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II. Marrying In, Out, and Sideways: Liberalization and Change

"Free Choice" in Marriage-Making among *Romanianized* Roma

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ABSTRACT

Anthropological research with Roma has consistently shown the significance of marriage-making practices in the reproduction of distinctiveness relative to non-Roma. Yet, my research with Ursari Roma—who identify as *Romanianized* Roma—indicates that marriage-making and family ideals can also bring out commonalities between Roma and non-Roma, thus complicating the notion of clear-cut Roma/non-Roma distinctions. In this article, I analyze how free choice claims assist Roma in negotiating similarity and distinction between "we-*Romanianized* Roma" and *other* Roma, non-Roma, and own ideals of the past. I suggest that the claimed freedom to choose whom to marry/love and the asserted capacity to choose between "viable" and "unviable" practices are central to the repertoire of self-identification as *Romanianized* Roma.

KEYWORDS

Free choice, marriage-making, *Romanianized* Roma, self-identification, Ursari.

Introduction

During my research in the town of Rotoieni,[1] I found that when talking about what made them similar to non-Roma and rather different from *other* Roma, the Ursari Roma there emphasized freedom of choice with respect to marriage-making practices and family ideals. In reference to "traditional" Roma/*țigani*, they positioned themselves as people who were free to marry whom they liked or loved; whose marriages were not arranged based on predetermined decisions made by the family; whose gendered relations and behaviors were not shaped by pollution rules; who didn't approve of child marriages; and for whom having their children schooled was important. It was in these terms that the "*Romanianized*[2] Roma"—as Roma from Rotoieni self-identified—explained what being a *Romanianized* Roma was about. In this paper I discuss the role of marriage-making practices and family ideals in the reproduction of this form of togetherness.[3] Subsumed to this inquiry, the question that the article revolves around is how claims and ideas of free choice assist *Romanianized* Roma in negotiating distinction and similarity relative to *other* Roma, non-Roma, as well as to their own ideals of the past.

In addition to the significance of marital practices and unions in the process of achieving Roma/Gypsy personhood (Okely 1975; Gay y Blasco 1997; Tesăr 2012), anthropological analyses indicated the centrality of endogamous marital alliances in the social reproduction of Roma togetherness and distinctiveness relative to both other Roma/Gypsies and non-Roma (Engebrigtsen 2007; Gropper 1975; Stewart 1997). In this sense, the argument made

1) This research in Rotoieni was possible with the financial support that I received during my PhD fellowship (2013-2016) from the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Justus Liebig University, Giessen). Both the name of the town and the names of the interlocutors quoted in this article were anonymized.

2) Translated from Romanian *"românizați."* Since this is the term used by local Roma and non-Roma (so it is not a concept I propose as such), I italicize the word "Romanianized" throughout the article.

3) My use of "togetherness" is indebted to Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka who explains the difference between "belonging to" and "belonging together" –i.e. togetherness– based on the meanings that reside in the German terms "Zugehörigkeit"and "Zusammengehörigkeit" respectively (2011, 2013). According to Pfaff-Czarnecka, "belonging (to)" refers to socially negotiated individual experiences, while togetherness "draws upon and results in both intersubjectivity in the sense of a person's feeling/ enacting/ experimenting the sense of common belonging as well as in collective practices and collective representations" (2013: 13-14).

by Patrick Williams according to which the pattern of endogamy is essential for the reproduction of Parisian Rom sociality and "basic for maintenance of any such community" (1982: 317) has been extremely influential. In Rotoieni, while most Roma are married to other Roma from Rotoieni or its surroundings, their marriage-making practices and family ideals do not convey a set of moral considerations specific *only* to them. What underpins their self-identification as *Romanianized* Roma and the reproduction of this kind of sociality seems to be the commonalities and similarities between Roma and non-Roma marriage-making practices and values.

The discussion is also relevant because it calls into question the notion of an unambiguous distinction between Roma and non-Roma sets of moral orders. By putting perceived similarities—as claimed by the Roma in my research—at the forefront of this discussion, but also by dealing with the ambivalences that stem from these claims, I point at the permeability of boundaries between "us" and "them" and at the unfixed character of what "us" and "them" implies. While ethnographic research convincingly shows that "in-betweenness" is rather impossible for some Roma (see Stewart 1997: 93; Horváth 2012), the case of Ursari Roma in Rotoieni provides ways to think with other scholars (Gay y Blasco 2011; Theodosiou 2003, 2010, 2011) about conditions of possibility for "in-betweenness."

In the first section of the article I introduce the marriage-making practices and family ideals of Roma from Rotoieni. In a second step, I discuss the *Romanianized* Roma's ideas and claims of free choice and connect them to other Roma/Gypsy views on freedom tackled in the literature. We will see that the assertion of freedom of choice in matters relating to marriage and family ideals espouses the Roma's endorsement of normative prescriptions regarded as "mainstream." Next, I analyze three ethnographic encounters: with Iulian (the head of the family that hosted me for about four months in the area called *țigănie*); with Ioana (the wife of a man whose family is among the wealthiest Roma families in Rotoieni); and with Aurel (father of three teenage daughters, living in a house located far from *țigănie*). The exploration of these three encounters shows that my research participants self-identify as *Romanianized* Roma by pointing at their marriage-making practices and family ideals as what distinguished them from the so-called "traditional" Roma/*țigani* (Iulian), from their ideals of the past (Ioana), and from the Roma living in *țigănie* (Aurel). The examples analyzed will show that both the articulation of similarities and distinctions permeated by claims of free choice are not devoid of ambivalences.

It will come to the surface that idioms of "civilization" and a pervasive concern with "normality" are intrinsic to the repertoire of self-identification as *Romanianized* Roma. While my interlocutors' employment of the attributes "Romanianized," "civilized," and "just normal" seem to be used interchangeably, they index the following nuances: *Romanianized* Roma refers to "we, the Ursari Roma" in (or from) Rotoieni; "civilized" defines those Roma whose lives are shaped by social mobility trajectories, including migrating out of Rotoieni and moving out of *țigănie* (thus living among non-Roma); "just normal" refers mainly to the engagement with "average" practices and ideals of marriage-making.

The Roma in Rotoieni

Rotoieni is a north-eastern Romanian town located in Moldova, the region known as the poorest and the least "developed" of the Romanian regions. My first stay there lasted two months (March-April 2014), and I lived with a non-Roma couple in the center of town. From August to November of the

same year (and during shorter stays in April and September 2015), I lived in the hilly area known as *ţigănie,* with a Roma family: Maria, Iulian, and their four children (two daughters and two sons). Located on the south-western outskirts of the town, *ţigănie* was the area known as the Roma/*ţigani* neighborhood. Based on official figures provided by the local authorities in 2013, between eight and nine per cent of the town's inhabitants (fewer than ten thousand) identified as Roma.

There is a consensus shared by Roma and non-Roma that the local Roma are "the *Romanianized* kind" ("*din ăia românizaţi*"). In fact, a few non-Roma suggested to me that there was not much to research about the Roma in Rotoieni as they "had become more like *Romanians*"[4] and "had forgotten their traditions."[5] These warnings probably say more about my non-Roma interlocutors' projections regarding what I was "in search for," than about the local Roma. For a non-Roma librarian, conducting research among Roma in Rotoieni couldn't have led me to any other finding except their "laziness," "unworthiness," and "filthiness," particularly for the Roma who lived in *ţigănie*. But just as my being a non-Roma woman shaped my interactions with the non-Roma in town, so it did my relationships with the Roma. The ways in which they talked to me about free choice, marriage-making practices, and about themselves as *Romanianized* Roma are expressions of the rapport between them as Roma/*ţigani* and my person embodying the perspective of "particular producers of hegemonic visions" (Haşdeu 2016: 187). But I also consider the research situation to be an arena where people perform, negotiate, and imagine their identities (Sletto 2009), and get a chance to self-identify and dis-identify. Hence, in the analysis of my findings I follow Theodosiou's warning regarding "the cynical trap of treating the dynamics of social identification as nothing more than strategic" (2010: 344) and thus refrain from assigning a higher heuristic value to the "doings" than to the "sayings."

Another general consensus about the local Roma is that they are Ursari. We know about Ursari (bear leaders) that at the time of the emancipation (in the mid-nineteenth century) many were "slaves owned by the State" (also called "Gypsies of the Crown") and had to pay taxes regularly to the Crown (Achim 2004: 33). They had a nomadic life, lived in tents, and practiced activities like bear taming, rearing mules, and manufacturing iron objects (Achim 2004: 89). Despite the general view that the Roma in Rotoieni are Ursari, a few Roma mentioned that there were a handful of Lăieşi in town and that they did not differ much from the Ursari, except in the dialect they spoke.[6]

At the time of my research only a few parents were speaking to their children the Romani dialect spoken by local Roma/*ţigani* (the Ursari dialect). Classes of Romani were provided for the pupils in seventh and eighth grade at the local school known as the "*ţigani* school."[7] The teacher used to be one of Iulian's brothers, also the first Roma in town to get a university degree. But it was only a few parents that seemed to encourage their children to attend those language classes. Others dismissed them reasoning that the content taught in school was not the Romani dialect that they spoke in Rotoieni or that they (as parents) didn't want their children to speak Romanian with an accent (i.e. "a Romani accent"). In a way, one could say that the case of Ursari Roma in the region where I did fieldwork is one of those "theoretically more challenging cases of monolingual or apparently more assimilated Gypsy populations whose enduring distinction is a puzzle to both assimilationist states and cultural anthropology," a category that Stewart opposes to that of "the more exotic Romany-speaking Roma" (2013: 424).

Before the fall of communism, a shoe factory was the largest employer in the area. Most of the people of Roma background I met during my fieldwork proudly recalled

4) In this article, I italicize the word "Romanians" to flag those cases in which my Roma and non-Roma research participants used this term to mean "non-Roma" (i.e., the majority population), thus distinguishing it from the use of "Romanians" with the meaning of "citizens of Romania."

5) My feeling is that such statements did not convey a comparison between the local Roma in the past and in the present, but rather a comparison between the local Roma and the general stereotypes of Roma/*ţigani* who strictly keep to their "traditions." I am led to think this by the fact that such statements were usually followed by comparisons to Roma we-collectives (mostly *Căldărari*) that have never lived in Rotoieni.

6) Lăieşi belonged to the same category of "slaves owned by the State" and worked mostly as blacksmiths (Achim 2005: 33). One of the few times I heard about Lăieşi in Rotoieni was from a woman whose husband came from a Lăieşi family. As his family spoke no Romani at home, the couple ended up speaking only Romanian among themselves and so did their two sons.

7) The school is located near the central market, at approximately two kilometers from *ţigănie*. It is not supposed to cater only for Roma pupils, and, indeed, it is not only Roma children who attend classes there. However, as I was often told, non-Roma avoid having their children attend this school due to the high number of Roma students.

having worked or having had relatives who had worked in that factory. The making and selling of combs has been often referred to as "the traditional occupation" of Roma in Rotoieni, which nevertheless stopped being profitable shortly after 1989. At the time of my research, apart from those relying on welfare benefits, many Roma had been engaging in formal or informal commercial activities. Iași and Suceava are the main urban centers where they bought merchandise to sell mostly at the local market. While most Roma had official documents and licenses to conduct small-scale commerce, a few others peddled cigarettes at the local market, whispering to potential customers that they had cheap cigarettes for sale.

In the absence of formal employment, another income source was day labor in private construction and renovation projects, as well as farming, mainly in the local Lipovans' gardens. In Rotoieni, Lipovans are referred to as "the other ethnic minority" besides the Roma. According to figures from 2013 provided by the local authorities, Lipovans were just over eight percent of the local population. They are descendants of old-rite orthodox believers who objected to the religious reforms imposed by the Russian Orthodox Church and went into exile in the second half of the seventeenth century (Dobrinescu 2015). Well-known in the region for their activity as vegetables growers and sellers, the Lipovans play an important role in the local social and ethnic figuration, viewed as the opposite of the "lazy" and "unworthy" Roma/*țigani*. I was once told that an outsider could easily identify the Lipovan neighborhood by their large houses and gardens located in the north-western part of the town. By contrast, the households in *țigănie*[8] are rather precarious two- or three-room houses clustered along the railway tracks. While most Roma in town live in *țigănie*, a few Roma families live in other areas of Rotoieni, including in the Lipovan neighborhood. Not living in *țigănie* was often mentioned as one aspect that distinguished one's family from the Roma/*țigani* families who lived there (a point which I discuss more in-depth in the fifth section of this article).

8) At times, it was referred to as *ursărie* (derived from the ethnonym Ursari).

Marriage-making in and around Rotoieni

The practices around the formation of marital unions seem to vary greatly in Rotoieni. Among those who were part of a marital union, most of the Roma that I met (with ages ranging from 16 to 60) had or used to have Roma partners. Some had formalized their marriages, by having both a civil and a religious ceremony, while others had married only in church for "it is not the papers that keep us together," as a woman in her mid-fifties pointed out. This was not Maria and Iulian's case. Maria married Iulian in 1994, wearing a white dress, both in the Orthodox church and at the City Hall, as she recalled having always wanted her wedding to be like that—"I wouldn't have married otherwise." She was 22 and Iulian was 27 when the wedding took place. Like most of the other Roma in town, after getting married and before building their own three-room house, they lived in a small, three square meter kitchen (as Maria put it), in her parents' house located in *țigănie*. (photo)

For the younger generation, currently in their twenties, the wedding seemed to be a highly meaningful social event, as well as an expensive one that could be organized only by those whose parents could afford it. Those whose parents couldn't provide this support (whether Roma or not) aimed to go abroad, work there temporarily, and save enough money to organize a wedding at home. While such "dream weddings" are envisaged as events taking place in Rotoieni, so that relatives and friends can join in, I met a couple who organized their wedding and the baptism of their child as one single

Maria and Iulian's religious ceremony (digital photograph from the author's research archive. August 2014)

event in the Basque Country where they lived with their extended family on a rather permanent basis. Laura, the young man's mother, proudly showed me the wedding pictures and the invitation they used to spread the word about the event that took place in a banquet hall in Guernica, in Spain: "We wanted to be with our people, speaking our language [Romanian] (…) Both *țigani* and *Romanians* joined us… We had a wedding like the ones at home!" Laura recalled enthusiastically.

Marriages with Roma, preferably from the surroundings, seemed to be indeed what parents preferred for their sons and daughters. My interlocutors, who have lived for years in western Romania or Spain, expressed their preference that their children would find spouses from back home in Rotoieni. Lina, for instance, a woman I met in 2015 in Zamora, told me that she would have liked her first-born to have a Romanian wife instead of the Spanish *gitana* that he was (and still is) in a relationship with. Another woman whom I encountered in Zalău, Ioana, expressed similar concerns regarding her sons. The mother of two sons of marriageable age, Ioana mentioned that their family travelled often from Zalău to Rotoieni (mainly on occasions such as Christmas, Easter, or Saint Mary's celebration on August 15) so that the two young men "could find girls from home to marry." Ioana herself, who grew up in Zalău since her parents moved from Rotoieni to western Romania, met her husband, Radu, on one of her visits to Rotoieni and settled back there with him, until later when the couple moved together to Zalău.

I met couples who had been together since they were young (like Ioana and Radu), as well as couples where one of them had separated from a previous spouse (like Lina and her current partner). I heard stories about elopements and the commotion that such occurrences generated, but mostly tales about parents who met and agreed upon the future of their daughter and son who had reached marriageable age, after the two had previously "freely" decided to be together. As many Roma from Rotoieni engaged

in commercial activities that required travelling to western Romania to buy merchandise or sell it at local fairs, people found spouses beyond the boundaries of Rotoieni or Moldova. In any case, many of my research participants' stories about how they met, became a couple, and/or married were mostly narrated as stories about free-choice love matches and recounted in terms of "we liked each other" or "we fell in love with one another."

There were only a few Roma men and women who had or used to have a non-Roma partner, and the notion of mixed couples prompted mixed feelings. When they talked about how Rotoieni was an "intercultural town" where Roma, Lipovans and the others lived together harmoniously, both Roma and non-Roma suggested that the existence of mixed marriages was an indicator of this conviviality. In other instances, coming from a mixed family was a source of pride for the Roma individuals and was depicted in terms of social mobility. This resonates with Kovai's discussion (in this issue) about mixed marriages as a strategy to exit the realm of the socio-economically vulnerable and stigmatized *Cigány* position. Based on the example of Kisjutka, the daughter of a Romungro family from a Hungarian village who married a Hungarian man, Kovai shows how this strategy is tightly connected to the pressure to become Hungarian. Without implying that a symmetrical comparison is possible here, this example reminds me of a single man in his forties from Rotoieni who took great pride in having had a "*Lipovancă*"[9] mother. In contrast to Kisjutka, who continued to nurture and respect her relationship with her *Cigány* family and relatives while being part of a mixed marriage, this man, whose father was a Roma, insisted that he had nothing to do with "these *țigani*" from *țigănie*. I remember the uneasiness that his attitude caused in his sister-in-law and brother's house (located in *țigănie*), as he expressed that sense of superiority based on the fact that he had lived his entire life among the Lipovans (i.e., among the "hardworking" and "reliable" people of Rotoieni).

All in all, the idea of mixed couples did not seem to vex the Roma in Rotoieni, but occasionally, it did bring out considerations about "Roma morality." I was once told that "a *Romanian* survives among *țigani*, but a *țigan* doesn't [among *Romanians*],"[10] meaning that a Roma can hardly have a good life married with a non-Roma. In this logic, what differentiates Roma from non-Roma is a human quality specific to Roma, which allows them to treat with respect and accept a non-Roma in their midst, but which non-Roma completely lack. This brings to mind Maria's hope that her daughters (both underage at the time of my research) would marry Roma men, which, in her view, would protect them from experiencing racism inside their own families: "I don't want them to be called 'ugly *țigancă*' in any little fight they might have with their [non-Roma] husbands." By invoking the Roma/non-Roma distinction, Maria seems to signal that, even when *Romanianized*, a Roma woman cannot escape her position of "*țigancă*" that determines the possibilities of choice relative to whom she ought to marry in order to have a good life.

Freedom of choice?

Free-choice and love marriages (as opposed to arranged marriages) are mentioned in the anthropological accounts of the Roma in the context of discussions about Roma's concern with the "civilized" standards theoretically associated with non-Roma ways (Engebrigtsen 2007: 80-82; Stewart 1997: 82-91). For instance, Engebrigtsen (2007) notes that the preference for arranged marriages coexists with the approval of love marriage among the Rom from the Transylvanian village where she conducted fieldwork. Mostly endorsed by the Roma whose marital alliances were love-based,

9) The feminine singular of Lipovan.

10) Translated from the Romanian: *"Un român trăiește printre țigani, dar un țigan nu."*

Engebrigtsen suggests that this endorsement should be understood in relation to the non-Roma peasants' view of arranged marriages as uncivilized (2007: 82; see also Lemon 2000: 136). At the same time, the tendency to go along with love marriages (regarded as the result of individual choice) is justified by the high value that Roma attach to the individuals' personal autonomy and will power (2007: 81; see also Stewart 1997: 91).

In fact, transgressions of marriage-making rules are viewed in various Roma communities as individual choices (Engebrigtsen 2007: 79) that often lead to exclusion (Gay y Blasco 2011; Gropper 1975: 187-189; Olivera 2012: 186-188). Gay y Blasco (2011) presents the story of a Gitano woman, Agata, whose individual choices informed by the ideal of love-based marital unions had drastic consequences for her position within the Gitano community from Madrid. Agata's life choices (such as leaving her Gitano family and moving in with a non-Gitano man) conflicted greatly with the ideals of female behavior encompassed by the "Gitano law," which never ceased to be present in her life.

The idea of a "Ursari/Roma law" doesn't exist in Rotoieni, and much less the idea of a "*Romanianized* Roma law." The very fact that there is no such law dictating their marriage-making practices is commonly invoked by Roma as what makes them *Romanianized*. In opposition with other Roma we-collectives (as those referenced above) that tend to regard individual choices as interfering with their specific structuring principles of marriage-making, *Romanianized* Roma claim that it is mainly individual choices and the ideal of love-based marriages that structure their marital practices. Yet, we know that marriage-making as a mode of social reproduction of togetherness and distinctiveness is never about individual choices only, and that family is "a major intersection between personal choice and social compulsion" (Coontz 1988: 2). While they contrast their claimed freedom of choice with what they represent as "traditional" Roma social constraint strictly exerted on the individual, the Roma in my research do not talk about the normative prescriptions they submit to as coercive. As non-Roma adhere to similar prescriptions regarding marriage-making and family ideals, Roma in Rotoieni don't interpret the compliance to those prescriptions as a matter of social constraint, and instead frame it in terms of how things *ought* to be. Agata's Gitano relatives or the Rom in the hamlet where Engebrigtsen did fieldwork are just as likely to view the "laws" that shape their lives as non-coercive. The next vignette is meant to illustrate the idea of a common normative horizon that sets the parameters of what marriage-making *ought to* look like.

Maria, Iulian's wife, who hosted me in their house from *țigănie,* often expressed her concern with the fact that I was unmarried while in my late twenties. The mother of four, Maria regularly stressed that, as the years passed by, my chances to make a "meaningful" life—with a husband and children—also passed me by. On one occasion, she told me, less subtly than usual, that in order to find a husband I had to do the following: "[You should] go with your parents to spend your holidays in your hometown, maybe for a month or so (…) So that you can find someone like you [to get married with], from your town, from your social class, someone *Romanian*, educated… like you!" Members of my extended family (also living in north-eastern Romania) used to express concerns in a similar vein. I remember one illustrative example at my cousin's wedding in 2015, a quite extravagant event with around 165 attendees. The husband of one of my mother's sisters introduced me to a young man and made supposedly random comments regarding my unmarried status. He also suggested I should forget about that man living in Latin-America (with whom I had a long-distance relationship at the time) and start looking for a Romanian partner. Whether I wanted or not to get married, it

was suggested to me that my choices had to be channeled in the direction of a partner whose origins and social background were similar to mine.

There was nothing in what both Maria and my non-Roma uncle intimated that suggested I couldn't have married whomever I chose and loved, as long as I married or at least I didn't stay single. A long-distance relationship did not even seem to really count. Far from being isolated cases, these similar concerns expressed by Maria and my uncle convey a set of prescriptions for how a woman in her later twenties should and could find a husband. According to these prescriptions, a woman should find a male partner whose origins coincide with hers, who has a similar socio-economic background, preferably the same level of education and who belongs to the same we-collective as she does; that parents should participate in the process of finding someone for her to marry (and implicitly approve of that process and person); and that "finding someone to marry" and actually getting married are essential for one's fulfilment as a woman and as a social persona, because postponing it puts you at a disadvantage. As long as one considered these normative parameters, the freedom of choice and to marry whomever, whenever and however one wanted was granted.

The notion of freedom has been of particular interest for scholars concerned with notions of morality and ethics in anthropology over the last two decades. James Laidlaw (2002, 2014) is one of the most quoted anthropologists when it comes to ways of ethnographically describing "possibilities of human freedom" (2002: 315). Among those who draw on Laidlaw's perspective, Joel Robbins (2007) identifies two main tendencies in the way anthropology deals with notions of freedom. One of them defines social action as moral as long as it is anchored in the normative, whereas the other considers social action as moral only when people make free choices and are conscious of the fact that they do so. In Rotoieni, Roma represent their marriage-making practices and family ideals as revolving around freedom of choice regarding whom to marry, when or what rules should or should not regulate the couple dynamics. As already pointed out, this affirmation of freedom comprises a self-comparison with *other* Roma (particularly "traditional") that Ursari Roma view as being subjected to "unreasonable" social constraint. What is implied as "the choice" not to practice prescriptive rituals or not to comply with certain gendered norms (such as clothing-related) and the subscription to, as it were, non-Roma civility-oriented morals (such as girls' education before marriage) are thus affirmed as insignia of their distinction from these *other* Roma. But neither this disapproval of beliefs and practices that Roma in my research deem as coercive, nor their ideal of individual choice-based marriage indicate that Roma in Rotoieni are "less normative" than the *other* Roma or than the non-Roma, as the vignette above suggests.

Before moving on with the analysis of the three ethnographic encounters announced in the Introduction, I would like to recall Povinelli's conception of freedom (2006). According to the critical theorist, freedom has little to do with individual choice. It is mostly about a "socially significant normative shift that begins with struggles aimed at freeing persons from some *specifiable form of social organization or social injustice* within a field of tactical power but ends with a devotion to freedom as a radical and ultimate break from all social conditions/horizons" (2006: 184; italics in original). It seems to me that the assertion of their freedom of choice vis-à-vis the "traditional" Roma, deemed as hostages to Roma/*țigani* specific laws, is indicative of this sort of "devotion to freedom," which more likely indicates their *Romanianizedness* than it is an approval (even verbal) of those laws.

Differently than *other* Roma: "just normal"

According to Stuart Hall, identification is "a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption," a process that "obeys the logic of more-than-one" (1996: 3). As a "never completed process," identification as defined by Hall differs from the common understanding of identification as a gesture of "recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity" (1996: 2). Instead, it "operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier-effects'" (1996: 3). It is this sort of discursive endeavor, one that binds and marks symbolic boundaries, that I contemplate here in relation to marriage-related practices as central in the repertoire of identification as *Romanianized* Roma/*țigani*. To illustrate, take the following excerpt from one of my first conversations with Maria's husband, Iulian:

> This [other] kind of *țigani* have gold coins at the weddings of their children. These are [their] unwritten laws. But not with us [*la noi*]… For us, the Ursari… Our children [sons and daughters] get married without any conditions; if they like each other, they will get married. We organize a wedding, an engagement, if possible, and all is fine. The *other* [Roma] communities consider the girl's beauty, her honor, her dowry, and then a [bride] price of I don't know how many gold coins is established (…) They [*other* Roma] meet in Costești at a festival, where all the relatives meet (…) But we, as Ursari, we don't practice such *țigănească* law [*judecata țigănească*] […] We are an *etnie* [ethnic group] that we consider ourselves (*sic*) to be *Romanianized țigani*. (Recorded conversation, March 2014)

The statement that daughters and sons of *Romanianized țigani* have liberty to get married without any prescribed conditions is followed though by an "if": they marry "*if* they like each other." The focus on choice-based matches conditioned by mutual feelings and self-made decision enables Iulian to illustrate what is the ideology related to marriage-making politics *la noi* as compared to the ideology *la ei*. Elsewhere I discuss the dichotomy conveyed by the two Romanian expressions: *la noi* and *la ei* (Racleș 2018). Their verbatim translation would be "at us" and "at them" meaning "in our places" and "in their places" respectively. As such, these expressions carry the idea of place-based togetherness that distinguishes those "here" who "are, think and do like us" as compared to those "there" who "are, think and do differently." In Iulian's account, *la noi* is meant to refer here to the Ursari we-collective whom he then levelled as *Romanianized țigani*. *La ei*, which in this excerpt is only implicitly referred to, points at Roma who engage (or are imagined to do so) in marriage practices regarded as unviable by Iulian, and, according to him, by Roma in Rotoieni. What is worth noting is Iulian's reference to laws (*legi*) said to determine the matches within *other* Roma communities. While *la noi* (among Ursari, thus *Romanianized* Roma) young people marry if they like each other, *la ei* (among *other* Roma) young people's marriages are bound to rules respected and secured by the members of those "communities" by virtue of their membership, thus turning into matter of constraint.

Interpretations based on anthropological research with Roma who, according to Iulian, "consider the girl's beauty, her honor, her dowry and (…) practice the '*țigănească* law'" would contradict his statement by arguing that the older generations' involvement in the match-making is far from being a matter of constraint. Instead, this involvement is essential for the reproduction of the specific Roma sociality and for the maintenance of the moral parameters that

frame political and gendered relations. In his book about Gabor and Cărhar Roma in Transylvania, Peter Berta writes: "According to the most common Roma ideology, this division of labour between generations is justified, because young people have only superficial knowledge of the social and economic situation of the families of potential husbands or wives and cannot decide of their own 'who will be a good, the right spouse for them'" (2019: 39). Without explicitly addressing the choice–social constraint continuum, Berta goes on mentioning that, in Iulian's terms, *la ei* (Gabor Roma) personal preferences and wishes are rather insignificant in matters related to marital alliances, as compared to *la noi* (*Romanianized* Roma), where choosing and liking each other are the preconditions for a match.

Iulian seems to set the freedom to marry whom one likes in absolute contrast with those "laws." But at the same time, he invokes a series of practical considerations that enable the *other ţigani*'s commitment to those laws and that, by extension, make the Ursari Roma's engagements with them impossible. By referring to "gold coins," Iulian implies that *la ei* people can afford, for instance, to pay a bride price. Meanwhile, as the Ursari cannot cover such expenses, the only 'choice' is to allow the youngsters to marry at will. Thus, the relation between choice and constraint treated as dichotomic by Iulian and others in Rotoieni surfaces as a convention since practicing those "laws" is inextricably interlinked with practical considerations.

The same dichotomic relation between constraint and free choice has been also suggested in relation to clothing (*portul*). As I mentioned before, clothing was indicated as what differentiated between "we, *Romanianized* Roma" and "they, *other* Roma" (*ăştialalţii*), with particular reference to women's long skirts and head scarves. Consider the following excerpt from my conversation with one of Iulian's male cousins who lives with his extended family in a household located in the Lipovan neighborhood:

> *Căldărarii, lingurarii, spoitorii, cortorarii* and *rudarii* [women] wear long clothes. We… [our] women wear regular skirts, over their knees, just *normal*. Also, their women don't go out without a scarf on their heads. Or… there's one more habit, [in the public sphere] women stay separated from their men. But we, *ăştialalţi*… we all stay together.[11] The woman with [her] man, they [the couple] don't separate. That's the way we do… not as *they* do: women on one side, men on the other side. (Recorded conversation, March 2014)

Clothing is intimated here as a token for gendered rules that structure the relations between men and women. While implying that the clothing codes index men's entitlement to exercise control over their wives' lives, Iulian's cousin emphasizes that *la noi* (the *Romanianized* Roma) the dynamic of the couple is not regulated by norms that require women to wear certain clothes or forbid them to dress in ways they like to.

These ways of talking about marriage-making where personal choice supersedes compliance with laws are based on the following logic: while the *other* Roma's compliance with "their laws" supposes constraint, siding with mainstream prescriptions is matter of being and acting "just normal." In Robbins's perspective, values do more than determine "the relative importance" of beliefs since they "serve to produce hierarchies of more or less valued elements" (2007: 296). In such a hierarchy of the Roma in my research, "normality" occupies one of the top positions. It is a valued element, which *Romanianized* Roma unceasingly reiterate as opposed to an excessive commitment to, as it were, outdated ceremonials, women's subjection to illiberal touchstones or excessive commitment to traditions. In the next section, I discuss these issues based on my

11) Lemon noted about settled Gypsies in Russia that they "value certain traditions—songs and dances—but eschew practices considered repressive and uncivilized, especially arranged marriages or gender-segregated tables" (2000: 136).

encounter with a Roma woman who moved from Rotoieni to north-western Romania years ago.

Differently than "before": free to go with the times

Ioana moved from Rotoieni to Zalău with her parents and four sisters when she was only a few months old. Like all her sisters, Ioana married a young man from Rotoieni after having met him at Christmas: "I grew up here [in Zalău], but we always went home [to Rotoieni] to spend the holidays. That's how I met Radu [her partner]; we were neighbors. My brothers-in-law are also from there, from Moldova. My sisters' husbands. We didn't marry men from anywhere else [but from home]." Shortly after marrying Radu, the son of one of the wealthiest families in Rotoieni, the couple started their life in Rotoieni and had their two twin sons. Later, when the children were seven, they moved to Zalău with the support of Ioana's parents.

In 2015, when I met them in Zalău, Ioana and her husband were in their late thirties. They were living in a fully equipped and modishly furnished three-room flat that they owned in town. Ioana's life seemed to gyrate mostly around the administration of the family's clothing store located in the city center. Throughout our conversation, I asked her whether she remembered the "Abduction from the Seraglio" kind of wall-carpets[12] that people used to hang on the interior walls of their houses in Rotoieni. That was when she first said: "Well… we have been *Romanianized*, I really don't see the point in that habit." To my question what it meant to have been *Romanianized*, Ioana cited a variety of doings or not-doings that distinguished them (her family) from *other* Roma. Most of the referenced doings or not-doings were the same markers of differentiation mentioned by the other people of Roma background that I had met in Rotoieni: a loosening of a strict allocation of gender roles; men-women equality in making family-related decisions; a relaxed attitude towards marriage-related ceremonials perceived to be backward; and the absence of clothing-related proscriptions. In her own words, in comparison to those *other* Roma:

> We [*Romanianized* Roma] wear... For instance, if I want to wear a short skirt, I go for a walk in a mini-skirt, what's the problem with that? Or there are persons who do not pass in front of the men, [I mean] women. They're dumb [*tâmpite*] … Why wouldn't I walk in front of the man? What if I do it? These are some issues... or for instance when the woman is pregnant she cannot... whatever. This is just... nonsense [*bălării*], *la ei*! *La noi*... we don't do that. If I want to sit down and have a drink with my husband, I do so! (Recorded conversation, June 2015)

Underlying her claim about her freedom to choose from different manifestations of physical intimacy—for instance, how to dress or how to perform her womanhood in her husband's or other men's presence—is the presumption that one can free oneself from social constraints. In fact, operating with this notion that one can free oneself from social constraints becomes one of the aspects that underpin the self-identification as *Romanianized* Roma. The social constraints implied are those seen as deriving from her position as a Roma woman, which Ioana sees as proscriptive to the extent of what choices can be made. But apart from assigning individuals their positions within the social structure, the family is also the sphere within which they negotiate those positions and redefine themselves as individuals and members of the society (Coontz 1988: 12-13). So, both the negotiation of the Roma woman position assigned to Ioana by her family and the redefinition of herself as *Romanianized* Roma happens within,

12) The practice of hanging wall-carpets was one of the main empirical foci of my PhD research.

through and in relation to the family. From Ioana's perspective, the redefinition as *Romanianized* Roma has to do with one's capacity—as individual and as family—to reflexively assess the social viability of certain practices or behaviors. In this logic, this capacity crystallizes in the ability to free herself from the constraints associated with practices that are unviable both from the perspective of the family and of the majority population. When Ioana stresses that she does not see a point in holding back from wearing a mini-skirt, from having a drink with her husband or merely from walking in front her husband, Ioana endorses her own capacity to discern between viable and unviable manifestations of intimacy, and moreover, to align herself along the lines of what she deems as the parameters of "normality."

Roma's claim of and aspirations to "normality" that I noticed in Rotoieni could be regarded as ways of implicitly countering the more or less tacit accusations of backwardness or excessive traditionalism, generically made by members of the majority non-Roma population. Whether we can see it or not as a response to such accusations, an idiom of civilization is employed by Roma who identify as *Romanianized* in relation to their capacity to set up their lives according to up-to-date standards of intimacy and sociality. This idiom of civilization as emancipation is not used only in reference to *other* Roma, but also to one's own past marriage-making ideals. Here is another insightful excerpt from my conversation with Ioana:

> Today I wouldn't like my daughter-in-law to go through the sheet test ceremonial to publicly prove her virginity, I wouldn't find it [right]… I even asked my son: 'Would you still marry someone if she wasn't a virgin?' And he said: 'Yes, I would, if I loved her, I would.' It's not the end of the world, everybody has the right to life. And if a stupid one [man] lied to her, telling her he loved her and that he'd marry her… Poor girl. But in the past, it wasn't like that. For instance, we were virgins, but nowadays it's not like that anymore. These are different times. (Recorded conversation, June 2015)

In this example the phrases "today" and "in the past" set the parameters of self-referentiality. While the excerpts discussed above illustrate the use of an idiom of civilization in reference to *other* Roma as those "whom we are not like," this one translates into "we are not who we used to be; times change, we change." This kind of self-referentiality resembles Cortorari's claim that "we've become civilized" discussed by Tesăr (2016) in relation to the mansions that they build, thus making visible for themselves and the non-Roma others their economic betterment and social upward mobility incompatible with living in tents. In a way, while the Cortorari mansions in Transylvania operate as "signs of upward mobility and of a project of *Gaže*-oriented civility" (Tesăr 2016: 194), Roma from Rotoieni resort to a free-choice-based way of making and conceiving of marriage and family to illustrate how they used to be and what they have become.

By locating love (as what drives marriage-making) above the related moral codes, Ioana asserts her and her family's capacity to distinguish between viable and unviable practices, and, by that means, her family's higher position on an imagined "civilization" ladder. This echoes the following "feedback loop" as conceived by Coontz: "As families assign people their initial place in the social order, so changes in people's place in the social order help them to reconstruct their families, while new family relationships help them to further affect their place in the social order" (1988: 14). The changes in the place assigned to Ioana by her parental family (a Roma woman) contributed to the reconstruction of her nuclear family into a "civilized" and, thus, *Romanianized* one. In turn, this "family reconstruction" shapes the relationship to her sons and is prone to affect the way of relating to her daughters-

in-law (i.e., by reconsidering the primacy of the virginity).

Ioana's kind of discourse seems to be at odds with anthropological accounts about other Roma populations' codes and practices related to gendered relationships, dressing code, and sexual behavior, which mark the symbolical boundaries between "we" (Roma) and "they" (non-Roma) (Gay y Blasco 1997; Grooper 1975; Haşdeu 2014; Okely 1983). Conversely, Ioana seems to cultivate those "terrains of commonality" (cf. Theodosiou 2011: 94) with those who are not "typically" complying with the moral rules of sexual behavior, the non-Roma. By debunking virginity as a precondition of marriage Ioana aligns herself and her family with another group, in contradistinction with those who treat premarital sex as evil. Yet, such discursive demystification of virginity and malleability regarding premarital sex do not automatically amputate the relevance of such rules in people's lives. While labelled as an "unviable practice," the significance of virginity seems to reside now in its quality as an ideal of the past belonging to the *Romanianized* Roma.

Ioana's comment that "now it's not like that anymore," after mentioning that her sisters and herself married before ever having had sexual intercourse, is loaded with a sort of nostalgia vis-à-vis a normative shift. This takes me to suggest that it is not the value of guarding virginity as such that Ioana reconsiders and refutes. What she reconsiders is the viability of practices that derive from this valuation of women's virginity, which in her view reproduces an oppressive and socially punitive treatment of women. What seems to be at stake here is a devotion to an ideal of freedom manifested by Ioana as a means of self-fashioning and positioning herself as someone who has the freedom and capacity to righteously assess the world that surrounds her and her family. Povinelli notes that the power of self-sovereignty resides in its ability "to make a personal event a normative mission and a civilizational break" (2006: 191). Ioana's stance provides a means to think particularly about such a "civilizational break" that many Roma in Rotoieni point at and enact when it comes to their self-identification as *Romanianized* Roma and dis-identification relative to *other* Roma.

What is notable about my research participants' claims is this link between their attribute as "civilized" people and the capacity to "freely" choose, thus circumventing constraint. This link is quite counterintuitive given that internalizing self-restraint is essential in processes of negotiating inferior positions (Elias and Scotson 1994), as well as in "civilizing processes" (Elias 2000). In fact, anthropological research has documented Roma/Gypsy views according to which compliance with clear-cut norms and self-restraint relative to shared taboos is what distinguishes between "we-the civilized ones" versus "they-the uncivilized Gadzo." For instance, the reason why Mānuš consider themselves civilized and the Gadzo uncivilized or "barbarous" (Williams 2003: 31) is the respect for the dead that the Mānuš ought to pay through various forms of abstinence and observance of taboos. Another example is the view expressed by an elderly Gitano man from Jarana, according to which the Gitano were the "truly civilized" as they "knew how to live a proper, decent, human life" in contrast to the Payos who don't (Gay y Blasco 2003: 211).

In the ethnically mixed and stigmatized neighborhood in Bucharest where Pulay conducted his research, "the claim of being 'civilized'" does not point essentially to a Gypsies/non-Gypsies distinction. But it does refer to a concern with being "an obedient citizen" (2017: 97). In Pulay's account, "civilized" is one of the "behavioural codes" that play a central role in people's "negotiation of worth and their quest for social distinction" (2017: 99). For the Roma in my research, the claim of being civilized is also part of such a process of reproducing social distinction from *other* Roma and

difference from their own ideals of the past. But while they signal this distinction by asserting free choice, Roma from Rotoieni seem to recraft 'old' prescriptions (that derive from their belonging to a Roma we-collective) in light of practices and ideals shared by non-Roma. The process of recrafting these 'old' and allegedly unviable prescriptions facilitates their assertion of similarities with non-Roma.

Beyond the "*ţigănească* mentality": choosing "school before boyfriends"

In Rotoieni, the affirmation of a "moral superiority" relative to *other* Roma as legitimized by non-Roma co-citizens (see also Stewart 2013: 422) has been also articulated in connection to the importance of schooling. Roma would often emphasize that school should prevail in girls' lives before they should be thinking about boyfriends and marriage. A similar observation was made by Theodosiou (2011) in regard with the Parakalamos Gypsies (in north-western Greece) who did not want to be confused with what the term *Tsinganoi* epitomized.[13] One of those aspects stressed by the Parakalamos Gypsies as what made them different from *Tsinganoi* was the fact that their children were brought up like *Balame* children and thereby went to school like *Balame* children (*Balame* being the Gypsy term for non-Gypsy) (Theodosiou 2011: 96).

"School before boyfriends" insisted Aurel, father of three daughters and husband of Sorana. His family lived for about ten years in his parents' two-room house located relatively far from *ţigănie*. The couple's first born, Gianina, is currently twenty-one years old and recently got engaged. On the afternoon that I spent with them in October 2014, our chat revolved around the variety of temptations that they depicted as prospective distractions from what they insisted the girls' priority should be: school. Monopolizing the chat, Aurel turned it into a sermon to his daughters, albeit held in a joking tone. He regarded school as the only way they could potentially become financially independent women and capable to contribute to their future families' income. Hence, school had to come before boyfriends and "facebooks" (as he put it). Gianina, who was fifteen at that time, was the main target of Aurel's remarks.

Seeking my backup, he asked me to count how many years I had studied and to tell whether doing both—falling in love and focusing on studies—was feasible. After we did the calculation, the father concluded that my long-distance relationship was a proof that allowing oneself to fall in love and focusing on one's studies and career were not exactly compatible. In a way, Aurel seemed to deem my long-distance relationship a result of this incompatibility and of the fact that I had given priority to "school over [falling in] love."

Earlier in the conversation, addressing Gianina directly, he said that he of course agreed that she could have a "friend or something" ("*un prieten, un amic… ceva*") when she would be 17 years old.[14] The "friend" was supposed to be someone Gianina could exchange texts and Facebook messages with, but "nothing more than that: a friend." "It's something normal," the father put it, while emphasizing that the "friend" should not impede her focusing on studies and aspiring to "become someone." In addition, both the father and the mother stressed that Gianina should be constantly vigilant so as not to become the subject of gossip for anyone in town—whether Roma or non-Roma. Inappropriate behavior in public space, such as kissing and hugging the "friend," was referred to as what would easily make Gianina the subject of gossip in town. The father went on, recalling: "Just like I did when I saw that [non-Roma] friend of yours. Remember? I knew that the train station was in a different direction, not

13) In the Greek context the term *Tsinganoi* refers to Gypsy groups represented as nomadic, non-local (Theodosiou 2010: 329), who inhabit a site "of drugs and crime; an irredeemably Gypsy, poor, illiterate and violent place given to all sorts of excess, degradation and decay" (2011: 96).

14) The mother insisted that Gianina should not have a "friend" before the age of 18.

there [in the park] (…) Loitering in the park [after school] and waiting for her boyfriend to come, hug and kiss [her]. Is that still school?"

This conversation sheds new light on the discussion about freedom and constraint, in particular on the normative parameters that outline the limits within which choices can be made. On the one hand, Gianina's parents deem that "falling in love" prevents the youngsters[15] from focusing on school. In the elaboration of this view, I was not only the reference that Gianina's parents used in order to "show" their daughters that "falling in love" and school achievements were not compatible. Regarded as a non-Roma who had put studies above "boyfriends," I also became the audience in front of whom they could mobilize those socially desirable views that made them different from the Roma in *țigănie*. In contrast to Iulian and his male cousin, Gianina's parents did not refer to *other* Roma, meaning "traditional" Roma, when pointing at those aspects that made their family different, but to the Roma in their proximity—the Roma in *țigănie*. More precisely, they did not speak about "we-Ursari Roma" vis-à-vis "traditional" Roma, but about "we-(*Romanianized*) Roma" vis-à-vis the stereotyped representations about Roma/*țigani* that operate locally and more broadly in Romanian society.

On the other hand, both parents agreed that "falling in love" (even at an age that they approved of) was what might turn a young woman into the subject of gossip in town if an "improper behavior" was involved. The parents' approval of a "friend" (*amic*) excludes sexual intimacy and comes with other restrictions meant to prevent any "improper behavior" (i.e., physical proximity such as kissing and hugging in public areas) and therefore the gossip. The fact that the danger of gossip resided in the family's relations to both *țigani* and Romanians suggests that the normative prescriptions regarding teenagers' public displaying are endorsed by both Roma and non-Roma. Another aspect that is worth emphasizing here is that "falling in love" at an approved age (17-18 years old) and engaging in friendship relationships with young male "friends" is framed in terms of normalcy. One could assume that the "abnormal" (and probably unapproved) thing to do would be to delay the formation of a heterosexual couple, to be single for a dubiously long period of time or, very likely, to be in a long distance relationship, as also suggested by Maria and my uncle, whom I mentioned previously in this article.

Aurel sporadically alluded to Gianina's lack of involvement in household chores. With the intention to mock her, he asked me whether I wanted coffee with the disclaimer that my chances to get a proper coffee were low. While teasingly finger-pointing at his daughters' lack of acquaintance with the household chores, he did mention his wife's merit of having brought up their children "properly": "I thank God and I thank my wife. I don't want to praise her to the skies, but she did well what she did; [their daughters] have been educated, always neat, with their homework done—they never went [to school] without their homework (…) But this didn't bring us money." This last remark referred to their previous complaint, namely that Sorana had never worked outside the household until recently. As Aurel's salary alone was not enough to cover the household's expenses, they decided that Sorana needed to get a job to supplement the family's income.

What is of particular relevance is Aurel's retroactive self-assessment according to which having insisted that his wife focused solely on raising their children was the "stupid thinking [*gândire proastă*]" of a young man: "I said to myself that I'd go to work and my wife would stay home, but, to put it straight, this was *țigănească* mentality [*mentalitate țigănească*], having a wife who stays at home, washing, cleaning, grooming the children, so that they don't go out unkempt [*jegos*]." This sort of self-assessment is symptomatic of how Aurel sees his own family. "We

15) He told us that, as a teenager, he stopped being interested in school once he started dating.

are different, I told you," repeated Aurel several times during our chatting while Sorana and Gianina approvingly supported his utterances. But as hinted at above, the distance that they take does not primarily translate into a social distance from the Roma in *țigănie* (including their relatives and acquaintances). It is rather a distance that is meant to mark the differences between their family and the stereotypical representations of Roma/*țigani* that revolve around notions of filthiness, backwardness, unreliability, and women's subordination to men's authority. Aurel's reference to the "*țigănească* mentality" as belonging to his past, but not to his present, points to the process he went through after he moved from the area near *țigănie,* where they used to live until Gianina was a few years old. He recalled the times when they used to live near *țigănie* as a set of episodes involving fights, trickeries, and the imprudent behavior of the *țigani* living there. Aurel asserted that what was acceptable for the people living in *țigănie*, was not acceptable for them, as they wanted a "normal" life for their daughters, far from those "uneducated *țigani*."

Part of this repertoire of distinctiveness was also the fact that Gina, Aurel's mother-in-law, is a non-Roma. Gina and her late husband had met in Suceava, in 1975, when she was sixteen and he was eighteen. They got acquainted through his uncle who, as Gina recalled, strongly encouraged the young man to get together with her for she was a "very good girl." Three days later, the betrothal took place and Gina moved to Rotoieni to start her new life. Ever since, Gina has lived in *țigănie*. But unlike Gina, who expressed a sense of belonging to *țigănie* and for whom her house there constituted her home, Aurel conveyed mostly aversion towards that lack of discipline and morals which he and others in Rotoieni (Roma or non-Roma) assigned to the Roma in *țigănie*. During that and other conversations that I had with Gianina, she mentioned that, when she visited her grandmother in *țigănie*, girls of her age would throw at her comments like "You think you're *Romanian* [*te crezi românc*ă*?*], or what?" Gianina and her family interpreted this kind of comments as symptoms of the envy that the Roma in *țigănie* felt and nurtured in relation to the socially mobile Roma, as they saw themselves. In any case, such comments indicate that being *Romanianized* Roma does not suppose thinking about oneself as "less Roma/*țigan(-că).*" If it seems to happen, it does not remain socially unsanctioned.

The identification as *Romanianized* Roma, which operates as the enactment of the social distance from Roma in *țigănie* or from *other* Roma social forms, refers thus to a process. As Judith Butler intimates, identification is not something that "happens," for identification "does not belong to the world of events" (1993: 105). Quoting Butler further, "identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitation (…) they are incessantly reconstituted and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability" (*ibid*.). To the repertoire of identification as *Romanianized* Roma pertain such efforts of alignment that imply a disapproval of marriage-related practices stereotypically considered to be specific to Roma/*țigani* and a reiteration of aspects historically and socio-politically constituted as "typically" non-Roma.

Togetherness in between?

In this article, I discussed the role of marriage-making practices and family ideals in the reproduction of togetherness for *Romanianized* Roma. I have shown that Roma's claims and ideas of free choice assist them to reproduce mostly distinction from *other* Roma and similarity to the non-Roma, as well as to articulate difference from who they or their kin were in the past. Empirically, being *Romanianized* Roma

means being in the social world, thus doing things in accordance to what is understood as "normal": marrying whomever, whenever and however one wants; abandoning and invalidating marriage-making practices regarded as backward and/or coercive; dressing in "normal clothes"; organizing intimacy "normally," thus making marriage "normally." Ideas of normality are reiterated in opposition to the ways of *other* Roma while being articulated as compatible with, as it were, "non-Roma ways." Nonetheless, being *Romanianized* Roma implies neither being the same as non-Roma, nor being "less Roma." Instead, it means to make a life that fits into a normative horizon often hegemonically prescribed and reproduced that gives the measure of what a "civilized" and "normal" life implies. Analytically, "*Romanianized* Roma" designates a repertoire of identification—discourses and enactments—that enables Roma to imagine and reproduce social distances between themselves and what is locally understood as the ways of *other* Roma/ *țigani,* as well as between who they are *now* as compared to who they used to be *before*. It is a means by which they negotiate the perceived boundaries between themselves as *Romanianized* Roma and non-Roma (as those who claim that they, by default, engage in "normal practices"), cultivating similarity to rather than distinction from the latter.

Keeping in mind that "analytical categories and concepts should never be mistaken for reality" (Olivera and Poueyto 2018: XVI), this article does not claim that my research participants' self-identification as different from *other* Roma might constitute a scholarly argument according to which Ursari Roma would be essentially different from other Roma populations described in the literature by virtue of being *Romanianized.* Building on their self-identification, however, the article suggests a three-fold contribution to cognate debates. Firstly, while a great amount of anthropological studies with and about Roma have shown the immense significance of marriage practices in the reproduction of distinctiveness from non-Roma, this paper opens a discussion about ways of making marriage that enable the articulation of similarities to rather than differences from non-Roma. Secondly, the article contributes to considerations of freedom and individual choices. Ethnographies (Engebrigtsen 2007; Stewart 1997) suggest that Roma/Gypsies tolerate transgressing marriage-making social norms up to a point in light of the value that they assign to the individuals' personal autonomy and will power. The case of the *Romanianized* Roma brings to the fore a view of individual choice as a structuring principle of marriage-making practices and family ideals. The freedom of choice here is not only about choosing whom to marry and love, but also about "choosing" between viable and unviable marriage-making ideals and practices. Yet, this viable/unviable dialectic suggests that the capacity and freedom to "choose" is necessarily tied to a normative horizon. Lastly, marriage-making practices and family ideals asserted as what makes one—as individual and as family—both different from and similar to Roma and non-Roma provide means to think about the porosity of boundaries and the conditions of possibility of in-betweenness. Based on the findings that I presented and interpreted here, I cannot argue that *Romanianized* Roma togetherness is a grey area between, as it were, a Roma and a non-Roma ideal type. Instead, the tensions, ambiguities and continuities that fluctuate at the intersection of Roma and non-Roma lives (as in Rotoieni) lead me to concur with Lemon's remark that "Roma do not live between 'two worlds' but in one world of many overlapping spaces" (2000: 211).

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