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## **ALLIES AND ADVOCATES RESEARCHERS AND THEIR CRITICAL TOOLS IN THEORY AND IN THE FIELD**

### Abstract

The paper concerns the process of research with the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community at its centre. This community can be depicted as radically marginalised as a result of an interplay of various factors. Additionally, the members of this community are exposed to the fallout from cultural prejudice against Roma, which is deeply entrenched in (not only) Polish society. Doing research focused on Roma communities, researchers are bound to interrogate the objectivity of science, the degree of their own commitment and above all their attitude to the group with whom they conduct/co-conduct the research process. In reflecting on my own practice as a researcher, I look to both present the dilemmas involved and some applicable solutions that can bring us closer to being allies in research.

Keywords: Roma, inequality, exclusions, racism, critical tools

### INTRODUCTION

Research on the Romanian Roma community in Poland that I have conducted over the last five years has called for using not only for employing theoretical concepts relatively rarely encountered in the Polish humanities and social sciences or for considerably modifying the classic, entrenched perspectives, but also for adopting an attitude that I refer to here as ‘an ally attitude.’ The word ‘alliance’ may trigger associations with being a ‘party’ in/to something, or simply with a ‘party’ or a ‘faction.’ Even if it

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does not denote 'partiality' (or 'partisanship') as such, it certainly involves 'taking a position' (or 'a stand') and a kind of 'partnership.' Although being a 'partisan' or 'supporter' of one or another idea in science does not have to imply a lack of objectivity (on the contrary, it may be an exhortation to it), it inevitably entails entanglement in the objective/subjective dichotomy and its appended issues. Without going into the details of positions in this dispute or the complexity of this problem field, I begin by explaining that my aim in this paper is not to disparage the objective criteria of the truth. When I discuss an ally attitude what I mean is being an 'advocate' of a given cause, looking into a phenomenon or a process more inquisitively and more thoroughly and promoting a revision of ideas about it. Of course, some preferences, 'interests' or 'epistemic sympathies' about the issues one studies are woven into research, but they need not be private or individual, and indeed they tend to be socially and culturally produced. Even the researchers who pursue absolute objectivity in scholarship and believe that the truth is a matter of the correspondence between the description and the state of affairs external to it, do not question the fact that research problems and solutions to them are generated in particular historical circumstances (including material, technical, economic and other conditions). Likewise, no one will deny that even the fundamental discoveries in astronomy and physics have been (and still are) influenced by the social world. It was no coincidence that the so-called Copernican Revolution is understood today as, first and foremost, a shift in worldviews and mores. Nevertheless, any proposal to redraw our view of reality around us must be preceded by some 'suspicion.' Both the development of science and advocacy for what has not been articulated, presented or argued yet are hardly imaginable without a fair share of suspiciousness. In fact, it is only critical reflection on what is at hand that makes it possible to know the truth, regardless of whether it encompasses planetary systems or social relations. Knowledge does not lose its objectivity just because we lend out voice to a development as 'allies' and 'advocates' that help the so far unrecognised and unfathomed appear (surface in discourse). Whether one researches animals, leaves, rocks, seas, climate, conflicts, inequality, violence, crime or anything else, commitment to bringing out their nature does not oppose the truth or objectivity. Of course, for many decades now, a range of social-scientific and humanities disciplines have promoted an epistemic ideal holding that in the study of the human universe,

becoming a truly 'objective' observer takes stepping beyond one's cultural conditioning (of time, background, religion, etc.) and trying to understand the world the way that the group one researches see it. Perhaps this better understanding is the most salient guarantee of cognitive objectivity. Anyway, one must be mistrustful and critical of one's own/entrenched dogmas.

Ours is a dynamic and rapidly changing reality; we live in an era of globalisation, migrations, the flows of people and ideas. We take advantage of what these processes offer, but we also perceive anxieties, frictions, fears, tensions and conflicts that they fuel. Those often stem from centuries-old history, but today they become newly pointed and acquire a wider resonance. The traditional academic standards of open-mindedness more and more frequently prove insufficient and prevent the recasting of our ways of thinking of things, events and processes around us. As a result of multiple cultural and political factors, some of which are heteronomous vis-à-vis science, they prevent introducing innovative strategies of responding to increasingly urgent challenges.

Outlining the specific intercultural dimension of my explorations, I will show in what ways the adoption of a proper attitude may further solving fundamental issues implicated in doing research and overcoming barriers that constrain theoretical and methodological thought and empirical work. Thereby, I will address researchers' attitudes to economic, social cultural and political phenomena. My argument will be supported by the example of a group that runs at the margin of dominant society but is not afraid to demonstrate its presence in public spaces (as a rule for utilitarian purposes). What crucially matters in any research involving marginalised communities is 'epistemic balance,' which I define as a shift in the perception of distance expected to guarantee objectivity and of engagement, which is regarded as a form of activism. As already mentioned, over the last few years, I have done research focused on the Roma minority, in particular on the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community. This community can be depicted as 'radically' marginalised as a result of an interplay of various factors. Besides, its members are exposed to the fallout of cultural prejudice, which continues to be firmly entrenched in (not only) Polish society. Researchers who study Roma societies cannot possibly avoid interrogating the objectivity of science, the degree of their own commitment and, above

all, their attitudes to the group with which they conduct/co-conduct the research processes.

## THE ROMA – THE LARGEST ETHNIC MINORITY IN EUROPE

Roma are now Europe's largest ethnic minority, whose population currently oscillates between ten and twelve million people (Kledzik & Pawełczak 2014, 363); at the same time, they are the most persecuted minority in Europe (Mirga-Wójtowicz & Fiałkowska 2022). These figures are estimates, because EU countries do not systematically collect data on Roma, and, additionally, the members of this minority often do not recognise their ethnic belonging, conceal it, and/or fail to officially register their stay in EU countries for fear of legal and administrative consequences (not to mention the lack of knowledge of the local language and procedures in place). All these factors make it practically impossible to accurately establish the size of the minority (Śledzińska-Simon 2011, 11–12). As observed by Andrzej Mirga and Nicolae Gheorghe, 'scattered across Europe and beyond, Roma have no ethnic territory of their own. Being a minority everywhere, they share an imposed identity that crucially involves a political and social marginalisation combined with ethnic stigma' (1998, 15). This insight is related to the key issue one encounters when exploring Roma's current identity. Specifically, for centuries, Roma and their ways of life have been scrutinised by members of majority societies in relation to their own ways of life. Elżbieta Mirga-Wójtowicz, Kamila Fiałkowska and Michał P. Garapich depict the history of Roma as 'a non-Gypsies' projection' (2018, 45), that is, an effect of the domination that nation states have produced and practiced over Roma by stigmatising, excluding and persecuting Romani populations to consolidate their own position, where Roma have been treated as 'significant Others' (ibid.).

At the same time, Romaness has been (and still is) used as a motif in artistic production (in literature, visual arts, music and film), whereby cultural products have typically exoticised or romanticised Roma by foregrounding, for example, their nomadic lifestyle perceived as replete with freedom, liberty, dance, singing and eroticism (Weychert-Waluszko 2017, 63). Scholarship has also been predominantly committed to studying Romani populations without including the voices of Roma themselves (see Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2018). Additionally, Roma groups have been labelled as

‘peoples without history’ and with no interest in their past or future. After the Second World War, these alleged attitudes of Roma were contrasted with the Jews’ concerted efforts to produce collective memory (Van Baar 2015).

## ROMAPHOBIA, ‘THE LAST ACCEPTABLE FORM OF RACISM’

For many years now, Roma have been recognised as a group inviting the greatest dislike from the public. Their presence often breeds anxiety and a sense of threat among majority society, which is connected to a range of persisting stereotypes about Roma and to the fear of the other, the stranger. According to McGarry, it is this irrational fear that fundamentally underpins Romaphobia, which he calls ‘the last acceptable form of racism’ (2017). McGarry stresses that this collective fear of Roma is founded on the spatial and symbolic separation of Roma and non-Roma. As the impression of strangeness and exoticism of Roma has been consistently nurtured, and along with it suspicion and distrust, conjectures have morphed into socially accepted ‘facts,’ reinforcing the belief held by non-Roma that Romani communities are distinct, secretive, and not trustworthy (*ibid.*, 2–6). McGarry posits an intriguing thesis, namely that ‘Roma communities have been used by nation-builders and state-builders to furnish material power and to generate ideas of solidarity, belonging and identity that have served to exclude Roma from mainstream society’ (*ibid.*, 6). This is intimately linked to the concept of constructing nation-states in conjunction with fostering and sustaining the identity of European citizens in the context of boundedness with particular traditions and territories. Roma were never included in these processes on the basis of, among other factors, nomadism which was attributed to them along with a reluctance to put down roots and otherness caused by their Indian origin, as mentioned above. This provided a convenient starting point for the multifarious exclusion of Roma as those who ‘are not our folk.’ McGarry argues that the Romani community as a nation without territory did not ‘fit into’ the model of nation-states. Consequently, it was troublesome in the context of efforts to construct a European order founded on nationalism, which for its part has a lot in common with racism and intolerance of ‘strangers’ and ‘others.’ McGarry marshals several similarities between Romaphobia and

other forms of racism and xenophobia in Europe, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia (ibid., 7–8).

With McGarry's framework in mind, one must not forget that Roma have been excluded not from one particular nation, but from all European nations. This strongly suggests that Romaphobia is endemic to Europe (ibid., 250). The consequences of the processes that ousted Romani groups from national communities have persisted until today. Romaphobia is 'the last acceptable form of racism' in Europe in the sense that it is still tolerated and accounted for by citing other reasons than racially-driven prejudice: 'Policy interventions that exclude and persecute Roma, such as ethnic profiling, are justified by the state and society due to the discourses of abjection which reify Roma populations' (ibid., 247). Romaphobia surfaces not only in the attacks of right-wing extremists on Romani households, in the segregation of Romani children at schools, in mass evictions of Romani communities, or in forced sterilisation. It is also emphatically heard in daily conversations of non-Roma and in statements delivered by officials and politicians; it is patently seen in newspaper headlines. It lurks in the lack of proper legal frameworks and integration schemes as well (ibid.).

## THE ROMA IN SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE

Typically, Romani/Gypsy-studies works open with an outline of the genesis of Roma, wherein their genealogical roots are traced back to India. Given that, Roma have lived in Europe for several centuries, I do not believe that this ancient history would have a substantial bearing on my study, which is limited to a small, contemporary Romani community in the city of Wrocław. Particulars of this distant past do not represent a necessary starting point for depicting this community. Researchers associated with critical Romani studies point out that, in fact, the focus on the Indian lineage of Roma results in the reproduction of the clichéd notions of their 'strangeness' – of them being 'not from here,' that is, not from Europe (Czarnota, Kledzik Witkowski 2020). Studies concerning this ethnic group as a rule emphasise that its members 'wandered over' to Europe from other corners of the world, reiterating for example that 'it is a well-known fact that India – perhaps northern Punjab – was the proto-homeland of Gypsies, who left the area about one thousand years ago' (Milewski 2009, 10). When encountering such statements, one is tempted to ask which of

the nations that currently inhabit the European continent actually did not 'wander over' to these parts from somewhere else. Constructing narratives about Roma in this way patently exoticises this ethnic group, with European literary culture boasting a long tradition of representing 'Gypsies' as exotic. Such exoticisation however, is not the only effect, because the constant citing of otherness of Roma as their distinctive feature excludes them from the circle of 'real' and 'legitimate' Europeans. This is one reason behind the perpetuation of the stereotyped perception of Roma as a nomadic people, with being nomadic considered by some authors (often quite inadvertently) as their inalienable cultural characteristic or even their genetic propensity. This evident discursive practice powerfully reinforces the socio-political marginalisation of this group. The language which is employed to describe Roma has affected their past and present social position, which has made them the target of an array of mechanisms that can be described as violence-based. In my research, I deliberately passed over the genealogical origins of Roma in order to avoid contributing to the dissemination of this notion of to the reinforcement of the idea that members of this ethnic minority are 'not from here.'

Roma are enveloped in what Kamila Fiałkowska, Michał P. Garapich and Elżbieta Wójtowicz have labelled as 'scholarly silence' (2018). This silence subsumes the failure to include the history of Roma in European historical discourse and the scarcity of Romani researchers active in science. These gaps result in Roma being treated as objects and silenced, while knowledge is produced 'of Roma' rather than 'by Roma' or 'with Roma' (ibid., 41). Scarcely the last decade has been marked by a significantly higher representation of Roma in research discourses. Romani scholars are more and more vocally critical of the research carried out by mainly non-Roma academics within Romani studies. Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka depicts this process as an 'act of intellectual self-constitution' and a process of 'intellectual decolonisation' (2022, 34). What matters in this context is also research that other minorities develop drawing on postcolonial theory, feminism and critical race theory.

## THE ROMANIAN ROMA AND THE FORMS OF THEIR MARGINALISATION

As stated above, since 2018, I have done research on a range of issues related to the Romanian Roma community who have lived in Wrocław since the 1990s. Members of this community grapple with exclusions spawned by a range of factors, such as their descent, skin colour, different language, low education level and poverty. When discussing the situation of the Romanian Roma, one must not pass over the context of slavery. ‘As long as until the mid-19th century, *Gypsies* were slaves in Romanian duchies, and many of them belonged to a given household like a stove, a scythe, or backyard poultry. The memory of the five centuries of bondage has not disappeared over one hundred and fifty years since its abolition, even though it has not been pointedly cultivated’ (Mappes-Niediek 2014, 117) – these two sentences penned by reporter Norbert Mappes-Niediek comprise issues of utter relevance that must not be ignored in scholarly reflection on the current situation of the Romanian Roma who migrate to Poland and other European countries. That people of Romani origin were slaves was sanctioned by the law in the eastern part of present-day Romania, in the west of what is now Moldova, in the region between the Carpathian Mountains and the Don River, including in Bucharest, that is, in the former Duchies of Moldavia and Wallachia. Actually, Roma slavery also practically existed in other areas, though it was not officially authorised by the law. Importantly, it was not serfdom. In present-day Romania, Roma were slaves much the way African-Americans historically were in the U.S. (ibid., 117–118). Mappes-Niediek relates that ‘there was a regular slave traffic: they could be sold, inherited, gifted away, or put up as a collateral on a loan. The master was authorized to take slaves’ children away, to whip, punish, and rape slaves, and keep them on a leash like a dog’ (ibid.). The liberation process of Romani slaves in Romania began in 1855–1856, and 1881 is recognised as the final date of the abolition of slavery. While Roma acquired a legal status, their actual social position did not change much, since they mostly continued to work as hired agrarian workers, which prevented them from integrating with local farming communities. Some of Roma also became involved in trade and crafts, chiefly blacksmithing (Asséo, Petcuț & Piasere 2018, 29–31).



The contemporary Roma living in Romania experience race-related discrimination in several respects. For example, as far as housing is concerned, they are regular targets of illegal evictions and dislike from landlords. When apartment owners find out that their potential tenants are of Romani descent, they tend to refuse to sign contracts with or even to show places to them. Romani settlements, especially those in rural areas, have no basic amenities, such as water or electricity. This often forces their dwellers to use well water, which is often unpotable and causes disease. Discrimination is also encountered by Roma in healthcare provision. For example, at the end of the 20th century, a municipal hospital attempted to ban Roma from entering it, because some of them did not pay health insurance premiums, which allegedly made them 'ineligible' for medical attention. Rural Romani communities have seriously constrained access to healthcare facilities due to deficient public transport services. The exclusion of Roma from the labour market is patent even in job adverts, many of which often state that 'Roma are not accepted.' Even if a non-Roma employer takes on workers of Romani origin, they are likely to be exposed to mistreatment from co-workers, relegated to the worst positions, and/or forced to accept lower pay than non-Roma employees. Members of Romani communities not infrequently are denied service at stores, restaurants, discos, etc. (European Roma Rights Center 2011, 86–103).

Members of Romani communities are discriminated against because of their background and social position in education as well. Admittedly, the Romanian Ministry of Education has put in place a range of anti-discrimination measures, such as appointment of regional officers to monitor the situation of Romani children in public education, training of Romani language teachers, a Romani curriculum for schools, courses improving literacy skills, and summer camps for Romani children. However, all these solutions have failed to foster an inclusive schooling system sensitive and fully responsive to the specific needs of children and adolescents of Romani descent in Romania. Research conducted by the European Roma Rights Center has revealed that 'the majority of Romani children in Romania remain significantly hindered in their ability to claim the right to a substantive and meaningful education' (ibid., 104). In practice, a considerable proportion of Romani children have no access to education, and many of those who are able to use their right to education end up in schools that practice racial segregation. One reason for this is that non-Roma parents who are driven by ethnic prejudice refuse to have their

children share classrooms with Romani children. Romani public schools are allowed to establish classrooms for students with learning difficulties. A study conducted by the European Roma Rights Center has found that such classrooms mainly comprise Romani children, even if they exhibit no symptoms of mental disability. This indicates that students of Romani descent are consigned to such classrooms, because their conduct differs from that of their Romanian peers. Romani children tend to grapple with behavioural problems resulting from the conditions in which they are growing up, and teachers often lack competencies necessary to effectively work with them. Romani children are also frequently exposed to expressions of dislike and violence from non-Roma. This engenders the atmosphere of fear and instils a negative attitude to school in young Roma. They feel at risk, inferior, and unwanted, which is not conducive to their commitment to education. Similar processes also unfold in pre-school education settings.

In an interview for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska relates that '[a]bout 80% of European Roma live in extreme poverty, and out of those living in Romania, 70% have no running water, 80% have no shower and toilet, and have no access to electricity' (2020). This situation is a result of persistent, centuries-long discrimination, persecution, and marginalization of this ethnic group in all other societies with which Roma have co-existed. Emphatically, many of the assimilation campaigns targeting Roma have been pervaded by racial and ethnic discrimination. The repeated failures of actors having more agency and more power to address and respond to the dramatic situation of this group indicate that there is a blind eye is deliberately being turned to the problems of the Romanian Roma community in Europe. In 2007, Romania joined the European Union. Besides eased border passages, this act should have entailed enhanced attention to the rights of ethnic minorities and concerted effort for improving their living conditions, social position, and cultural situation. As Talewicz-Kwiatkowska says:

When they [Romanian Roma] got passports, they set out to run away from hell, as anybody would. It appears that a cardboard tent in a park in Paris or Milan is a better place to live than a village or a town in Romania. (...) It has turned out that despite increasing racism, refugees feel more comfortable on French or Italian streets than at home in their country. I had the displeasure to visit such camps, and I know Europe's response: they must be deported, or

at best kept behind barbed wire, in defiance of the EU principles and human rights. (ibid.)

In exploring the situation of contemporary Romani communities in Poland or any other European country, the focus should not be on so-called labour or economic migration. Of course, when Roma travel to and settle down in another country, they look for a better place to live in dignity, which involves seeking better income. However, poverty exacerbated by very high unemployment rates caused by the economic crisis was not the only challenge Roma had to confront in Romania. They also had to cope with systemic exclusion, discrimination, hindered access to education, dismal living conditions, and Romaphobia, that is, phenomena directly ensuing from the centuries-long persecution of Roma. When arriving in West-European countries, they must often face up to similar challenges, but the fact that despite all odds they remain in Poland, Germany, and France speaks to the hardships they have left behind. Inequalities, particularly those afflicting groups as radically excluded as Roma are, stem from systemic defects in education, social policy, and the economy. The reproduction of inequality is patently visible in the case of Romani communities, which means that their emancipation and the improvement of their position in the social hierarchy are only possible if comprehensive solutions are implemented.

## CRITICAL THEORIES AS A RESEARCH TOOL

When beginning to develop my research design, I was afraid that I would find it difficult to avoid marring my analyses with value-judgments, siding (automatically perhaps) with one of the parties involved and identifying 'heroes and villains.' While these fears may have stemmed from timidity characteristic of a beginner researcher, they may also have resulted from my awareness of the difficulties involved in doing research on the themes of inequality. Critical race theory was one of the theoretical and methodological concepts I selected to found my research framework on. Critical race theory helped me discern complex hegemonic configurations and, consequently, to deepen my interpretations of the research field centered around the Wroclaw-based Romanian Roma community. However, I am still perfectly aware that ideal objectivity, which science has idolised for

centuries as its ultimate goal, is unattainable. Such an ideal does not exist since we always bring certain presuppositions into the research process, and the very tools we use are anything but neutral. This must be explicitly articulated in the context of the language perspective I employ, where language is taken to be socially produced and at the same time to actively contribute to the formation of the social world.

Below I outline the crucial tentacles of critical race theory, which came into being in jurisprudence disciplines, but was soon picked up in a range of other fields, including education sciences. It tends to be depicted as a movement involving activists and scholars devoted to studying and re-fashioning the nexus of race, racism, and power. Critical race theory pertains to the areas explored not only by ethnicity studies and citizen rights studies, but also by economy and history. As one of its axial distinctive features, CRT questions the foundations of the liberal order, including its theory of equality and the purported neutrality of law. Crucially, CRT has an activist dimension to it, as it does not stop at producing reflection, but robustly seeks to initiate change (Delgado & Stefancic 2001, 2–3). Developed chiefly in the U.S., it holds that racism is a salient and basically permanent feature of American society. This does not mean that CRT is supposed to be used exclusively by scholars whose research focuses on the U.S. (*ibid.*, 7–11; Zamudio, Russel, Rios & Bridgeman 2011, 4).

Critical race theorists are committed to the study of mechanisms by which differences among society members are instituted on the basis of selected physical features such as skin color, body build, and hair texture, while similarities and common features, such as intelligence, personality, etc., are by and large overlooked. If differences are prioritised and foregrounded, races are socially produced and divisions are consolidated. Notably, majority society racialises different groups at different moments. For example, depending on fluctuations of the labour market's demand for workers, racist narratives tend to be attenuated to facilitate filling vacancies with non-white migrants. Representations and stereotypes of minorities are mutable as well. These transformations are reflected, among others, in the productions of popular culture. CRT researchers emphasise that social identities are extremely complicated, and a single, uniform identity of a social actor is very rarely to be isolated.

Even though the slavery of black people in the U.S. and the slavery of Roma in what is now Romania was abolished a long time ago, race-based inequalities are still profuse in a range of spheres, including the legislation,

private life (disapproval of mixed marriages), urban space (white and black communities considerably differ in living standards), and schooling (differences in access to schools and in learning outcomes); white males continue to be a dominant force in the accumulation of economic capital.

Pivotal to the theoretical toolkit of critical race theorists, whether they side with the realist or with the idealist approach, is what they call an 'oppositional voice.' This essentially involves giving prominence to the narratives informed by minority perspectives, that is, those constructed from the viewpoint of the oppressed. This method helps bring contradictions between dominant and minority narratives into spotlight. Emphatically, no narratives are neutral, but history is as a rule related from the dominant group's angle. By giving voice to non-whites, non-males, etc., it is possible to undermine 'mainstream' narratives. The idea of objectivity tends to be employed to legitimise and entrench majority narratives:

To be objective effectively limits one's basis of knowledge to commonly held beliefs about what is true and the accepted means for deriving those truths. Objectivity takes a position which serves to silence. Alternately, critical race theorists give voice to the experiences and truths of those without power while simultaneously asking citizens to question the master narratives we have come to believe. (ibid., 5)

As already highlighted, critical race theory is mainly developed in and in relation to U.S. society. This does not make many of its elements irrelevant or inapplicable to conceptualising racism in Europe, either historically or regarding the present conjuncture. For one, migrations to European countries certainly form a problem field the study of which can be fruitfully furthered by the CRT toolkit, seeing that migratory flows voluminosly include non-white people. In Poland, racism has mainly been discussed in the context of hate crimes in recent years. As a result of several processes, ranging from economic migration and student exchange programs to the expansion of international corporations, the proportion of foreigners in Polish urban populations is growing, though the country still remains remarkably homogeneous in terms of its ethnic composition. Given this, the problem of race and racism officially is not an issue in Poland. Nevertheless, it is in fact patent in numerous histories of other-than-white people who have come to live in Poland, Romanian Roma being one of such groups.

## AN ALLY ATTITUDE

In my research, I deliberately adopt an ally attitude to the Roma minority. This research approach is the most prominent one in the robustly developing field of Critical Romani Studies (Ryder 2018, Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2022). Admittedly, I am not of Romani descent, but I seek to conduct my research ‘with Roma,’ rather than merely ‘about Roma.’ This is a pivotal distinction, given that research on this minority has been done for years, but its members have not directly participated in these research processes. I endeavour to channel such participation by including in my empirical studies statements offered by people of Romani origin in interviews and by referencing research done by Roma about Roma. Consequently, my research is located outside classic Romological studies, where Roma were scrutinised as an exotic, nomadic group. Rather, I see my pursuits as aligned with the vigorously expanding movement of Critical Romani Studies, that is, an interdisciplinary research field centred around Roma and combining ethnology, anthropology, culture research, education, history, political sciences and related areas of study.

I consistently explore the positive dimension of my research processes and ponder in what way the identification or exposure of hegemonic arrangements can morph into, for example, eroding them. In the context of my theoretical tools, which derive from critical theory, I inquire into possibilities of intervention and subversion of the *status quo*. My reflection, however, is not about utopian visions of the fully equal and free world, since power relations are inalienable. The point is to attempt to fashion ‘new beginnings’ at the micro-scale at least. What is at stake is action that enhances knowledge and awareness concerning minority groups. I have cherish no illusions about change taking place rapidly and overthrowing the (unjust) order in place immediately, but any shifts, no matter how tiny ones, triggered by the production of knowledge and/or educational work are, I believe, of essential relevance.

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