2017) speaks of conversion as a personal relationship with God among Finish Kaale in addition to analysing the process of emancipation of Roma evangelical churches. Christova (2018:7), a Roma woman, confronts the views of seeing conversion as '*gypsified*' or a

'convenience' "hence not entirely genuine" in her book *The Roma woman and the Bible*. My informants spoke of personal faith and what this meant to them as individuals:

> *'I thought my atheist views could not be shaken. When communism fell, it was as if my world disintegrated. My faith, which was previously put into the power of the state to help, to support its citizens, was now under question because the state as I knew it was not there anymore. When I became a believer in God a new world of possibilities was opened to me. It was personal. It was about me and how God loved me.'* – Villy.

Roma conversion can be a reaction to hopelessness, a resistance to the meagre reality of the present. As illustrated, it is also the result of Roma not being seen as belonging to the national identity of Orthodox Christianity and the exclusion that entails. Villy and her family, including elderly Assuna, became Christian Evangelicals. They felt accepted. It was the care and the hope that they searched for because "hopelessness isn't natural. It needs to be produced" (Graeber 2008). '*Intellect could not comprehend my conversion*' Villy tells me '*but I know deep down that this is what I was called for – to have my personal understanding of God'*.

Christova (2018), herself a Roma woman, writes of the "individual freedom that Roma women find in their belief" and of their resistance to stereotypical and disempowering actions outside and inside the community. In my fieldwork, it was the women in Radost and Sastipe who took care of the church, who visited the sick, who collected resources to share with the poor and those in need in the neighbourhood; they were navigating their own worlds (see also Abu Lughod 1988). Neli's mother's centre in Sastipe was largely composed of women who were Evangelical Christians and who formed a community of women, both Roma and nonRoma, where they could share both communal and personal stories, beyond the 'Roma

vis-à-vis nonRoma' divide. Indeed, as illustrated earlier, women were the first who resisted the communist ideologies of religious suppression; they were the ones who interacted with the teachers, the local authorities, who looked after their children. Each individual story of conversion has a value. Therefore, when considering Roma women's dis-empowerment, the latter perspectives as Howarth (2018) confirms, tend to present 'single strand typifications' (Munn cited in Howarth 2018:140), which "disregard the intrinsic complexity of human experiences" (ibid). One may also contend that Roma evangelical churches are 'taking away' from the Roma cultural heritage, that traditions are being forgotten, that culture has been disrupted, that conversion represents a break with the past. I have argued differently here. '*We are not victims anymore, we are victors*' – Villy tells me and this is the key sentence that provoked the writing of this chapter. It is my attempt to move beyond the Roma as an 'eternal victim' analysis (Gheorghe 1997; Marushiakova and Popov 2005) because my informants have moved on with the negotiation of their singular and communal identities, not always achieving but striving to transcend ethnicity, gender, class and even close kinship (Slavkova 2003), 'to become', to find future and hope.

**Conclusion**

I argued that memories can be rotational; they can transcend the past (Bergson 1911). They can also eclipse the present and affect the future. 'There is nothing new under the sun' says the Bible (Ecclesiastes 1:9). The future remains a central theme in the narratives of my informants. Appadurai (2004) points out that in anthropology while we focus on culture and its ways of negotiation, we tend to look at the past and the present while neglecting "plans, hopes, goals […], wants, needs, expectations" (ibid:60). He proposes that we engage through our "capacities to aspire" and consider the futures of our interlocutors. That is not to say that we should neglect history and the present in our ethnographies; these will continue to be

incredibly informative as I illustrated earlier in the chapter. But we should see how past, present and future converge (Pine 1998; Hirsch and Stewart 2005). This convergence of time, "duration" (Bergson 1911; see also Das 2007) and perpetuation can help us understand how history is being repeated, how the "befores" have come to act in the present and as a result form an anticipation of and an aspiration for the future. There are strategies that people employ in order to create a sense of identity, belonging, and personal value by connecting past, present and future (Pine 2014). Religious strategies just as kinship strategies (illustrated in the previous chapter) are also related to the creation of a future and hope for Roma. Faith and hope are firmly situated in becoming.

I provided a discussion of what has been a consensus in Romani Studies that there is no other state or non-state organisation that has managed to reach out to as many Roma as the evangelical churches in Bulgaria and beyond (Benovska et al 2009; Canton-Delgado et al 2019). While I showed how the evangelical churches provide a sense of identity and belonging for many who join them, I emphasised the individual narrations of Christian evangelical conversion, focusing on what is seen as miniscule, yet gives better angles to deconstruct monolithic presuppositions of an aggregated community (Gay y Blasco 2011). "It is in one's singularity that one experiences the world as if for the first time" (Jackson 2013:18). "The idea of separating entire populations on the basis of singular and unvarying traits is at best a fiction" contends Jackson (Ibid:21) but so is the idea of ethnography that shows "a bounded culture, faith, or history whose character is considered unique" (ibid).

Finally, attempting to understand "the supernatural", the belief, the hope and their entailing rituals through the 'objectivism' of secularism I contend we not only risk the privileging of one perspective over another but we also objectify the religious experiences of our informants (c.f. Asad 2003). Therefore, reflexively, it is my starting and finishing point as a researcher

and as a Christian to simply state that I cannot know everything and acknowledge that science is 'unfinished'. In Villy's words 'intellect cannot comprehend everything". Correspondingly, isn't this the acknowledgement of Michael Jackson's existential anthropology (2013b) and Joao Biehl and Peter Locke's anthropology of becoming (2010) also? We may strive to be the 'situated knower' (Harding 2004) but we cannot ever achieve complete knowledge, it is 'unfinished' and so is the knowledge production of our ethnographies.

It is tempting to represent religion as one whole but representations of religion as collective in Durkheim's terms, as 'great'/central and 'little'/peripheral/ binary traditions (Gellner 1981) can only yield a limited analysis, indeed remarkably 'straying' away from the pursuit of objectivity (and its various meanings), without considering the individual, the singular and their appropriation and agency to belief. This 'systematization' of religion is often an academic/intellectual endeavour which may not appear in everyday realities. Such systematization can also be a state project as I have illustrated. The influential 'grand schemes' (Schielke et al 2012) of the state and the political in regards to religion are important to consider. But these 'grand schemes', despite their high relevance to power relations, only represent part of the picture (ibid:2). There are the miniscule practices, past events, unspoken and 'unthinkable (Trouillot 1995). Practices and beliefs which appear 'marginal' have the potential to destabilize centrality (Pine & de Pina-Cabral 2008:1). These margins, the everyday practices, the embodiments, the rituals, cannot be ignored (Ibid). Mary Douglas contended that religious practices can elevate 'dirt' or impurity (or marginality) to a position of divine power or 'that which is rejected is ploughed back for the renewal of life' (1966:167). These are the stories that inform the everyday to destabilise religion as "systematic" (Schielke et al 2012). I find the words of Liria Hernandez, an anthropologist and evangelical Gitana woman, very fitting for an end to this chapter: "Unity is what gives us

strength, and two things like God and anthropology, together, can cross borders without ever being stopped" (Gay y Blasco and Hernandez 2020: 158).

# Chapter 8. Conclusion: Unfinished 'Becoming'

## Endpoints

To conclude this thesis I go back to its core idea that Roma identities are varied, layered, complicated, yet they are also shared and re-negotiated in different spaces, stories and domains - state and non-state provision, history, kinship and religion, the very spaces in, and from which, they can also be excluded. This wide ethnographic scope provided ***only*** a 'glimpse' into my informants' lifeworlds (Jackson 2013) but it is purposeful for two reasons. First, by following the stories of individuals I brought forward juxtapositions, the singularity of individual trajectories, circumstances which were unexpected or difficult to understand, talk about or simply needed to be left alone to develop, to live on and 'to become'. So, I set out to direct attention to these singular experiences as part of an 'anthropology of becoming' (Biehl and Locke 2010; 2017) that focuses on both the uniqueness and the commonality of human experience as 'experience in the making' (Biehl and Locke 2010: 32). Following 'becoming' has been incredibly liberating as well as frightening because it is in human nature to be used to the 'expected'; uncertainty and ambiguities are unsettling; 'ethnography can come in the way of theory" (Biehl 2013: 574). "How can we ethnographically apprehend these worldly fabrications and the lives therein, constituted as they are by that which is unresolved, and bring this unfinishedness into our storytelling?" (Biehl 2013:574). Of course, theoretical frameworks have limits and the contradictory nature of life can be interpreted only partially (Jackson 2013a, 2013b). So, what I searched for were spaces, narratives, histories and silences that provide only an entrance into the 'unexpected', unsettling at times but still powerful to confront and present.

Second, I acknowledge that I set myself the difficult task not only to provide an entrance into the multiple worlds of my informants' everyday but also to add to Roma identification

debates which have produced numerous writings, thoughts and discussions. There is hardly any academic writing or policy paper which does not have a discussion on 'who' Roma are. Indeed, Roma identity is a subject that can be over talked and overproduced and this includes my personal preoccupation with the subject. Yet, in the process I have come to the conclusion that it is a subject which will remain unfinished. Roma identification can be ever evolving, appropriating and contradicting. Roma identities are construed alongside and in opposition to the dominant culture, but they can also be chosen, forced upon, exploited and rejected. Roma identities can be local and global, tied to space and boundaries and trans-nationality. Roma identities can be imaginary, symbolic and material. They can represent embodiment, symbolism and morality. Roma **can,** if they have, are given, allowed to strive for agency and speak, question, narrate back and reciprocate (Gay y Blasco and Hernandez 2020; Tidrick 2010). This is where we as researchers, writers, observers, participants in Roma lives can make a difference by implementing 'new ways of thinking', of seeing our interlocutors and involving them (Gay y Blasco et al 2020:173) with 'responsibility and judgement' (Arendt 2003). I am not suggesting for a moment that we need to cease 'writing culture' (Clifford and Marcus 1986), theorising, defending and challenging, preoccupying with origins and spaces, even obsessing over Roma identities. Reflexivity plays an enormous role (Okely and Callaway 1992) and acknowledging that the lifeworlds of our informants have the potentiality, the freedom and the agency to 'become' can have an effect on these very lifeworlds which we leave behind us when fieldwork ends (Gay y Blasco and Hernandez 2020). Importantly, we need to acknowledge that Roma identification is dialogical, and it is also a question of our imaginations and writings. As a corollary to this there are two themes (and many more which will remain a subject of another time and space) that have occupied my mind while writing this thesis. First, binaries are not always the most productive frameworks in discussing Roma identification (or any other for that matter) and second,

considering temporalities as rotational and non-linear can aid envisaging Roma future and 'becoming'.

**Binaries**

'How Roma is a 'Roma' anthropologist?' I should ask following Narayan's (1993) question: 'How Native is a "Native" Anthropologist?' The ***'insider/outsider'*** debate is an ongoing theme in Romani Studies as it has been in other areas of study also. This thesis contains as much of me as of my informants. What I presented were themes that have been woven into my existence since my childhood. From my first ethnographic encounter in the field to the last moment of writing I have been confronted with identification. My 'insider' status may have given me an advantage in terms of certain familiarities with my 'own' culture (Okely 1996; Abu-Lughod 1993) but it also had to be proved, negotiated and accepted. I did not belong immediately despite the valuable insider perspectives. More importantly, again, back to the core idea of the thesis is that identity, including that of the researcher, is context and time bound. Membership to 'the group' does not guarantee nor preclude 'good' research. What is important is that one writes in social embeddedness and self-reflexivity in "a continuing mode of self-awareness and political awareness' (Okely and Callaway 1992:33). Each of the substantive chapters of the thesis starts with my personal reflection and how I came to experience the particular theme I discuss. I present my experiences not to assert my 'insiderness' nor my solipsistic authenticity. It is my hope that the result is not "a soul-searching investigation" of oneself (Jackson 2013b: 23). On the contrary, including my own subjectivities as an observer and more so as a participant, "radical empiricism switches our focus to relations between observer and observed, making knowledge effectively conditional upon the nature of this relationship" (Jackson 2013b: 23). This is what Behar (1998) calls "at once the inscription of a self and description of an object" in order to "disintegrate" the

boundaries between "self and other" (ibid:20). Taking 'insiderness' for granted would be naïve because of this very same notion of knowledge being subjective. By sharing my subjective vulnerabilities as a researcher I also wanted to suggest that researchers, be they Roma or nonRoma, think of how much more "profoundly vulnerable" are those whom we study (ibid:24). There is a body of research produced by Roma scholars who challenge the 'status quo' in academia and question its role in "sustaining and/or disrupting biased narratives" of Roma (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2018:10). However few these Roma voices may be, there is hope that knowledge-production can be "meaningful" (ibid:10) once researchers, no matter what their belonging is, can move beyond whose knowledge 'counts' (Surdu 2014) and acknowledge that 'relationality' with the people whom we study is paramount (Navaro-Yashin 2002: xii).

This brings me to the next binary. The underlying theme in the thesis is that Roma are not a homogenous community. There is also a consensus amongst social scientists that Roma identities are created as a result of and in opposition to the macro-community (Sutherland 1977; Williams 1982; 2003; Gropper 1975; Okely 1983; Silverman 1988; Stewart 1997, 2011; Gay y Blasco 1999; 2001; 2002; Gheorghe 1997; Lemon 2000; Engebrigtsen 2007 and other). As such the binary '***Roma vis-a-vis nonRoma'*** has come to occupy academic writing as a permanent framework of analysis. In the thesis I built some of my arguments around this binary but I also illustrated spaces and circumstances in which individuals may identify as Roma or decide not to do so for reasons beyond the 'Roma/nonRoma' binary. Take, for example, the individual perceptions of education and more importantly how children negotiate these understandings; how Roma who were and are seen as children of the state live everyday life; how Roma can 'act' as nonRoma and why; how Roma leave and/or re-join the 'communal' way of life; how the 'unspoken' in early marriages is dealt with; how Roma women find agency in restrictive circumstances; and what hidden causes there are for the

unprecedented rise in Roma Protestantism. These at times unchallengeable themes have both collective/group aspects and, importantly for my argumentation, they also have an 'individuation' nuance (Jackson 2013b:6). In our defence of 'communal interests' we risk the creation of an imaginary 'frozen culture, of arrested cultural development' (Gilroy 2000:13), presupposing that such communal interests can be "fixed in their most authentic and glorious postures of resistance" (ibid). Although understandable and altruistic in origin, this view does not reflect the complexity of Roma everyday lifeworlds. For example, I argued that activism, just as academia, is occupied with the survival of the 'group', the 'community', in pursuing authenticity to counter negative preconceptions of Roma. The tendency is to focus on the individual as part of 'the group' but this can miss important singular experiences that may be unique in 'transgressing' group boundaries, yet, they can certainly fit within the wider human worlds beyond Roma 'groupism'. On the other hand, the 'Roma vis-à-vis nonRoma' divide does exist and can be very present in the lives of my informants. The literature has documented that this is the way Roma resist the state (Okely 1983; Stewart 1997; Gay y Blasco 2011), create autonomy and authenticity (Acton 1998), and belong. This was certainly the case of my research experience also. However, "belonging […] becomes articulated, formally structured and politicized only when it is threatened in some way" (Yuval-Davis 2011:10), understandably, in a strife to make relationships intelligible, to make sense within frameworks and to connect people within categories, models, theories and "clear concepts" (Douglas 1966). Therefore, there are times and spaces in which the binary 'Roma vis-a-vis nonRoma' is not applicable. I found an explanation by Okely (1994) who argued that Traveller-Gypsy culture is "created by **selective** choices and oppositions" (ibid:55) clearly pointing to the selectiveness of choice. This, I believe, we have taken for granted and applied to each aspect of Roma life, risking going back to the entailing binary of essentialism versus constructivism which I detailed in the introduction of the thesis. In such circumstances, ethnography can be powerful tool in illuminating the micro, the singular, 'unfinished', 'the

non-important' and unexpected, the different identification. These complex pictures of fragmentation challenge binary thinking and their instability. Moreover, tensions and ambiguity can also provide productive discussion points but above all and foremost when considered in the interest of our informants (Tidrick 2010).

I also presented the tensions between different actors, between domains – ***private and public/kinship and state*** - binary ideologies grounded in power relations that in actuality interact constantly (Thelen et al 2018). The seemingly 'unitary category' of the 'non-governmental', for example, turned out to be an unstable category (Lewish and Shuller 2017:634). State and non-state alike change policies and appropriate the language of kinship, including through the perpetuation of Roma 'victimhood' (Gheorghe 1997). Yet, through this complex net of relationships and objectives we see local Roma activists struggling in a genuine commitment for the causes they have taken. Negotiations between public and private, state and kin continue as the state steps in to educate Roma children. Different moralities and viewpoints clash and the individual stories and reasons behind what is seen as public transgression are lost before the eyes of the very institutions created for the public good in the first place. Who but the children of Roma 'transgressors' would be taken away and looked after by the state for the common good? Kinship and the private category, on the other hand, oppose the state in order to create alternative narratives and forms of identity and belonging. The contradictory actions seen as the 'uninterest' of Roma parents in their children's education, the repeated rituals of Roma weddings, the spoken and taboo subjects of Roma women's respectability and childbearing are all part of kinship strategies. But ultimately, I argue, such strategies are behind attempts at socio-economic survival and go beyond the separation of dominant and dominated; public and private; kinship and state. It is not just the state that the ordinary and incredible people of my research have in mind when they live their lives; it is their Roma neighbours that they want to impress, the community that they want to belong to, the personal dreams that they dream of, the temporal goal of a

future that they perform in their songs and dance. Even when class differentiation is applied, take for example Tesar's (2012) descriptions of the 'Gypsy palace-like houses' which contain precious chalices transferred from generation to generation (more specifically, father to son), I doubt that these Cortorari do so with the sole purpose to reinforce the 'Roma/nonRoma' binary. Roma do not live "as automatons programmes according to 'cultural' rules or acting our social roles, but as people going through life wondering what they should do, making mistakes, being opinionated, vacillating, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragic personal losses, enjoying others and finding moments of laughter" (Abu-Lughod 1993:27). Roma are people who find hope and future in their kin, neighbourhood and community just as any other humans do. My informants also found brotherhood and sisterhood, precious hope in the kinship of the evangelical church; these are also people whose lives continue to pain a perfectly 'imperfect' picture that shows one's ability to live now and aspire to 'become' (Biehl and Locke 2017) in the future.

**Temporalities**

Throughout the thesis I often tapped into the historical records to argue that we cannot comprehend Roma identification and choice without looking back at the historical settings in which identity politics operates. Writing about the past was an act of giving voice to something that has deeply influenced my own commitment to the histories of my informants. I often differentiated between historical and political regimes (for example, socialist and post-socialist) and I believe these distinctions can provide a better understanding of the inter-relationship between identity, state, kinship and gender. I also reflected on the past as "communal forgetting" (Gay y Blasco 2001) and the emphasis on a "presentist rhetoric" (Stewart 2004) as strategies for remembering and 'living with the past' (Stewart 2004:563). I showed that my informants may choose not to commemorate painful historical events, but

this does not mean that these "affective spaces" (Navaro-Yashin 2012:12) are not remembered and passed down - through rituals, songs, body movement, and through silences. If the present is constantly reminding of the past, this past cannot be celebrated. A past of persecution, assimilation and non-acceptance that continues in its various forms in the present cannot be commemorated but it can be viscerally and ritually remembered, suppressed and controlled. Moreover, the communal collective memory (Halbawchs 1992), even postmemory (Hirsch 2012) may be embodied in this very binary of 'Roma vis-à-vis nonRoma' that plays a role in how my Roma informants see themselves as part of a community and in their acts of resistance. As vast as the subject of memory can be there is so much more to be explored in regards to Roma 'politics of forgetting' (Carsten 1995).

Nevertheless, identities are not only about 'who we are' or 'where we came from'; they are also about 'who we might become' (Hall 1996). While focusing on the process of 'becoming' I also found something vitally important missing in the Romani Studies literature and it was the lack of focus on how Roma imagine and negotiate their future. This, of course, is something that has permeated anthropology in general, because we are "concerned with the continuity of tradition and culture" (Bryant and Knight 2019:3) but we tend to neglect the future in attempting to analyse how the past interplays in the present. The future, especially the future of Roma children, was a central theme in the narratives of my informants. The future featured firmly in kinship (see also Tesar 2012) and religious relationships. Weddings were celebrated in the present but it was the future that was being performed. Behind the exchanges of gifts, property and wealth were strategies to ensure the future of the married couple and the future of the kin as part of the community. Moreover, the actual celebration in the present was what people dreamed of their lives 'to become'. They were literally and symbolically performing and enacting the future. It is this ungraspable potentiality of my informants that I wanted to seize and 'translate' (Behar 2003) as limited as this translation

could be. The people of this thesis were striving to become, although not always as one would suppose in conventional/mainstream terms. Most of the time they strive within the existing community structures and hierarchies, and other times as required, externally, such as the Roma children in care whose stories can never be adequately re-told because they carry so much burden and emotion. There were also exceptions. These were women, men and children who negotiated life and wanted 'to become' in a different way and those singular examples challenged mainstream and communal perceptions.

Finally, my research is captured by temporalities also. Each thesis chapter presented only a limited picture, a snapshot of what are otherwise complex lifeworlds. I may have accessed and gazed at a picture of time and space when I was present with the researched but ultimately these realities continue to be lived outside of my analysis. Thus each of the themes in the thesis is 'unfinished', always 'under construction' because circumstances change and so does identification. The 'unfinishedness' (Biehl and Locke 2017) of each chapter is unavoidable and, as liberating or frustrating as it can be, 'unfinishedness' also shows that the politics of knowledge production of everyday lives is always in motion. This is where this thesis finishes but ultimately its core idea is always evolving.

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