ROMA STUDENT ACCESS TO

HIGHER EDUCATION IN SERBIA:

CHALLENGES AND PROMISES

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

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DEDICATION

To my mum, Radmila who devoted her life to me and specifically my education.

I love you mum!

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EXPLANATION OF ACRONYMS AND TERMS

NGO   Non-Governmental Organization

REF   Roma Education Fund

UNDP   United Nations Development Program

UNICEF   United nations International Children`s Emergency Fund

EU   European Union

ERRC   European Roma Rights Centre

OSCE   Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

EC   European Commission

DRI   Decade of Roma Inclusion

ECRI   The European Commission Against Racism

OSI   Open Society Institute

HE   Higher Education

OECD   The Organisation for Economic CO- operation and Development

GPD   Gross Domestic Product

CRC   Convention on the Rights of the Child

EMIS   Education Management Information System

RMUSP Roma Memorial University Scholarship

RHSP   Roma Health Scholarship Program

RIPS   Roma International Scholar Program

RV   Romaversitas Foundation Program

VRCD   Vojvodina Roma Centre of Democracy

CEU   Central European University

RELP   Roma English Language Program

RAP   Roma Access Program

UK   United Kingdom

LGBTQ   Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer

MDGs   Millennium Development Goals

SDGs   Sustainable Development Goals

USA   United States of America

ABSTRACT

The Roma constitute the largest ethnic minority in Europe and have a long history of social immobility, marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination. Despite the many political attempts to address these issues, the Roma people in Serbia, as in other countries in the Central and Eastern Europe region, remain disadvantaged in key areas such as health, housing, employment and education. In terms of education today, Roma people remain highly under-represented at the higher education level throughout Serbia: only 2% of the total number of the Roma population ever attend higher education, and the number of Roma in Serbia with university degree only 0.7% (Serbian National Strategy for Roma Inclusion, 2016). More precisely, the participation of Roma in the student population is 16 times smaller than their Serbian peers (EQUI-ED, 2012). Regarding research on Serbian Roma education, there has been a lot of interest among academics in exploring how the Roma communities in Serbia fare in school-level education (e.g. Milivojevic, 2008). However, there has been little focus on Roma people's experiences of access to higher education (Rakovic, 2009). My research is an attempt to fill this gap. The crucial issue of war and displacement aside, Serbia can serve as a case study informing policy and practice in the wider Central and Eastern European region.

My doctoral dissertation presents findings in response to the following research question: 'How do Roma students as an ethnic minority, succeed in accessing higher education in Serbia?' My research employs an intersectional, postcolonial feminist theoretical approach, and a qualitative life history methodological approach. The rationale for this is that patriarchal oppression within Roma communities intersects with institutionalised anti-Roma racism to create a multidimensional modality of oppression for Roma women and men. Marginalisation and loss of voice affecting the Roma also make this approach relevant, as does the status of the Roma as a 'colonised' people in the wider Serbian society. My qualitative research involves 10 life history interviews to explore Roma students' lived experiences and 5 semi-structured interviews with Roma activists, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) workers and professionals. I undertake this research as an ethnical feminist Roma woman from an

economically disadvantaged background, and one of only a tiny handful of Roma to have gone this far in my higher education journey. During this journey, I have developed a feminist consciousness with a position on power and patriarchy that challenges both the socio-cultural practices within my Roma community, and Serbian anti-Roma institutional and social racism – especially in the higher education sector. The theory underpinning this research has its roots in intersectionality and postcolonial feminism as developed by feminists of colour in the US and the Global South during the 1980s and '90s, but also builds on the adaptation of these theories to the Roma context undertaken by Roma and non-Roma feminist activists since 2005.

Drawing on Sara Ahmed's (2012) theories of difference, inclusion and institutional racism, my research shows how conceptions of diversity and inclusion play out in the Serbian context in relation to Roma students' access to and experiences of higher education. Specifically, the findings show how the contexts of profound poverty (Ringold et al., 2005), institutional and social experiences of racism, and the gendered natured of marginalisation of the Roma people all interact to affect Roma students' access to higher education. My research further shows what Roma students have found useful in accessing higher education. My research thus explores how the socio-cultural practices of these students influence their access to higher education, with a focus on Roma students' aspiration. It highlights the importance of widening participation of Roma in higher education as an integral element in countering Roma marginalisation in Serbia, improving Roma people's welfare and of enabling their social mobility and inclusion (Morley et al, 2010).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 My Research Journey

We use story and narrative to generate self-understanding and social meaning (Dunne, Pryor and Yates, 2005, p. 149-150); therefore, I shall begin and end this study with a narrative of my personal-political experience as a Serbian Roma women who entered higher education against the odds, and have studied to postgraduate level – a very rare occurrence in the community from which I hail. My interest in the subject of this research emanates from my own life experiences growing up in Serbia as a young Roma child from a low-income family. Throughout my life my mother has been an inspiration to me through standing up for me and encouraging me to pursue my dreams. This is despite that, given that my dreams involved education, in many ways it went against Roma cultural traditions in which educational investment in a girl child, who is assumed to get married and leave her parents' home at an early age, is perceived culturally as a loss. I specifically came to this topic of research by reflecting on the challenges that I personally faced on my journey towards and through higher education as a Roma woman: this dissertation concludes with a reflective coda on this journey that is autoethnographic in the sense that it links the personal life story with the public life and political (Ellis, 2002). Despite my mother's encouragement, I was surrounded by young women whose dream in life was merely to get married in the culturally expected way, and make a home for the new family. Beyond that, these girls generally had little ambition of their own, certainly in so far as higher education is concerned. As for those few who did have such dreams, they faced a struggle to realise their dreams due to lack of financial and moral support from their families, and an array of socio-cultural factors, both in the Roma community, and in the wider Serbian society. For example, one of the female participants in this research, Jagoda also from low income family but without even their moral support as a woman to pursue her dream and study was considered by her community and the mainstream community as incapable of studying and that her studies were unnecessary because they were convinced she would fail anyway and would not be needed in her life:

…Nobody was encouraging me because my mum was not allowing me even to enrol in the secondary school…' (Jagoda).

This meant that for most of us girls the educational opportunities available to us were limited from the outset. It is against this backdrop that I formulated the questions underpinning this research. I was fascinated by both the social and political attitudes towards Roma in which Roma are generally pathologised as inherently failures, lazy and incapable of achieving anything in life, and therefore discriminated against and seen as second-class citizens. It was this deep-seated angst about how the Roma were treated in the wider hegemonic society, combined with the patriarchal Roma culture's attitude towards women, that set me on this journey to explore why and how Roma young people experience and access higher education in their attempts to overcome these multiple obstacles, what I later learned to be an 'intersection' of multiple oppressions. Although as a female researcher, my research journey began with concern for the female Roma in Serbia and this issue remains a constant in my study, this research study examines access to higher education for both female and male students, as the issues faced by Serbian Roma males are no fewer than those faced by Serbian Roma females when compared to others in the same country, although the nuances of this experience are different between the genders. I am not, of course, suggesting that Roma men are exempt from discrimination and struggle in the face of social and economic exclusion, and institutional and social racism and harassment. Rather, my position is that, when researching the Roma, an intersectional approach is required that these forms of discrimination interact with issues of gender, ethnicity, patriarchy and socio-economic factors (Oprea, 2012; Bitu and Vincze, 2012; Brooks, 2012). In this chapter, I outline the rationale of the study to situate the context of the Roma access to higher education in its socio-political context; I then outline the research questions, aims and both methodological and theoretical assumptions underpinning my questions. I close this chapter with an overall outline of the dissertation.

1.2 Rationale of the Study: Roma in Higher Education in Serbia: The Scale and Scope of the Issue

The Roma are one of the most marginalised groups in Europe because of institutionalised racism and individual and social discrimination, and ignorance and prejudicial assumptions about their social status. The last acceptable form of racism 'Romaphobia' is used to describe Roma excluded from equal citizenship in many European countries and 'actively constructed as a deviant "other" that threatens the fabric of the nation' (McGarry, 2017, p. 250); in a similar vein, Rostas speaks of 'antigypsyism', analogous to antisemitism and Islamophobia, and argues, based on fieldwork undertaken in Hungary, that the education system there plays a key role in the construction and persistence of Hungarian antigypsyism (2017, p. 767).

This marginalisation has meant that traditionally, they are also excluded from involvement and consideration in aspects of social life ranging from education, housing, health and employment. To draw on Sara Ahmed's concept (2000, p.21) the Roma are bodies 'out of place' in European cultural, social and political life, and there is nowhere where their exclusion has been highlighted as much as in education access and attainment. This is evident in initiatives funded by the European Commission (European Commission, 2015) and other bodies who, appalled by the continued socio-economic subjugation of Roma, have attempted to address the issue of Roma access to education. This has been through initiatives such as Roma Education Fund (REF), which is non-governmental organisation established by George Soros and World Bank in 2005. The mission of REF is to reduce the educational gap between Roma and non-Roma students in Serbia and in neighbouring countries through financial support of Roma students, developing the quality of education and reducing the segregation of Roma students. Yet still today, the numbers of Roma youth reaching adulthood without even a basic education are staggering. A REF report (2004) highlighted the poor educational outcomes for Roma populations in Decade of Roma Inclusion countries such as Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Spain, Romania, Slovakia, and Czech Republic stating that:

70-80 % of Roma populations have less than a primary school education, while very few have completed primary and secondary education. Some Roma have no education at all and less than 1% of Roma continue on to higher education (p.8).

Comprehensive and reliable cross-national statistics on the numbers of Roma accessing education across Europe to illustrate how the Roma are marginalised to the point of obscurity and deep social exclusion are, unfortunately, virtually non-existent (Danvers, 2015). However, in 2011 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and the European Commission conducted a large-scale survey of Roma populations across 11 countries: Bulgaria, Hungary, Check Republic, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia. The study showed that overall, only 1 out of 2 Roma children surveyed attended pre-school or kindergarten. During compulsory phases of school education (except Bulgaria, Greece and Romania, which were worse) 9 out of 10 Roma children aged between 7 and 15 were in school. However, these numbers drop sharply higher up the educational trajectory, with only 15% of young Roma completing upper secondary or vocational education (UNDP et al, 2011a). The UNDP/Regional Roma Survey found that across the Central and Eastern European regions less than 1% of Roma have completed higher education (2011a). For example, in Romania there are only 1% of Roma with higher education qualifications (Tarnovschi, 2011, p. 184). In Albania, a national survey shows 1% Roma with higher education degree (Nelaj, Kaçiu, Dundo, & Dervishi, 2012, p. 54) in comparison with completion rate of tertiary education of non-Roma in Albania of 27% (UNDP Regional Roma Survey, 2017); in Serbia Roma with university degree are only 0.7% (Serbian National Strategy for Roma Inclusion, 2016) and completion rate of tertiary education of Serbians are 23% (UNDP/Regional Roma Survey, 2017). This low number of Roma graduates demonstrates the underrepresentation of Roma in higher education.

National differences, and specifically in relation to the proportion of non-Roma of the same age with equivalent qualifications, need to be considered when understanding this figure of 1%. For example, 1% of Roma attending post-secondary education in Serbia would be less than 1% of Roma in Romania because of the difference in number of Roma population in different countries.

Furthermore, as Brüggemann (2012) suggests, these numbers may underrepresent the true picture, as the data are based on household surveys of areas with concentrated Roma populations, which are often poor and isolated and thus unlikely to provide work for graduates, who will subsequently not appear in such household data. He also argues that Roma who complete university are less likely to return to their locality and instead 'live more or less invisible among the non-Roma' (p. 24). However, despite these limitations, the survey is the only existing comprehensive multi-country database on Roma education, and tends to confirm that, for the Roma, education operates as a site of exclusion (Rostas, 2017), and that Roma students are less likely to enter and flourish in higher education than their non-Roma peers (UNDP Regional Roma Survey, 2017).

As well as the often incomplete statistics described above, further evidence about the situation of Roma university students can be found via bodies such as REF who report that, despite this desperately low figure less than 1% in most of the Central Eastern European countries, the situation appears to be improving, albeit slowly and incrementally – with more students accessing their scholarship programmes than ever before, and an increase in implementation of support for Roma higher education students via national policy (REF, 2014). The level of educational attainment for national and Roma populations in Serbia can be seen bellow in the Table 1:

Table 1. Level of educational attainment of adult population (older than 15) - for national and Roma population (2011) in Serbia

Educational Attainment	Population proportion (percentage)	
	Roma population	Total population
	2011	2011
No school	**19.5**	**2.7**
Incomplete primary school	**34.2**	**10.9**
Completed primary school (8 grades)	**33.3**	**20.8**
Completed secondary school	**11.5**	**48.9**
College or university degree	**0.7**	**16.2**
Unknown	**0.8**	**0.4**
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2011.

The focus for this study shall be the Roma in Serbia, my home country. According to Statistical Office Republic of Serbia Roma population numbered 147, 604 in 2011 (the latest census, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2011). However, there are estimates that the Roma number is about 500, 000 in Serbia (UNICEF (b) (2007, p. 9), since forced migration from Serbia and other conflict affected areas in the region has increased the number of Roma in Serbia, and many of these forced migrants remain undocumented. This number varies because of the Roma's frequent lack of personal documents, unregistered houses and hiding their ethnicity due to mistrust between Roma and the authorities (Joksic, 2015; Milankovic et all. 2015).

In addition, the Roma are systematically excluded from participation in public and social lives; for instance, the Roma are underrepresented in politics or in government positions (see McGarry, 2012); in many respects, the Serbian government's initiatives towards Roma inclusion appear to be largely politically driven, particularly regarding the goal of eventual accession to the European Union (EU), which would require a demonstrable commitment to the principles of social inclusion, and a commitment to pro-actively combatting forms of discrimination such as institutional racism. While this is laudable, there is a danger that under such politically driven circumstances, 'inclusion' can be reduced to a bureaucratic metric that has little effect on the situation on the ground, or can even exacerbate exclusion, as Sara Ahmed argues (2012). Nevertheless, the Serbian government has attempted to introduce policies to improve Roma access to higher education. For example, in 2003, it established national scholarship schemes to increase the numbers of Roma attending higher education (REF, 2007b). I will discuss this in more detail in a subsequent chapter; here, however, it is sufficient to say that these policies have not made much practical difference to the situation of the Roma. Today, after 14 years of such initiatives, and after other affirmative action initiatives, the REF's figures still suggest that while the number of Roma students accessing higher education appears to be increasing, it is nonetheless difficult to provide a confident estimate of the numbers of Roma students accessing higher education: young Roma do not have reasonable access to compulsory sector education, and the problem is exacerbated in higher education, where barriers to access are compounded by an intersection of multiple issues of institutional racism both in government and society at large, poverty and an entrenched view of

citizenship based on whiteness as a basis for recourse to social justice and citizenship rights, as well as patriarchal oppression within the Roma community itself. In this context, the Roma lack adequate state protections and enablers for socio-economic advancement, despite education's status as an internationally agreed human right, and the education is widely recognised to be a fundamentally important means for bringing about social mobility (Burke, 2012; Hinton-Smith, 2012; Layer, 2005). Therefore, academic research on Roma in higher education in Serbia should help provide further information on specific barriers and enablers. Mindful of this, I research the experiences of Roma young people in accessing higher education. Below I outline my research questions, aims and approaches.

1.3 Research Question, Aims and Approach

The main purpose of this research is to use qualitative research methods to empirically investigate the experiences of Roma students' educational journey in accessing higher education in Serbia, in answer to the research question:

'How do Roma students as an ethnic minority, succeed in accessing higher education (HE) in Serbia?'

To address this question, I will use life narratives gathered from participants who are Serbian Roma students in higher education, in the expectation that this will enable me to connect their childhood to their adulthood and to identify the common experiences shared by participants from one person's life and educational experience to another, thereby enabling me to begin to scope the problems they continue to face.

Specifically, this research's overall objective is to investigate how Roma students, as a marginalised and socially excluded ethnic minority, experience access to higher education in Serbia. My research aims are therefore:

- To investigate how national and international policies, strategies and interventions influence Roma students' access to higher education in Serbia;

- To investigate how sociocultural and socioeconomic factors influence Roma students' access to higher education;
- To investigate how Roma students' aspirations and support structures facilitate their access to higher education in Serbia.

Analytically, this research draws on postcolonial feminist theory on intersectionality as originally developed by Collins (1990), Mohanty (1988), and hooks (1981), and the concept of 'voice' as a matter of power in relations between domination and subordination (Nayak 2015; Brown 2012; Moore and Muller 2010; and Atkinson et al As Phoenix (1994)., 2003). It further includes the applications and adaptations of intersectional theory to the Roma context pioneered by Alexandra Oprea (2005, 2012) in the Romanian context, and further developed by Irina Ilisei (2012), Nicoleta Bitu and Eniko Vincze (2012), Angela Kocze (2009), Debra Schultz (2012) and Ethel Brooks (2012). My research seeks to build upon this work. The intersectional approach is a concept that emphasises the ways in which the different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into isolated and individual strands. I further draw on Ahmed's theories on difference and post-colonial feminism (2012), adapting this theory though considering the Roma, although a European community, to be a post-colonial or colonised people, oppressed by a local form of white supremacy. I shall bring into critical dialogue the notions of inclusion, institutional racism, poverty and gender as intersectional factors that shape experiences and access into higher education for socially marginalised Roma youth: I explore how concepts of diversity and inclusion play out in the Serbian context in relation to Roma students' access to higher education.

Further, I seek to show how the domination and subjugation of Roma that has continued in educational contexts operates, and in doing so point to ways in which action could be taken to improve the Roma's current educational situation. I am interested in exploring how institutional racism plays a role in excluding the Roma in Serbian higher education. Equally, I seek to critique the concept of widening participation in the Serbian context based on Affirmative Action policies aimed at increasing the university enrollment figures of Roma youths seeking higher study. My

knowledge of the socio-political-economic contexts of the Roma in the region draws heavily on the extensive work of the political scientist Aidan McGarry.

I will use a feminist qualitative research approach, entailing triangulating sources of qualitative data from Serbian Roma students and from NGO workers, informed by extensive desk research and readings in intersectional and postcolonial feminist theory and methodology, this will be used to investigate the lived experiences of Roma participants in higher education, and discover how they manage, negotiate and overcome marginalisation and exclusion. To do this, methodologically, I shall adopt a life history narrative approach, combined with selected in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Roma students to gather life-history narrative data from participants, to trace how their lives have been variously shaped and impeded in the face of continued discrimination, and highlight how marginalisation shapes lives, especially regarding educational outcomes and attainments for this subjugated group.

1.4 Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 outlines my own research journey and the reasons for my interest in this topic and provides a rationale for the study. I discuss the intellectual beginnings of my study, my positionality as a Roma woman researcher and provide an overview of the theoretical and methodological framework. **Chapter 2** provides essential historical, cultural, social and political economic contexts for the situation of the Roma in Serbia. It offers some statistical information about the marginalisation and social exclusion of the Roma in Serbia, commenting on its causes and consequences. It concludes by clarifying my position as an insider-outsider researcher.

Chapter 3 aims at rethinking Roma education in Serbia and critically reviews the literature on widening participation, before critiquing the notion of 'access' to higher education in Serbia. It explores the impacts of poverty, discrimination and institutional racism, and reviews the literature on postcolonial feminism and intersectionality, including the pioneering work of Alexandra Oprea (2005), who first adapted intersectional theory to the Roma context, and the work of subsequent Roma feminists who developed this body of theory and practice further during the 2010s,

work upon which I seek to build. The chapter also covers another key theoretical underpinning of this research, the concept of 'voice' and its relationship with political representation and participation in the Roma context. **Chapter 4 outlines** my methodological framework, elaborating my research questions by providing a set of sub-questions to explore the nuances of the topic. **Chapter 5** presents my qualitative data after analysis, using and commentating critically on quotations from my participants. The chapter will highlight participants' experiences of this intersection of discrimination and how this has affected their experience and contributed to their struggle throughout the educational process, including accessing higher education. The chapter shows how systematic exclusion of Roma people from early education operates. Building on Chapter 5, **Chapter 6** uses participant-derived qualitative data to examine the barriers to inclusion Roma students face when accessing higher education in Serbia. The chapter reviews the international literature on poverty as a barrier to accessing higher education, before relating this to the experiences of the participants in Serbia. The analysis of the qualitative data will continue in **Chapter 7**, with a focus on the success of Serbian Roma students in accessing and flourishing in higher education. Participant-derived data is analysed in the light of the literature on aspiration as a motivator, and discussed the ways in which aspiration might be encouraged more systematically using resources already existing within the Roma community such as mentors and role models. **Chapter 8** is the conclusion of this dissertation. It continues by systematically relating the research findings to the research questions, before offering a vision of a reformed and more inclusive approach to Serbian higher education informed by this research.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter outlined the aims and rationale on which this research is based, in this chapter I shall situate the Roma in broader historical and socio-political context. My intentions here are to highlight the history that has led the Roma to their current geographical locations in Europe, while at the same time highlighting how this history of migration and settlement undertaken by the Roma people over hundreds of years have been met by the prejudice, violence, intimidation, economic exclusion and social marginalization that the Roma are still experiencing today.

2.2 Historical Context: Who are the Roma?

The term 'Roma' (sometimes 'Romani' or 'Romany'; 'Roma' will be used throughout this dissertation) as a population of people currently defined in ethnographic discourse relates to peoples descended from waves of migrants that originally migrated out of central India, probably from around today's Rajasthan (the Roma language shares a basic lexicon and grammatical structure with modern Indo-European Indian languages such as Hindi and Bengali). According to Hancock (2002), Roma left India around one thousand years ago passing through territories that are now covered by the borders of modern day Afghanistan, Iran, Armenia and Turkey. At the beginning of the 14th century some groups of Roma moved into the Balkans, and by the early 16th century some Roma groups appeared to have arrived as far north as Scotland and Sweden. Other groups of Roma migrated south through Syria to North Africa, arriving in Europe via Gibraltar into the Iberia and beyond (Vantic-Tanjic, 2008).

After migrating from India, most of the Roma population who migrated to the Balkans settled in the Wallachia and Moldavia regions (parts of present-day Romania), and lived under conditions of slavery and unfree labour from the fourteenth century until the nineteenth century. As slaves, they were treated 'as if they were beasts of burden'; the horrors inflicted on them were comparable to sufferings of African slaves in the Americas. In the areas where they were not enslaved, oppression nevertheless was

severe: the Roma across the region were used as smiths, musicians, and soldiers. To escape this, many adopted a nomadic existence. In the nineteenth century, abolitionist movements in Western Europe, and humane principles brought to the Balkans by students from the Eastern European elites who studied in the West, and likewise the decline of feudalism and the gradual rise of capitalism made the ownership of slaves less profitable. This contributed around 600,000 Roma obtaining their freedom. Church- and state-owned slaves were freed in Wallachia and Moldavia in the 1840s. In 1855, the remaining slaves in the area were freed, to live as free peasants. Prior to this, in 1760, a Roma from Hungary in Holland overheard students from India talking about Sanskrit, the classical language of India. Some Sanskrit words seemed remarkably like the language used by the Roma workers on his father's lands. Nowadays, linguistic evidence indicates that the language used by these Roma workers resembled to that of Brahmin groups who had migrated from India around 1300 to escape conflict with Turco-Islamic invaders (Matras, 2004; Fraser, 1992).

By the fourteenth century, much of the Roma in the Central and Eastern European region had adopted a settled lifestyle, and proved to be flexible in terms of which language or religion they adopted 'one of the key reasons for their demographic success and presence across the world' (McGarry, 2012, p.11). While Europeans initially saw the Roma as 'colourful and exotic', European tolerance soon turned to 'sustained genocidal persecution and enslavement', and deportation used against the Roma 'pest' (p. 15). However, the Roma were relatively safe in the Balkans, which at that time were part of the Ottoman Empire, but with the decline and eventual break-up of the Ottoman state, and the concomitant rise of the nation-state and rival regional nationalisms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Roma were once more victims of sustained persecutions across the Central and Eastern European region by nationalists who saw them as a dangerous other and a potential enemy within (McGarry, 2012) during a period that saw the rise of an elite political desire for religious, linguistic and ethnic uniformity with the emerging borders of discrete nation-states, and nationalistic ideology began to define who was, and who was not part of the 'national community'.

When the Second World War arrived in the Balkans, the Nazis undertook a programme to exterminate the Roma, paralleling their 'final solution' for the Jews. It is estimated that they killed at least 1.5 million Roma in this holocaust (known in the Roma language as the *Baro Porrajmos*, or 'great devouring') (Hancock, 2007). Other Nazi atrocities against the Roma included mass detention, forced labour, subjecting many Roma to starvation (McGarry, 2017). Other Nazi atrocities against the Roma included mass detention, forced labour, subjecting many Roma to starvation and even being subjected to supposedly 'scientific' experiments (McGarry, 2017). After the eventual defeat of fascism in 1945, Roma residing in the region fell under Communist rule. Some Roma could obtain jobs, housing, and a degree of education; however, this work was often unskilled government-controlled heavy industry. The Communist regimes in the region, wanting to undermine the Roma culture, attempted a forced assimilation, ending the tradition of Roma nomadism, in a bid to incorporate them into the state-run economies. When the Soviet Union broke up so did its economy and those of its satellite nations in the Balkan region. The Roma, thus displaced, were unprepared to flourish in the supposedly free-market economies that followed the collapse of Communism in the region (including the former Yugoslavia (of which Serbia was a part), although it had broken from the Soviet sphere in the 1960s, and began to experience great hardship (McGarry, 2012).

2.3 Roma in Europe Today

I am now going to shift from a focus on the Roma in history to an examination of the Roma in Serbia today. Different labels have been applied to the Roma people, such as 'Gypsies', 'Romani' and 'Travellers'. While the Roma are an ethnic group, they are not homogeneous, and are sub-divided in to several large clan or ethnic subgroups. Religious and cultural practices can vary depending on the country of residency. The choice of the term here is analytical rather than semantic, in the Romanes language the term 'Roma' means people, and thus the term will be used henceforth. The Roma originally migrated into Europe at a well time before the rise of today's discrete and clearly defined borders between modern nation-states in the nineteenth century. Wherever they settled they were generally able to form well-established settled or

semi-settled communities alongside the native inhabitants of those lands. Currently, in terms of established national boundaries, many Roma live in Eastern Europe (but are also found as far East as Iran and as far west as the British Isles); however, their migrations have expanded to include migration to the Americas and Australasia (MGarry, 2017). Yet despite this wide geographical dispersal, more than half of the Roma continue to live in Central and Eastern Europe (McGarry, 2012).

As mentioned above, with regards to culture and identity, the Roma are not a homogenous group of people and their journeys have impacted on their culture and traditions. Today, it is safe to say Roma comprise different sub-groups such as the Kale, Gitano, Sinti, Manouche, Ashakli, Beyash, Domari and Romanichals sub-groups. They are diverse in culture and although they all speak the Roma language, Romanes, alongside the language(s) of the countries they live in as one might expect among such diverse and widely dispersed groups of people, not all dialects are mutually intelligible). Furthermore, regarding culture, the Roma do not follow one faith: some are Muslims, others are Catholics, some Orthodox Christians, some Protestants and still others are Evangelicals (McGarry, 2017; Marsh and Montesino, 2013; Fraser, 1992). Today, Roma people constitute the largest ethnic minority in Europe and, as mentioned above, have a long history of marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination (McGarry, 2017; Mirga and Gheorghe, 1997). Experts on the Roma generally agree that there are now ten to twelve million people in Europe identified as or who identify as belonging to the Roma ethnic culture (Ringold et al 2005). Their numerousness aside, however, various authorities (Guy 2001; Ringold et al, 2005) all confirm that generally the Roma are the largest, poorest and most marginalized minority in Europe.

As with the Jews in Europe, the Roma have faced a history of ghettoization, marginalisation, forced displacement, pogrom and genocide, particularly in the Early Modern and Modern periods of European history. Like the Jews, the Roma are survivors of repeated waves of genocide. However, for the Roma the persecutions they faced did not end with the Holocaust: since that genocide many Roma have died at hands of ultra-nationalist white supremacist groups across Europe, and others still are being treated inhumanely and unjustly in a systematic and institutionalised

manner by some communities and governments. For example, in Strasbourg 6 December 2017 Muslim Roma win discrimination case against Montenegro for being harassed by neighbours because of their ethnicity and religion (ERRC, 2017). Today, extremist groups have subjected Roma people to varied forms of abuse. Recently in particular, there has been a rise in 'Romaphobia/antigypsyism' characterized by overt public physical violence, hate speech, exploitation, and discrimination against Roma people in many countries in European societies. According to Post (2017) this anti-gypsyism has become widespread across Europe, this assertion is supported by evidence from the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), which reports that Roma people in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and other Central Eastern European countries have all become targets of brutal discrimination and physical violence (McGarry, 2017; Rorke, 2017). Violence against and the abuse of Roma seem mainly to be based on their racial identities as non-whites. In this context, they have been perceived as outsiders and thus not deserving of support or protection as citizens. In the context of increasing anti-migration rhetoric across Europe, Roma have been labelled as the original 'immigrants' and thus not belonging to Europe or even deserving of sharing the European identity because of their dark skins, and supposedly 'alien' language and culture. The irony is that most of Roma living in Europe today have no other national or continental identity other than the ones they currently hold, and they trace and see their roots in these geographical locations that have now been given national identities mostly based on whiteness. The implicit whiteness of many modern national states, identities and boundaries has meant the Roma have been set up by nationalist and nativist ideologies as 'outsiders' (Ahmed, 2007) from the outset, at the very birth of the national state; this tenancy seems once more to be intensifying. While the Roma as a distinct group in Europe challenge these assumptions about national identities linked to 'race' as the basis for inclusion and recourse to citizenship rights, little attention has been paid to the problems they face. If anything, they have continued to experience not only violence from some groups but their marginalization has been perpetuated and enforced by governments in different countries. An example of 61 attacks against Roma in Hungary between 2008 and 2012 where Roma are killed injured, Molotov cocktails were used against Romani people and/or their property, at least 16 cases of shots were fired; and at least 19 cases of Romani

property was vandalised (Mares, 2016). In Europe the marginalization of Roma is embedded in institutions of government and law enforcement, and that as such Roma people cannot necessarily expect to get protection and justice from the state which is expected to be the impartial arbiter of justice, and the norms of internationally expected rights. Historical and culturally embedded Romaphobia, weak state, public life and civil society institutions, the recent economic crisis, and economic instability have all intensified the levels of antigypsyism, discrimination, hostility, and racism in the region, both generally and against the Roma specifically; there is little evidence to suggest that this situation has improved markedly over recent years.

Figure 2: Map of Serbia as Balkan state

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Serbia is a Balkan country located at the crossroads between Central and Southeast Europe. Its population is around 7 million people where ethnic Serbs constitute 83%; of the population; among the other ethnic groups the Roma are reckoned at 2.1% of the total population, based on Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia. Many European countries do not track or record ethnicity data, and even where they do, there is mistrust on the part of many Roma of revealing their ethnicity due to a perception that such information will be used to discriminate against them (Greenberg, 2010).

2.4 Serbian Policy Influencing Roma Issue

Serbia has adopted several laws relating to Roma issues. By adopting the Federal Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities in 2002, Serbia officially recognized Roma as a minority (OSCE, 2008), which was a significant political advancement, since hitherto the Roma were barely considered to be part of Serbia's national community. As part of the accession criteria to the European Union, Serbia had to adopt the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination in the Republic of Serbia (Serbian Government, 2009). Education is of vital importance in combatting social exclusion, and historically the education received by Roma children in Serbia was of poor quality with very high dropout rates (REF, 2007). However, to accord with EU stipulations, in 2009 the Serbian Ministry of Education amended the Law on Foundations of the Education System, to introduce a system whereby pedagogical assistants helped in the delivery of compulsory state-sector education to Roma children. The European Union accession process currently being followed in Serbia (Serbia is seeking admission to the Union by 2020) has also presented an important policy framework. The EU Council adopted a Decision on 18th February 2008 regarding the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the European Partnership with Serbia; this explicitly refers to the necessity of the economic and social integration of the Roma into mainstream Serbian society (EUR-Lex, 2008). Accordingly, the European Commission will regularly review the situation of the Roma in Serbia, particularly from the point of view of discrimination and social and educational exclusion-inclusion. Thus, beginning in 2008, every annual progress report of the EC has reported on the situation of the Roma population in Serbia (Müller and Jovanovic, 2010).

The most important policy framework for addressing the challenges faced by the Roma in formal education in Serbia is the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015.' The DRI was a regional initiative initiated by the World Bank and the Open Society Foundation to bring together governments, non-governmental organizations and international agencies to close the economic and social distance between the Roma and the non-Roma populations in Central Eastern Europe. Thus in 2005, the Serbian government, together with eight other regional governments (Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Montenegro, and Slovakia), signed a declaration to join this initiative (DRI, 2005). In 2008 Albania, then 2009 Bosnia and Herzegovina and Spain. The US, Slovenia, and Norway joined the Decade as observers in 2009, 2012, and 2013 (Brüggemann and Friedman, 2017).

The education, employment, health and housing sectors are the key priorities for the national governments participating in the DRI, which further commits governments to account for the crosscutting issues of poverty, discrimination and gender mainstreaming. According to the provisions of the Decade, the Serbian government should adopt action plans for all four of the initiatives' main social policy areas. To forward this agenda, the Serbian Ministry of Education adopted the Common Action Plan for Advancement of Roma Education in Serbia (Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, 2005).

However, the overall situation of Roma education in Serbia remains dire, particularly regarding dropouts. Milivojevic (2008, p. 7) reports that:

> *Only 40.1% of Roma respondents in Serbian education completed only their primary education, and 28% did not complete even this. 12.5% had no education at all, and the percentage of Roma women either with no education at all or with only primary education is 87.1%, compared to 77.2% of Roma men. Young Roma up to the age of 35 have the lowest level of education of all, with only 0.6% having a university degree or other form of tertiary qualification (2008, p. 7).*

However, the Decade has produced mixed results: more recently, Rorke et al (2015), of the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, write of the DRI as a 'lost

decade', arguing that 'The Decade by virtue of its shortcomings, has highlighted the need for a coordinated and public Europe-wide "reckoning with history" to shed light and spread knowledge about the Roma', (p. 60).

2.5 Policy Context: Responses to the Plight of Roma People in Education

2.5.1 Policy Response at National level

Despite the status quo there have been various responses to the plight of the Roma in Serbia. These have been at the local, national and international levels. At the national level there have been some policy responses around reducing the marginalisation of Roma people. For instance, affirmative action (Care and NSHC, 2011) is a policy response to the marginalisation of Roma people, specifically in education. The Affirmative Action policy aims to increase access to higher education for Roma students in Serbia by providing places in universities with tuition fees paid. This is facilitated by the Secretariat for Roma National Strategy, who forwards a list of Roma candidates who have passed the necessary exams to the Ministry of Education, which authorises free access to the higher education institution concerned, although scholar Stella Garaz has written: '[Her] findings confirm critics' expectations that affirmative action targets the most affluent members of a disadvantaged group as they are the most likely to have the necessary qualifications to enroll in higher education' (Garaz, 2014, 305) – facilitating Roma access to higher education in the numerous poor communities suffering the most desperate poverty is as yet not even a work in progress. Writing on a comparable initiative in neighboring Romania, Maria-Carmen Pantea writes:

> *As it stands affirmative action is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. It includes those able to negotiate their ethnic identity in sometimes unfriendly environments. It excludes (the sometimes more vulnerable) Roma who are reluctant to handle the challenges generated by a marginal status, including the 'regime of compulsory disclosure' (2015, p. 911).*

Another national policy response was the 2010 Strategy for the Improvement of the Status of the Roma in Serbia. This Strategy was aimed at addressing the inclusion of Roma people in education, health and employment. It focused on defining the basis of Roma inclusion in Serbia, and the reduction in inequality between Roma and non-Roma. This document was intended to identify the measures for affirmative action in the areas of education, health and housing for the Roma. In the same year, the government produced a Strategy for Poverty Reduction, which outlined government strategies to reduce overall poverty (2010). This strategy also considered education as priority in reducing poverty and marginalisation of the Roma people, and was considered a central plank of Serbia's bid for accession into the European Union.

2.5.2 Policy Responses at the European Level:

At the transnational level, The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) Report on Serbia notes (2011, p.7) the enactment of Serbia's 2009 Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, which prohibits 'direct and indirect discrimination as well as victimisation, racist organisations, hate speech, harassment and humiliating treatment,' and the 2010 appointment of Serbia's Commissioner for the Promotion of Equality are significant steps. However, despite these positive developments, the ECRI still finds substantial evidence of institutionalized discrimination in Serbia against a range of ethnic and religious minorities, most notably the Roma, and the committing of hate crimes by racist groups and individuals (ECRI, 2011 p. 8). The report finds that the Roma minority is particularly discriminated against in the field of employment, recommending strong measures to counter this. Among the ECRI recommendations is the need for the Serbian authorities to apportion appropriate human and financial resources to the different programs aimed at improving the employment situation of Roma, including the Strategy for Improvement of the Status of Roma. The ECRI further calls for consultations with Roma representatives as part of the implementation process.

In terms of education, the report strongly recommends teacher training and continuous professional development aimed at combatting racism and changing the negative attitudes of some Serbian teachers towards the Roma. The report stresses

the importance of promoting Roma students' inclusion in mainstream schools, strongly recommending, 'The Serbian authorities take steps to prevent Roma children from being unnecessarily placed in special schools' (ECRI, 2011 p.19). The report states that only 3.9% of Roma children living in settlements attend pre-school, that only 25% complete primary education, only 9% complete secondary education, and that the rate of Roma participation in higher education is a mere twentieth of the Serbian national average, noting widespread discrimination against Roma students in all phases of education, and the widespread segregation of Roma students. The report further calls for the Serbian authorities to establish measures that would ensure combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education, recommending that the Serbian authorities take measures to combat the social segregation faced by Roma children by ensuring they are not segregated into separate Roma-only classes in schools. The report also calls on the Serbian authorities to ensure that Roma children are not placed in Roma-only schools, and asks that the Serbian authorities 'implement the Strategy for the Improvement of the Status of Roma as soon as possible and provide it with sufficient human and financial resources', and suggests that Roma representatives should be consulted and included in the implementation of this strategy (2011, p. 20).

However, even if considerable progress had been made in this regard during the final years of the DRI, significant questions would nevertheless remain regarding quality of the education Roma students receive, particularly in the light of the anti-Roma racism and discrimination outlined in the ECRI report. Indeed, there is a danger in such circumstances that 'inclusion' might be reduced merely to what Sara Ahmed (2007) calls a 'managerial performance indicator,' which provides a 'happy picture' or 'veneer' of 'inclusion,' while leaving the substantive issues of institutionalised racism and discrimination (2007b, p. 604) unaddressed. The relevance of Ahmed's 2012 critique of 'inclusion' to the situation in Roma education in Serbia will be looked at in more detail the literature review below. While studies such as the The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (2011) provide comprehensive and up-to-date quantitative data on Roma inclusion in education in Serbia and in the wider region, qualitative research in-region is still in its infancy, as is the broader analysis and

theorisation of exclusion-inclusion issues relating to the Serbian Roma. Accordingly, the sections below will review relevant theory from other educational contexts, and explore the theoretical implications of these for the study of Roma exclusion in Serbia. Although such polices have been useful, one of the major setbacks they face has been the lack of clarity as to 'who does what', and in the implementation and monitoring phases of these policies. In addition, there has been a lack of accountability with many of these initiatives, and the situation that Roma people face remains largely unchanged in Eastern Europe and particularly in Serbia. In the following section I will discuss literature on education of Roma people in Serbia.

In the above section, I have discussed international policies such as Decade of Roma Inclusion, also national level policies such as the Strategy for the Improvement of the Status of Roma in Serbia (2010), Affirmative Action (2011), the Strategy for Poverty Reduction (2010), and the Action Plan for improvement of Roma education in Serbia. The implementation of these international and national policies at local level cannot be seen in clearly outlined local policies, rather it is seen conjunction with policy initiatives such as the scholarships schemes within the Affirmative Action policy in Vojvodina (North of Serbia). For instance, the University of Novi Sad (the main city in Vojvodina region) implements the scholarship scheme by reserving places for Roma students interested in accessing higher education. While such policy response initiatives are encouraging, it is not clear what impact they have had on the access of Roma students into higher education. In addition, it is also not clear how these policies are monitored, evaluated and there seems to be a conflation of national and local policies (OSI, 2011). This provides opportunities to explore the implementation of inclusion policies such as affirmative action in Serbia using Ahmed's (2012) work on diversity. Ahmed observes that the calls for inclusion have resulted in a 'tick box' approach to inclusion policy implementation without much actual practice of inclusion being carried out.

2.6 Reflexivity: My Own Life Narrative

As you will read in Chapter 4, my main qualitative research method is life history interviews. At this point in the dissertation, I feel it would be useful to clarify my own position in relation to my research. In this section, I use autobiography to position myself relative to my research and my interactions with my participants and the aims of my research, linking my personal-political experiences to the formation of my subjectivity as a Serbian Roma woman researcher to its cultural, social and political contexts, using concrete experience, emotion and embodiment in a relational dialectic with my topic (Ellis; 2004).

As I stated in Chapter 1, I am a Roma woman from Serbia; I am also a feminist. I entered higher education because, as a Roma woman from an impoverished low socio-economic status background I wanted to show, after a lifetime of marginalisation and racialised abuse, that I could make a positive contribution to society. I am personally and professionally committed to enabling the prospects of other Roma women who are frequently dismissed in Serbian society as not being full citizens, and are frequently perceived as sex objects by the majority Serbian male population. At school, I was treated very badly, often by non-Roma boys who sexually harassed and tormented me. Patriarchy and institutional racism within the Serbian education system ensured that my tormentors enjoyed a culture of impunity as they abused me. To them, Roma female students were generally seen as merely a body, and an easy target, because as a Roma woman I was perceived as living a state of what Judith Butler calls 'precarity' (2009) on the margins of what was regarded as civilised society, and therefore abuse-able. My oppression was compounded by the fact that due to traditional patriarchy, the Roma community often expects women simply to marry and have children. The Serbian media is replete with racialising stereotypes of the Roma, who are frequently portrayed as an uncivilised people, living in squalor, as thieves and cheats. There is almost no coverage about all the Roma who live and work quietly –often in professional employment. However, most of my participants told me of the racialised and sexualised violence that they experienced, the everyday racist hate crimes they have been victims of, and the way in which they had to struggle to be taken seriously in schools rather than being automatically segregated into 'special', low-achieving

schools for the Roma. My participants document much sexism, racism and prejudice, and yet their desire for education persisted, and they were determined to overcome all the obstacles. In very many respects, their experiences parallel my own, especially the life narratives of Serbian Roma women in higher education in Serbia – hardly surprising given that I am one of a very small handful of Serbian Roma who have achieved to this level in higher education.

In this regard, I am both an 'insider' researcher as a Serbian Roma woman, and an 'outsider' researcher as one of the very few Roma to have achieved entry to higher education at doctoral level, probably the only one studying international education at postgraduate research level; in a sense, as a researcher I myself am both the subject and object of my own research (Jovanovic, 2017; Ellis, 2002). Interviewing my participants in Serbian, I have translated and transcribed all the qualitative data presented below in Chapters 5 and 6. Translation is both an art and a linguistic science, about which I have been on a learning curve during this research. A several challenges arise in translating qualitative data after fieldwork. For example, I have developed an awareness about the role of interpretation during translating, and the kinds of decisions a translator has to make when translating in the absence of participants. This can create an unequal power relationship, as I am interpreting their words in a way over which they have no control. I counter this, I have sought to maintain a conscious awareness of this as I translate, and have shown the translations and originals to Serbian-speaking friends educated to at least Master's level for feedback on how my translations relate to the original texts.

Above, I have sought to relate my personal-political experiences to the socio-cultural-political contexts of my research (Ellis; 2004, p. 37), this in turn provides context for the discussions on voice, reflexivity and insider-outsider research presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3: RETHINKING AND REFRAMING ROMA ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the relevant literature that will inform the analysis of the qualitative data gathered in the field from Roma students in higher education in Serbia. It explores the issues related to the themes that the research explores, and the theoretical framework used to frame the findings and this research. It analyses and critiques widening participation as a concept in higher education, arguing that current uses of the concept have been narrow and ineffective in addressing the challenges facing highly marginalised groups such as the Roma. I argue for a critical use and engagement with the concept of widening participation to account for complexity of intersectional issues that affect historically and politically marginalised peoples, not only at the point of entry into higher education but also over the life course. In doing so, the chapter discusses the role of poverty, discrimination and institutional racism with regards to their role in inhibiting access of Roma students to higher education in Serbia, and foreclosing their higher educational and professional aspirations.

The chapter begins with a definition of and discussion on widening participation as a set of policies and practices internationally and as implemented in Serbia. It also outlines the limitations of current approaches to and conceptions of widening participation in practice. Then follows a discussion on the relationship between poverty and education and the role of institutional racism in perpetuating marginalisation and limiting access to higher education of marginalized groups. The chapter then focuses on the theory used in this research: namely, post-colonial feminism and intersectionality. I argue that a postcolonial feminist approach is useful in understanding marginalisation in the context of higher education because of the ways in which it highlights the progressive role of 'voice' in marginalised groups' struggles against discrimination and unfair socio-economic relations. Furthermore, enabling the voice of the marginalised can begin to bring that voice into scholarly research on inclusion-exclusion to higher education, and eventually, it is hoped informing policy and practice aimed at achieving higher education equality and social

justice in Serbia. Therefore, to better understand experiences of Roma in higher education, there is the need to research the experiences of struggle and success of those for who most widening participation policies and practices have been designed to reveal the true impact of these polices. Qualitative research, and much more importantly the social and educational development work that might be informed by it, has the potential to provide a platform for voices that are effectively silenced by hegemonic structures. The further development of this would be incorporating these voices in future education reform and development planning and implementation, enabling the marginalised to own the development work, adding a 'grassroots' dimension to such work, and overcoming the regional tendency towards top-down solutions. A danger, however, is if the research imagines that they have the power to 'give voice', thereby establishing a further unequal power relationship, a tendency I have sought to overcome by developing and maintaining an awareness of the issue. Thus, voice becomes central to understanding the participants lived experiences that will be discussed in more detail below. This chapter concludes by highlighting the need for an intersectional approach to researching access to higher education, so that the situation can develop from the Roma having policies and practices designed *for* them, to becoming equal participants in the framing and implementation of socially just widening participation initiatives.

3.2 The Concept of Widening Participation in Higher Education

The concept of widening participation in higher education has emerged over recent decades to become the main contemporary policy internationally for supporting disadvantaged groups, targeting the most socially vulnerable students or 'non-traditional students' in a given socio-political context (Hinton-Smith, 2012 p.3). The British models of widening participation have developed over more than fifty years, and have been highly influential worldwide, including widening participation initiatives aimed at the Roma populations in Central and Eastern Europe, hence the relevance of the discussion below. The significance of the UK here is that it was there that much of the foundational work on higher education widening participation theory, policy and

best practice was undertaken, there, and thus the UK experience tends to inform (consciously or otherwise) policy and practice in widening development work elsewhere in the world. Access to higher education is recognized as an important enhancer of life chances for aspiring disadvantaged students, increasing social mobility and their competitiveness in the labour market (Hinton-Smith, 2012). Burke (2012, p.13) refers to widening participation as 'the discourse of expansion' that became a significant reform agenda in higher education in the United Kingdom following the publication of the Robbins report in 1963. This report recommended increasing the number of students in British universities according to what became known as the 'Robbins Principles (based on the concept of 'meritocratic access'). The expansion in widening participation in the UK was justified in part by reference to human capital accumulation to lend to the concept of widening participation an economic legitimisation: the mass accumulation of human and cultural capital being seen here as a driver of economic growth. This expansion further necessitated investment through the public funding of higher education and the financial support of disadvantaged students accessing higher education (Hinton-Smith, 2012, Burke, 2012; Layer, 2005). Widening participation for disadvantaged students was referenced to certain social groups, underpinned with certain assumptions as to who belongs to those groups and who does not. The hegemonic assumptions behind the concept of widening participation therefore need to be deconstructed in their context, to enable measurement of their actual success access policies, beyond the levels of discourse and institutional rhetoric -- the global hegemonic discourse of widening participation tends to be constructed through masculine white, middle-class perspectives, which do not necessarily address the practical needs of marginalised groups (Burke, 2002). For example, in Serbia the political and institutional rhetoric of social inclusion and widening participation tend not to be gender sensitive with the effect that official administration and legislation concerned with inclusion still does not recognize the role of gender in marginalisation (Cekic-Markovic, 2016). Widening participation in higher education has been promoted as part of the social inclusion agenda for increasing social mobility of disadvantaged groups, and to achieve social equality (Hinton-Smith, 2012; Burke, 2012; Layer, 2005). Reducing social inequality by moving from elite higher education toward mass higher education necessitates the expansion

of access for underrepresented groups, and this has caused much debate predicated on prejudicial assumptions about 'dumbing down' – an alleged reduction of the standards in higher education, for access to higher education to be more equal in terms of ethnicity, social class, gender, sexuality, different ability and age. The inclusion of more underrepresented students 'is perceived as dilution, or pollution -- a situation which challenges the very notion of equity in higher education' (Morley, 1997: 115). Under-represented groups accessing higher education in the UK include students from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, students with disabilities, students from marginalised minority ethnic groups, women from ethnic minority groups, low-income students, and LGBTQ+ students. (BIS, 2011a; Morley, 2009, 2015; Quaye et al, 2014). However, Raffo et all (2006) highlight certain disadvantages to this approach to widening participation that might be relevant to the case of the Roma in Serbia, citing what Levitas (1998; 2003) calls the 'moral underclass discourse' tends to 'predominate in the sense that local people are seen as lacking in appropriate expectations – then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's "will to win". This approach constructs marginalised communities as being unable to help themselves dependent on government or local authority. Thus, as Lister (2004) illustrates, this leads to a process of 'Othering' the poor, who are robbed of their dignity and denied their agency through. (p. 59)

In the case of Serbia, such inclusion raises the political concern in elite/hegemonic circles if, for example, lower income working class Roma women access higher education they might 'contaminate' or 'devalue' the status of the degrees awarded by Serbian universities because they are no longer open just for middle class white elites who enforce exclusion and discrimination. As I have written elsewhere:

> *There is a vital need to engage with, hear, and respond to the voices of educationally marginalized groups, including the Roma, to continue to identify persistent and newly emerging inequalities, and responses to these at individual and collective levels. We need to continue to work to both imagine and create more democratic and empowering spaces in education by engaging in direct dialogue with the marginalized and the majority, by increasing the influence of marginalized groups within powerful institutions while continuing to problematise the inadequacies of those institutions, and by recognizing the*

> *complexity of the relationship between individual agency and institutional responsibility as a means of tackling persistent inequality. (Hinton-Smith, Danvers and Jovanovic, 2017, p. 15)*

As will be seen in subsequent chapters, both the hegemonic Serbian equivalent of Levitas' 'moral underclass discourse' and the lack of engagement and direct dialogue with Roma users and aspiring users of Serbian higher education remain significant obstacles in furthering Roma access to higher education in Serbia, and to ensuring positive higher education outcomes for Roma students who do access higher education, where the Roma are 'Othered' and denied dignity by multiple social and institutional factors, including the almost casual deployment of overt racism.

As Sara Ahmed (2012) has stated, the institutional language of 'diversity' can operate performatively merely to enhance the reputation of an institution, while systematic practices of inequality and exclusion continue. This means that universities operating widening participation agendas still have problems of unequal access and underrepresentation of disadvantaged students despite their tendency to deploy the institutional rhetoric of inclusion (Layer, 2005). Thus, widening participation policy claims to reduce inequality by opening access to everybody who has potential and ability, while certain forms of inequality continue and even increase. This raises the question of power and meritocracy. Who is deciding who has potential and ability, and by which criteria? On one side widening participation policy as a part of social inclusion strategy claims to include those who are excluded by opening the access to higher education to certain groups; but on another side, such groups continue to be overlooked and their exclusion continues. Often potential higher education students are already educationally excluded prior to their seeking to access higher education. Where, then, is here 'fair access' (Burke, 2012, p.36) if inclusion policies begin merely within higher education institutions? If marginalised groups are excluded from attaining their academic potential while still in compulsory phase education, of what real use are institutional widening participation policies? Within this view, social inclusion by providing widening access in higher education focuses merely on being seen to achieve 'diversity' as defined by management metrics, and ignoring 'difference' and social exclusion factors (Burke, 2012, p.36). It is not simply a matter of

including those who are excluded into the powerful mainstream, to be seen to be reducing inequality; rather, is necessary to shift the focus and challenge the inequality within the mainstream society outside of higher education institutions. The question is who is deciding, when, and for whom is opening access to higher education? This is a matter of power relations, the relationships between the privileged and subordinate, being perceived socially as being on the 'inside' or the 'outside'.

In many European countries, including the United Kingdom, those who are targeted to be the beneficiaries of widening participation polices are still relatively socially, economically and culturally advantaged (Dillon, 2007; Taylor et al 2009). This means that within the marginalised groups and non-'traditional' students there are differences in terms of skills, ability, and disability, past learning experiences, learning and lifestyle that need to be adjusted in transition to higher education, not to mention the issue of social class *within* gender and ethnic groups. This transition faces challenges such as inculcating a 'feeling of belonging' to prevent marginalised students feeling alienated from the institutional cultures of higher education institutions, a major cause of drop out and under-attainment among such groups (Hinton-Smith et al., 2016), unfamiliarity with dominant knowledge and socio-cultural practices, unfamiliarity with educational culture as an asset that is transferable from one to another generation (Dillon, 2007) frequently encountered among non-traditional first generation students.

It might be argued that though widening participation has been developed to address these disadvantages it is important to consider the complexity of disadvantage. For instance, groups may be considered by elite-hegemonic power-mongers deprived as a whole; but within those groups there will be those who are more deprived than others, and thus less able to participate in higher education. In that case, widening participation frequently fails to reach those who need it the most. It is therefore important to be critical of the ways in which we conceive of widening participation as an approach to addressing inequality.

Within higher education cultures the concept of widening participation is highly contested and complex. Therefore, there is no single accepted definition (Burke, 2013). It is generally understood as an extension and attempt at improving access to higher education of people from 'under-represented' backgrounds. There are many reasons why widening participation policies have been attractive to hegemonic policy makers, among them has been: the need to address increasing economic differences in most societies; the needs of minorities and those from a poor background have traditionally struggled to succeed in life and thus widening participation is perceived as an attempt at bringing about social mobility. On the other hand, there have been the desires to address historical discrimination that have placed minorities at a disadvantage in access to higher education and participating as social actors. Here, widening participation is conceived as an enabler for marginalized groups to participate in and benefit from higher education (Brown et al, 2004). Louise Morley (2011) takes this further by arguing that widening participation in higher education is not a static entity, but rather an evolving system addressing not only existing inequalities but also attempting to amend previous struggles, in doing so widening participation becomes a tool for improving the future of marginalised individuals and communities. Watson (2006) defines widening participation as improving and increasing access to higher education for under-represented groups of people by enabling such people to participate and benefit from it. Therefore, widening participation should be taken as being concerned with diversity and inclusion by considering how issues such as ethnicity, gender, disability and socio-economic and political backgrounds impact on people's experiences and their potential of benefiting from higher education. Taken in this way, widening participation is not merely a social issue, but concerned with the institutional, structural and deeply embedded nature of social inequalities. In contrast, according to Taylor et al (2009), widening participation policy is the response to political concerns regarding the potential of social collapse due to increased social inequalities between the privileged and disadvantaged groups. Specifically, there have been increasing social and political concerns about the increasing numbers of illiteracy as well as under-achievement of people from disadvantaged backgrounds in mainstream society (Strand, 2014; Cassen & Kingdon, 2007). The concerns here stem from the view that those from economically disadvantaged circumstances often barely

make it in life, resorting to illegal, anti-social or subversive behaviours to survive. Thus, in this way widening participation can sometimes be perceived as a political attempt to redress this opportunity imbalance as a bulwark against social unrest. Therefore, influenced by theories of social justice that call for equal access, equal opportunity and human rights of individuals, the political aim is to bring isolated elements of society to become more active citizens and improve the social democracy in the society. Accordingly, widening participation becomes a kind of tool or safety valve, raising awareness of the citizenship and reducing the social inequalities. Contrastingly, on the conservative right there are concerns that the 'massification' of higher education by default devalues university degrees on the labour market and as elite cultural capital. In this sense, widening participation and equal opportunities are going against the interests of and discriminate against more prosperous families (Kelenbach, 2003). The right also asserts that serving the interests of under-represented is too expensive a process to justify.

Within these perspectives on, the discourses of 'equality' and 'equity' have emerged as dominant in higher education institutional discourse. This is because historically and rather ironically, higher education was a space for implementing social exclusion and perpetuating the interests of the elites. For instance, in education the question of elitism and access to higher education illustrate this issue. Brown et al. (2004, p.14) describe the 'royal route' to the achievement of A-Levels involving elite and expensive private schooling, private tuition, and access to cultural and intellectual resources in the home. On the other hand, Gorard et al (2006) identified the opposite of the 'royal route' faced by those from multiply disadvantaged backgrounds limits educational chances and achievement, higher possibilities of dropping out at all stages of education, under achievement and lower earnings. Only those privileged and 'lucky' enough to be born in a wealthy upper-middle-class or upper-class background have had the opportunity to influence and create standards in global knowledge economy. Considering the strong correlation between tertiary education enrolment and social class, concrete political-economic initiatives beyond 'widening participation' then become necessary to provide better opportunities of access and success for students

from lower income families and marginalised minority groups (Burke, 2005; 2013; Morley, 1997). Without such purposeful action, the cycle of inequity can only continue.

By equity I refer to how the focus is on addressing historical, established obstacles and even existing processes that further marginalise groups of people. It is also about challenging the existing privileges that occur within some groups (Morley, 1997). Within the marginalised groups there are some who are more marginalised than others; for instance, taking this intersectional approach, within the marginalised Roma community, Roma women are more marginalised than men. Roma women face a 'double disadvantage' in comparison with Roma men, as well as in relation to other women from the majority population (Kyuchukov, 2003, p.97). According to European Commission report on the socio-economic and cultural position of Roma women within and out of their community, Roma women emerge as being in an even more dire situation than Roma men, also in relation to women from the majority, especially with regarding accessing the employment, health, social services, education and so forth. This exclusion is not just a consequence of discrimination, but also from the patriarchal culture that strongly underpins traditional Roma ways of life. For example, Roma girls are far more likely to leave school earlier than boys because of some family obligations such as taking care of younger siblings or indeed because the culture sees women as homemakers and boys as breadwinners (Corsi and Crepaldi, 2010). However, the Roma are not a homogeneous group and therefore, the assumptions mentioned above should not be generalised because within the Roma community there are differences in culture, religion, legal status, lifestyle, and level of integration in the mainstream society, among others. In addition, among Roma women there are different factors that intersect such as social class and family background that influence access to education, particularly to higher education.

Therefore, this situation represents a challenge to common conceptions about widening participation, where reaching marginalised individuals requires structural changes to the wider society, as it has to account for the diverse established cultural attitudes and circumstances Roma women and youths find themselves in. As has been pointed out by Brown et al (2004) and Burke (2013) that for widening participation to

make real a difference there is need to go beyond the common discourse of the equality and equity differentiated access to higher education by considering the broader socio-political contexts in which widening participation operates, and issues associated with people's real experiences of inequality and equity. For instance, there is the need to consider the complicated intersections of inequality involving issues such as class, gender, ethnicity and other socio-economic and political contexts. In other words, widening participation then becomes more than just about accessing higher education, but becomes a matter of social justice (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014; Morley, 1997). Accordingly, in my research, widening participation is thought from my point of view in ways in which it should be concerned not only with access to higher education, but people's wider experiences before access takes place, such as pre-higher education preparation, retention in primary and secondary education and its successful completion as prior main condition to access to higher education. In the Serbian context, for instance, the discourse of widening participation is associated solely with issues of physical access and increasing numbers in higher education (Momcilovic and Jovanovic, 2015). There is a little focus on what happens prior to and during the higher education process in Serbia, as the statistical data shows in the Table 1. In this case for widening participation to be effective, there is need for a broader definition and understanding of what it is about.

To improve the opportunities of entry for people from marginalised communities, there is need to consider the wider issues such as poverty, the experience of discrimination and gender among others and how these impact on their potential to enter the education system. For these reasons, my view on widening participation, as used in this research, is that only those approaches that include not only a focus on access but on experiences prior enrolment/access to higher education represent true 'widening participation'. Such an approach necessitates that we do not retain a 'narrow' view of what marginalisation is, but that we include the broader issues both current, historical and deeply embedded forms of inequality and how they shape experiences of and access to higher education. Widening participation, narrowly and institutionally defined cannot resolve social inequality by focusing on access and

enrolment alone; rather a broader approach is needed to improve the life chances of marginalised people.

Stella Garaz (2014) notes that while affirmative action policies targeting the Roma in Europe tend to attract relatively elite individuals within Roma communities, 'the use of preferential treatment for ethnic Roma can be a useful for increasing Roma's access to higher education … as long as the beneficiaries of such treatment will be active in playing the role of agents of integration after graduating higher education' (p. 307). Writing a few years later, Roma access to higher education in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, Garaz and Torotcoi note that 'Hence, the example of Roma students and their specific choice of fields suggests that elitist elements and "horizontal" differentiation of students inside higher education, as identified in the literature on reproduction of social inequalities, can also be observed in the region of Eastern and Southeastern Europe' (Garaz, 2017 p.30). Helen O'Nions noted in 2010 that there has been considerable interest from the European Commission in the grave educational disadvantage faced by the Roma. However, improving access to education has had little success due to funding issues and lack of government commitment on the part of regional states to even successful projects, 'When funding avenues expire, the initiative is rarely scaled up and typically goes into simultaneous decline (p. 11) In 2010 O'Nions was relatively optimistic about the positive prospects for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, but as indicated above and in the chapters below, at least some of her pessimism was justified.

3.3 Economic Arguments for Widening Participation in Higher Education

The major global policy framework for educational development was the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) it has now moved on to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since 1962 the World Bank has been fighting poverty by investing in education in developing countries. Additionally, the Bank has stated:

> *Of all the goals, educating children—particularly girls—has the greatest*
> *impact on eliminating poverty. Studies show that an extra year of secondary*

schooling for girls can increase their future wages by 10 to 20 % (World Bank 2012, cited in Hart 2012).

It is widely accepted that the main driver of economic growth is capital (Bassanini and Scarpetta, 2001). Capital is the accumulation of physical and financial assets used in the production of goods, services and information. An important factor of economic growth and development is human capital, and the dominant policy discourse views human capital investment—investing in education and health, to increase people's productive capacity—as a significant factor for development. According to Reich (1983) investment in human resources occupies a very important place in today's technology because 'this new technology requires highly trained workers to rapidly shift tasks; indeed, some argue that knowledge is now the greatest component of competitive advantage' (p. 236). Education is held to be a major stimulus for human development (Jalilian, 2012), and this means that investment in education is necessary, to overcome poverty. Economic development requires a greater number of educated people in society. Poverty in developing countries also influences the further development of developed countries because increased migration to Western countries/the Global North slows their economies and increases their costs. Therefore, poverty in developing countries is a problem for the entire global society, North and South. Thus, it is held that investing in human capital creates wealth that will benefit not only individuals but also society local, national, regional and global levels.

In higher education it has been argued that society has moved into what is sometimes referred to as the 'global knowledge economy' (Morley, 2014). This idea argues that knowledge is increasingly important both to economic output and social cohesion, with an increasing number of workers involved in 'knowledge work' (Roberts, 2009, p. 289; Morley, 2014). However, the participation of workers from historically marginalised communities in the 'global knowledge economy' is thought to be precarious when 'the distribution of spending on education is … uneven,' (Roberts, 2009 p. 290), threatening to perpetuate historical patterns of social exclusion further into the globalised era. Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin American and the Caribbean are particularly threatened in this way, while North America and Europe are held to be 'knowledge-privileged'. However, Serbia is among the least well-off parts of Europe

due to recent experiences of political transition and war; hence, the level of social exclusion, economic marginalisation and poor educational opportunities experienced by the Roma minority in Serbia suggest a further level of exclusion from the 'global knowledge economy' (RECI, 2012): Serbia is marginalised within Europe, the Roma are marginalised within Serbia, and Serbian women, as discussed above are doubly marginalised within Serbia and within their own communities. This has negative impacts, not only for the Roma themselves, it also jeopardises Serbian European social cohesion because there is an imbalance in opportunities in accessing the knowledge. Investment in education is a long-term endeavour, although it has a net lasting impact on individuals, communities, and the wider society. The return for the society or nation at large might be obvious—better educated people are at the same time a better skilled workforce, which further translates to a stronger economy and a wealthier and more stable society and nation. Systematic changes in production in the era of information technology require as highly educated a workforce as possible.

The shift towards knowledge is thus a key economic resource; however, 'there are some regions of the world that are so poor that their ability to participate in a global knowledge economy is very limited' (Roberts, 2009 p. 299). Furthermore, Roberts stresses how the efforts of those suffering economic exclusion to interact with the 'global knowledge economy' are often frustrated because the focus of life priorities change instead of knowledge, it becomes a matter of existence and survival rather than aspiration. For the World Bank, increasing participation in higher education is essential for economic growth, social justice and stability (Roberts, 2009; p. 11), and furthering this requires a range of measures such as increasing the quality of secondary education, preferential enrolment policies and the remission of fees aimed at increasing the participation of 'low-income ethnic minority and female students' in higher education, since 'equity cannot be achieved in higher education unless women, low-income youths and other disadvantaged subgroups of the population have access to good quality public education' (p. 12). Thus, even the financially driven perspective of the World Bank suggests the importance of widening participation of Roma students in Serbian education, for the benefit of Serbia's and the EU's economic development, social justice and stability.

According to the World Bank (2010, cited in Arandarenko, 2011), due to its financial crisis on the way into the EU, Serbia has faced very serious unemployment challenges that are closely connected to systemic education problems. With a severely devastated economy after the end of the Milosevic regime, the transition to a modern market economy has not been easy for the citizens of Serbia. The impact of the global financial-economic crisis beginning in 2008 has worsened the situation by producing a steady increase in the unemployment rate in Serbia. World Bank records have shown an increase in Serbia's unemployment rate from 13.6 per cent in 2008 to 19.2 per cent in 2010. The ratio between men and women losing jobs also shows a negative trend. In 2008, males suffered less unemployment (11.9 per cent) than females (15.8 per cent), while in 2010 that difference decreased to 18.4 against 20.2 per cent.

Further, young people face more severe consequences due to the crisis in Serbia. Unemployment has been highest among the youngest age group (15-24). In 2010, it reached 46.1 per cent (Arandarenko, 2011). Records of the OECD (2011) show that the Serbian government has spent 5 per cent of its GDP in 2009, which is relatively close to the EU average of 5.41 per cent. Clearly, much of the EU is much wealthier than Serbia. Overall, the unemployment rate is more than double the 9.7 per cent rate in the EU average, presenting a precarious economic outlook for Serbia. Moreover, Vukovic and Perisic (2011) describe an even more dramatic situation, with a third of the unemployed workforce having never worked. In other words, 266,148 Serbian citizens have not recorded a day of official employment. About half of these people belong to the category of youth while 158,593 are women. The main two reasons for this situation are low levels of education and skills incompatible with labour market demands. The authors also report that about 40 per cent of the unemployed do not have any formal educational qualifications, and only 2.8 per cent have graduated from a college or university, while more than half have completed secondary education. On the other hand, the requirements of the labour market in Serbia do not match the knowledge and skills of the never employed. For this reason, those have never been employed have been waiting for a job from four to five years on average, while more than 30,000 Serbian citizens have not found a job ten years after their graduation.

These are devastating data for a country that is one of the biggest economies among the EU accession countries in the Balkans (Vukovic and Perisic, 2011). This section began with a 2012 quote from the World Bank on the economic arguments for widening participation with specific reference to girls and women. To what extent has this been effective for Roma women in South Eastern Europe? Writing in 2013 on the situation in Romania, in many ways comparable to that in Serbia, Irina Ilisei wrote that 'cultural tolerance' was used by the Romanian state as a 'comfortable umbrella' allowing the tolerance of 'inequalities and discrimination against Roma women, with government policy gender-blind, treating the ethnic and gender aspects of Roma women's situation separately:

> *… in this context, the indifference of the state towards [Roma women's] problems was explained as a form of "cultural understanding" of the Roma lifestyle. It has been considered that Roma families rely on different values that have to be protected in the name of cultural diversity. (p. 72)*

My data below will suggest that much of this applies still to the situation of Roma girls and women in Serbian education and higher education.

3.4 Deconstructing the Meaning of 'Access' in Higher Education

There are many different interpretations of the concept of 'access' (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014) or 'equitably access' (Gidley et al. 2010) into higher education. As a term access has been used to cover multiple issues ranging from physical accessibility of the institution for students with limited mobility, to the availability of higher education regionally, primary and secondary, to promote widening access to higher education (Hayton, 2003). 'Access' is also often used to refer to a system for student recruitment (or selection) that is able to identify potential students from a variety of diverse backgrounds.

Access in higher education within the widening participation framework is defined in the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention), as 'the right of qualified candidates to apply and to be considered for admission to higher education' (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014). This definition shows how access to higher

education can be defined as the right of any human being provided they are suitably qualified. However, defining access in this manner would appear to fit well with meritocratic views of equality. In this view, access is based purely on merit. If access is granted based on merit it would be assumed that all people have an equal starting point. In this case, there is no consideration of the ways in which equality shapes people's life chances and opportunities prior to access; therefore, access would be understood as increasing access of those who are privileged into higher education, which is the opposite to the purpose of social widening participation described above.

However, there is another usage of the term that extends further, and that was used by the Council of Europe in its 1998 Recommendation on Access to Higher Education (Council of Europe, 1998). In this context, 'access policy' is defined as 'a policy that aims both at the widening of participation in higher education to all sections of society, and at ensuring that this participation is effective (that is, in conditions which ensure that personal effort will lead to successful completion)' (Council of Europe Recommendation 98/3 on access to HE). It should be noted that access is not only a question of numbers, but is a key feature of the social dimension of higher education, and thus also is concerned with the social composition of the higher education population. In a social and economic environment where skills and competences are acquired and refined through higher education is becoming increasingly important (European Commission, 2010), it is a therefore a societal imperative to expand opportunities to higher education as broadly as possible, by providing equity and equality in access to quality education, with considering the individual needs regardless of socio-economic background and other factors which may lead to educational disadvantage. Access to higher education is also linked to ideas about developing the potentials of disadvantaged students that involve improving all learning conditions and eliminating all barriers for studying and providing financial supports (Sursock et al 2010).

While the relevant national strategies and polices are mostly in place in Serbia, such as the 2009 (updated 2014) Strategy for Improvement of the Status of Roma and its Action Plan, the system in Serbia for supporting Roma students and enhancing access

to higher education among the Roma remains much underdeveloped. Access in Serbia is more about physical access to HE through the policy of Affirmative Action. Affirmative Measures were designed in 2003 by the Government of Serbia to help Roma students enroll into a first year of higher education faculties without paying for the fees, even though many of them were not ranked successfully enough after their enrolment exam (REF, 2010). Over the past year, the quotas were decreased and conditions hardened, making for access for many Roma students more instead of less difficult via Affirmative Measures support. This greatly affects the retention and completion rate of Roma students, because they are not sufficiently prepared for participation in higher education. Affirmative Measures is thus focusing on physical entry and outreach, while Serbian policy is focusing on numbers of students entering higher education.

Further, although in Serbia there are now Affirmative Measures policies including reserved places for Roma students, there is still insufficient government support for greater inclusive education in terms of the financial commitments and sufficient quotas (Momcilovic & Jovanovic, 2015). Further specific constraints include insufficiently tailored assistance towards empowering Roma students, and enhancing their academic and employment performance and helping to strengthen their much-needed academic, professional, and personal communities with a shared set of concerns, purpose, vision, and identity.

Thus, in this research, access is taken to refer to preparation for access as well as retention and completion, because even if the places are reserved for Roma students to enrol higher education they are not sufficiently qualified to fulfil the requirements that are established for all students who were qualified to enrol in higher education. Therefore, the number of Roma students in Serbia remain very low, as the statistical data shows in previous section.

3.5 Poverty and Access to Higher Education

Access to education cannot be discussed divorced from consideration of the social economic contexts in which people live. Poor economic circumstances are widely agreed to play a significant role in undermining access to education (Ahmed and Sayed, 2009; Preece, 2006). Roma communities in Serbia are subject to intensive economic exclusion and related challenges. In the Central-Eastern Europe region for example, 71% or more of Roma families live in relative poverty, UNESCO define this as follows:

> *Relative poverty defines poverty in relation to the economic status of other members of the society: people are poor if they fall below prevailing standards of living in a given societal context.*

In Serbia, 60.5 percent of the Roma population are considered very poor, in comparison to just 6 percent of the general Serbian population (World Bank, 2015; Tomovska, 2010). This means that we cannot talk about access to higher education in the Serbian context without reference to the material and economic conditions in which people live.

In this research, I consider poverty is to be more than just about financial power. I draw from Lister (2004) and Skeggs (2004) who conceptualise poverty in a broader sense to include the non-material aspects of poverty such as shame, stigma, lack of dignity, voice and self-esteem, as well as denial of rights and diminished citizenship. This shows how lack of material and economic resources have a negative impact on non-material spheres of the society in terms of unequal access to citizens' rights, including access to education. Further, poverty is related to deficiency of opportunities and *vice versa,* because even if you have opportunity you cannot use it without certain material and financial resources. Lack of money and opportunities leads therefore to limited choices and shortage of privileges. Also, the World Bank defines poverty as not only the problem of finances and earnings, but also limited access to chances for human development that can be achieved through education (1994).

Education has often been perceived as a policy response to poverty reduction in many political agendas and manifestos. In these contexts, a lack of education is perceived as the cause of many social problems such as poverty and exclusion. Thus, to address these issues, programmes aimed at increasing education have been implemented in many countries with the view that they will result in reduced poverty in society and increased wealth and stability. This view clearly sees close links between poverty and education. For example, the Serbian government designed a Strategy for Poverty Reduction (2010), aimed at addressing poverty as a social problem. Among the objectives of this strategy is education as a priority in reducing poverty in Serbia in general, and particularly the marginalisation of the Roma people. Poverty reduction and inclusion has also been considered as being central to Serbia's accession into the EU.

In these policy debates, education and poverty are often taken to be inevitably related with the assumption that the higher the level of education of the population, the lower the proportion of poor people in the total population, as education impacts knowledge, skills and employability. The assumption here is that high skills are automatically associated with higher wages and earnings (Tilak 2002), which leads to reduced poverty. However, the reality on the ground is more complex: because of the global market knowledge economy, the massification of higher education increases competition in the job markets. In doing so it increases incomes and wages, and employers compete for better talents; widening participation therefore produces more knowledgeable and skilful people. Among these educated people there is a hierarchy of skills and reputations of institutions from which the skills are obtained. The implication for this is that widening participation does not help reduce poverty but emphasises social inequality as more graduates from non-elite universities are not accessing employment, precisely the universities that Roma students are unlikely to enter due to the prejudices and discrimination described at length above (Brown, 2007, Elias and Purcell, 2004).

In countries where discrimination is culturally embedded in society, opportunities for marginalised groups become even more difficult. Discrimination is further discussed in

detail in the next section. However, it is sufficient here to say that for some people poverty limits their access into education in general. Due to poverty in marginalised groups, the barrier to education is exacerbated by the lack of information or even ability to make sense of information due to illiteracy. This is also related to a limitation of access to information that is applicable to students from disadvantaged backgrounds who have very limited options regarding which school to choose. This is not only because of financial barriers, but also because of very limited information that students and their parents have, because of mostly not having an experience of higher education in the family (Reay et al. 2005). Therefore, financial support within widening participation programs has become a common strategy for enhancing access in higher education of marginalised groups, but this is insufficient for a broader understanding of access where the aspect of prior preparation is involved. As Payne (2005, p.1) explained, 'Money makes human capital development easier, but money alone does not develop human capital'. Further, this view adds credence to the proposition that widening participation focused on physical access into institution will not be effective if it does not account for the wider social inequalities experienced by marginalised groups. Other studies on the relationship between poverty and education have found that poverty in many poor communities is closely linked to low enrolment in schools and low completion levels, both factors that severely impact on Roma inclusion in Serbia. The reasons for children not being in school may range from demands for them to work as child labourers to provide for their families or work to pay for their education; however, generational poverty might mean that poor families might never be able to make adequate investments in education or even see education to be of value if their concern is simply how to bring food on the table for their families (Tilak, 2002).

3.6 Discrimination and Access to Higher Education

While poverty plays a role in limiting access to education in general, access to higher education can also be limited by the wider socio-political context in which people live. Historically, racism in most societies is thought to have resulted in limited if not no access to education for certain populations. For instance, in apartheid South Africa access to education for the majority black population was thought to have been very

poor and in some cases non-existent (Meek et all. 2009). As mentioned above, this dissertation will use theoretical paradigms around intersectionality as originally developed by women feminists of colour in the US, and postcolonial feminism as developed by women of colour in the Global South and in diasporic communities in the Global North to frame the Roma in Serbia and the wider region as a (post-)/colonial people. In the USA access to education for African Americans up until the 1970s was poor and structurally inadequate resulting in low numbers of African Americans accessing or completing higher education (Telles et al., 2012; Harper, 2009). What this demonstrates is that discrimination based on ethnicity and unequal racist economic relations leading to poverty play a key role in access and experiences of higher education This is particularly severe in populations where skin colour plays a key role in the social construction of 'race' and defining and determining firstly their presumed capability in education. This can become a deeply embedded societal problem, where physical and structural violence against those considered by hegemonic groups to be 'outsiders' is carried out not only by individuals but is sustained and present in institutional and wider political structures, now commonly referred to as institutional racism, itself a form of structural violence (Ahmed, 2009; 2007; 2012). In such cases, institutions are systematically discriminating against populations considered as foreign or underserving based on their skin colour. As Lynn (2008) has explained, 'pigmentocracy' is a result of discrimination by those socially constructed as 'white' against other socially-defined 'races' based on, among other factors, the colour of their skin. He argues that thus 'whiteness' is highly valued in such societies and therefore constitutes the top of socio-ethnic hierarchy, while people with dark skin are kept at the bottom of the social ladder. This is then exacerbated by socially constructed pigmentocratic ideologies concerned with a supposed relationship between skin colour and intelligence and ability.

Therefore, in Serbia, the fact that the Roma are not considered to be 'white' in hegemonic discourses and practices means that there has developed a long-standing historical negative impact on Roma educational achievement at all levels and phases of education. On the one hand, socially the skin colour of Roma students creates self-prejudice and internalised oppression, a lack of confidence, and fear to pursue their

academic and professional aspirations. On the other hand, not being accepted because of the skin colour has come to be perceived as 'normal' in the wider Serbian society because discrimination based on skin colour is deemed to be 'common sense' and the 'natural order of things' by many in the dominant, majority population, and institutionally.

Racism among children tends not to be expressed only verbally, but also physically. There is a clear division based on skin colour because of assumptions that skin colour determines their personal character and ability. As a comparison, in Jamaica during the 1930s it was found that lighter skinned people had the most chance to be hired in higher professions while those with darker skins were doing the most menial work. (Curti et al, 1935). Likewise, a survey carried out in Havana, Cuba in 1995 by the Cuban Centro de Antropologia found that 58 percent of whites believed black people to be less intelligent than they, while 69 percent believed that blacks did not have the same standards of 'decency' as whites, while 68 percent opposed inter-marriage between supposed 'races'. The Roma face a similar form of discrimination in Serbia.

3.7 Institutional Racism

To better understand the impact of racial discrimination on access to higher education it is important to define the concept of 'institutional (-ised) racism'. Phillips (2011) envisages a multi-dimensional framework to explain the operation of this modality of racism. Originating in the Civil Rights struggles in the United States of America during the 1950s and '60s, the concept gained currency in British political discourse following the 1999 publication of the Macpherson Report into the Metropolitan Police's botched investigation into the murder of Black teenager Stephen Lawrence, and earlier in relation to the Scarman Report (1981) on the causes of the inner-city street uprisings in Bristol, Brixton and Tottenham (London), Toxteth (Liverpool) and elsewhere during the early 1980s. For Phillips, 'institutional racism' is useful in that it aids understanding of 'persistent inequalities in key areas of social policy' (p.174). However, she adds that:

> *'... Institutional racism needs to be situated within a conceptual framework, which acknowledges the role of racialization at the micro, meso and macro levels, and cannot serve as the sole explanation for the ethnically disparate welfare outcomes that have long been observed' (p.174).*

The micro-level concerns of the perceptions, attitudes and actions of privileged majority individuals, in-groups and familial socialisation; the meso-level involves socio-economic disadvantage, political, media and popular discourses, political empowerment, and institutional processes and practices; the macro-level involves globalizing forces, major demographic changes and migration flows, technological change, maketisation and neo-liberalism. Therefore, understanding 'institutional racism' as 'institutional *racialisation*' with its own dynamic on three interconnected levels usefully informs research into the social exclusion of the Roma minority in Serbia, rather than thinking of this marginalisation as merely being the consequence of static, primordial historical racism. Understanding Roma marginalisation as institutional racialisation shows how the dynamics of anti-Roma prejudice and discrimination in Serbia change across historical time and social space, developing different shifting of exclusion.

Phillips (2011) explains how the reproduction of persistent ethnic inequality is dynamic and shifting in response to micro-, meso- and marco-level changes, with the consequence that despite policies and practices aimed at removing historical barriers to access structural inequalities persist on multiply levels, that intersect with different factors like ethnicity, gender or class, adapting to thwart the progressive intent of inclusivist policy and practice (Mirza, 2006). Thus, this has an influence on educational experiences of racism, marginalization and exclusion, even as educational institutions and governmental agencies are promoting inclusivist agendas (Ahmed, 2012; Gillborn, 2006). Thus, the wider national policy and the education system in general can become institutional spaces for the reproduction and legitimation of discrimination based on ethnicity, even as they enact inclusivist policy and practice. In Serbia, the marginalisation of the Roma in education persists a socio-cultural milieu where the Roma are perceived by the hegemonic majority as inferior and thus an underserving other, despite considerable legislative and institutional input to reverse this.

In keeping with this view, Sara Ahmed's work (2012) provides a useful critique of the common uses of the term 'diversity' in education by critically questioning what 'diversity' really does in practice. Significantly, Ahmed proposes that the ideological function of diversity is to manufacture the impression of more diversity than really exists '...diversity can participate in the creation of an idea of the institution that allows racism and inequalities to be overlooked' (p. 14). Thus, Ahmed illustrates that the diversity discourse in education creates the false sense of security that discrimination is being effectively addressed when on the ground what is happening that a dynamic, shifting modality of discrimination is adopting new and different forms to sidestep institutional diversity agenda initiatives. In this context, diversity serves as a rhetorical and performative tool as well an emblem for institutional reputation, when in practice these institutions are not inclusive. Ahmed examines the contradiction between higher education institutions' rhetorical attachment to diversity, contrasted with students' and practitioners' lived experiences of indifferent attitudes toward the processes that are put in place supposedly to achieve it. Ahmed suggests that this occurs because of the way that 'diversity' is attached to pre-existing organisational values. For example, such values can be seen in many university mission statements that link diversity to the pursuit of academic excellence. Ahmed argues this illustrates that such an institutional attitude results from what is already valued, and acts to maintain rather than transform organisational values and cultures.

Ahmed shows how this situation often means that managerialised diversity-as-performance-indicator actively works against the development of real diversity in institutions; thus, she maintains that 'the institutional preference for the term 'diversity' is a sign of the lack of commitment to change, and might even allow universities to conceal the operation of systematic inequalities' (2007b, 604). Thus, the managerialisation and marketisation of diversity is primarily concerned with perception and image, mere 'image management', rather than bringing about real inclusive change, 'Diversity work becomes about changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations.' (p. 605). This shows how such an

approach to diversity is more about the marketing of the organisational values as a 'performance indicator for public relations'.

Applying Ahmed's theorisation to the Serbian context, the hypothesis emerges that the Serbian government's initiatives aimed at widening Roma participation in higher education, while apparently laudable, are not primarily driven by a desire to remedy social inequalities in Serbia, but by the European Union's criteria for Serbian accession. As such, they represent a form of policy compliance (Deem and Morley, 2006). The Serbian government's implementation of these initiatives should not, therefore, be perceived as being wholly independent of the historical reality of anti-Roma racism and social exclusion that has long persisted in Serbia, and from the 'racialisation' of the Roma in Serbian institutions. Further, the overview that the Union and NGOs have of the Serbian government's initiatives, while no doubt rigorous, is likely to be of a generic nature and quite distant from the realities pertaining 'on the ground' for Roma in Serbian education. In this situation, there is a strong possibility that oversight of the reform process in Serbia might become a 'diversity' issue in the negative sense described by Ahmed, ultimately serving to deny the reality of anti-Roma racism and social exclusion in Serbian education by presenting a managerialised 'happy picture' of bureaucratised 'diversity' at odds with a reality of continuing excluding practice.

As a hypothesis, Serbness, like whiteness, has been privileged and institutionalised and might only be effectively countered and deconstructed if activist-educators insist of the reality of anti-Roma racism (Romaphobia) and the necessity of strong advocacy Roma voices on the ground in Serbia to ensure that the Serbian government's commitment to 'diversity' and the EU's oversight of this commitment do not become merely a managerial exercise in compliance, but are connected organically with structural and socio-cultural change.

3.8 Aspirations of Roma students

The picture presented above is familiar from much of the literature looking at not only Roma access to higher education, but also all aspects of Roma social life. Important as the focus on the challenges faced by the Roma people is, focus focusing exclusively on

the challenges alone risks devoicing the Roma by presenting a single story, namely the Roma as poor, marginalised and disadvantaged victims deserving of an institutional or extra-territorial saviour. My difficulty with this view is that it tends to negate the agency of the Roma in relation to how, among all the challenges they face, there are numerous accounts of success, survival and resistance against marginalisation, and success narratives of Roma in higher education. In this research while highlighting the problems Roma youth and women face in accessing higher education I also intend to highlight how they cope and resist marginalisation.

It is with this is mind, I approach this research from a post-colonial perspective. This is because, given their historical status in Serbia and in the wider region, and their experiences of extreme marginalisation and exclusion, social and institutional racism, and racist violence, the experiences of the Roma there in some ways parallels those of people's 'writing back' from countries that have undergone colonialism and are struggling still with the aftermath of colonial oppression and current patterns of unequal global relations and exploitation. While it might be going too far to claim that the Roma have been 'colonised' by the Serbs, the parallels between experiences of the Roma and the those living under conditions of postcoloniality suggest that the theories related to postcolonialism can usefully inform this research.

3.8.1 Defining Aspiration in Higher Education

Sellar and Gale identify 'low aspiration' as a significant barrier for students from low-income, marginalized or socially excluded backgrounds accessing and flourishing in higher education (2011, p.117), going beyond a private or individualised understanding of aspiration to define it as 'the capacity to imagine futures' within the context of a 'politics of aspiration' within which higher education institutions' 'aspiration-raising' policies and practices operate (pp. 122-3). They cite the capacity for marginalised communities globally to inculcate a 'collective cultural capacity' to aspire and imagine better futures as an important driver of educational inclusion and attainment, to challenge the low aspirations that hegemonic forces deem to be 'realistic' for marginalised communities (pp. 124-5). Such an approach to aspiration is clearly relevant to the Serbian contexts, where higher education institutions tend to take the

'high' aspiration of elite groups as normative, and socio-cultural and political-economic forces have trapped the Roma into a culture of 'low' expectation, both in the eyes of the dominant communities and internalised within the Roma themselves. Developing a collective cultural capacity to aspire and imagine better futures is an important grassroots way for the Roma in Serbia to counter their marginalisation. Burke (2006) recognises the ways in which aspirations are gendered, classed and racialised by hegemonic forces, again of clear relevance for the Roma, where, as I will discuss below, female Roma students and aspiring students particularly face an intersect of gender, racist and class oppression, part of which is an imposed culture of low aspiration.

3.9 Developing the Theoretical Framework

This section introduces aspects of the principal theory that will frame my analysis and interpretation of my findings, namely: postcolonial feminism.

Background: Feminist Theory

Feminist research positions issues of gender identities, power relations and roles at the centre of inquiry. Thus, research can be considered 'feminist' when it is primarily concerned with highlighting women's issues, enabling women's voices and exploring women's lived experiences as a marginalised group (Hesse-Bibber, 2012). Feminist research creates new forms of knowledge about women's experiences of oppression, and it is often 'engaged' research which foregrounds social justice issues, with the intention to make a progressive social difference (Kelly et al., 1994). This means that gaining knowledge by considering the experiences of those who are oppressed in male-dominated society can lead to deeper understanding of the issues that are important to women, particularly, women from groups that have experienced oppression, social exclusion, and socio-economic marginalisation. The Roma in Serbia, are a good example of such a group. Thus, my research aims to inform Roma policy makers and enable steps to take Roma from 'the margins to the centre' (Hesse-Bibber

2012, p.3), to shift the Roma voice to the centre of the social and political attention. Recognising the importance of women's and marginalised groups' lived experiences means challenging existing knowledge and constructing new knowledge that has hitherto been unvoiced and excluded: the goal of feminist research is 'unearthing subjugated knowledge' (Hesse-Bibber 2012, p.3), this is a key aspect of my work, since feminists ask questions that place women's lives at the centre of social inquiries. Crucially for my research, feminist epistemology has progressively explored the complex interrelations between gender and other social categories such as ethnicity, 'race', class, and sexuality, exploring the implications of these interrelationships for feminist knowledge; my research seeks to do this in the context of Roma participation in higher education.

Feminists such as hooks (1981), Mohanty (1988), and Collins (1990) have argued that women's experiences cannot be put into one single category, as if all women have one single homogeneous experience. At this time, the 1980s and '90s, feminists began to recognise a plurality in women's lived experiences. In the early 21st century, feminist research began to emphasise issues of difference regarding race, class, and gender (Baxter, 2012; Hesse-Bibber 2012); at the same time Gayle Letherby has been concerned with the development of feminist epistemology, particularly the location of the researcher's subjectivity within the research (2003), while Christina Hughes has explored feminist methodology, particularly the use of qualitative research methods in feminist research (Hughes and Cohen, 2013). These feminist epistemological and methodological developments will inform my research on the Serbian Roma's access to higher education. Precisely, the feminist focus on the lived experiences of diverse women as well as giving voice to marginalised groups underpins my approach to my research.

3.9.1 Intersectionality and Postcolonial Feminism

Beginning in the later 1980s in the United States and the United Kingdom, 'feminists of colour' began to explore the interconnections between feminist theory and other social factors mentioned above, to develop the new term 'intersectionality'. This was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), emphasising the ways in which ethnicity,

gender and social class intersect in different ways in different women's lives to contribute to systematic injustice, multiple dimensions of discrimination and consequently social inequality. Intersectionality examines how in unequal, patriarchal societies different social and cultural categories including sexual orientation, religious heritage and ethnic identity interact in a way that constructs social inequality and maintains privilege for hegemonic groups. Thus, 'intersectionality' demonstrates the complex and diverse impacts that take place when multiple axes of differentiation intersect in historically specific contexts to produce and reproduce social inequality and marginalisation. The concept emphasises the ways in which the different dimensions of social life cannot each be separated out into isolated parts. Rather, it focuses on the need to consider the social and historical specificities of different marginalised and socially excluded groups as a multi-dimensional whole (Brah and Phoenix, 2004). Intersectionality arose out of a critique of previous research on gender and race that had neglected the ways in which these two factors interact (Mirza, 2006; McCall, 2005), and moved towards developing a concept of 'multiple subordination'. In my research, when seeking to understand the experiences of Serbian Roma in accessing higher education as an aspect of the Roma's wider social inclusion I intend to go beyond an approach to gender that is based on feminist epistemologies and methodologies developed in previous research on white, non-Roma women. Rather, my research needs to acknowledge the distinctive interplay of social factors that have shaped the lived experience of Roma subjects and have contributed to the historical and social 'multiple subordination' of this group (Oprea, 2012; Bitu, 2012; Brooks, 2012; Kóczé and Popa, 2009; Kocze, 2011; Blagojevic, 2010).

During the 1980s many feminists were concerned with problematising the concept of 'global sisterhood', focusing instead on the ways in which differing power relations were dividing the notion of a universal 'sisterhood' (Haraway, 1991; Davis 1981; Amos & Parmar 1984; Talpade-Mohanty 1988). Exploring the historical dimensions of this differentiation in power relations, some scholars noted how black women were absent at the Seneca Falls Anti-Slavery Convention of 1848, where the mainly white, middleclass delegates debated the motion for women's suffrage, and explored the question of how this exclusion of black voices shaped the relationship between black

and white women's approaches to feminism (Brah and Phoenix, 2004). This research showed how an intersectional approach is important in going beyond the conceptualisations of gender and class from white feminist perspectives, to develop new understandings of the intersectionality of social factors from the perspectives of black feminists and feminists of other identities. These differences in priorities and inequality are based on the different starting points of white and black feminism. Black women appeared to achieve better equality with men of their own ethnic background in comparison to white women because the conditions of slavery and hegemonic whiteness forced them into the labour market alongside black men, creating a different set of social norms, values and expectations. Furthermore, Black women also were more exposed to sexual violence because whites did not consider them worth protecting 'as women' (Davis 1981), exposing the racism and unequal power relations underpinning a naïve notion of 'universal sisterhood'.

Thus, 'feminists of colour' such as hooks (1981), Mohanty (1988), and Collins (1990) have 'disclosed to white middle-class their own racism', showing how black women were constituted as the 'outsider within' (Collins, 1998). A comparable situation exists in terms of the historical relationship that has existed between the Roma and the majority population in Serbia. Echoing the experiences of black women in the United States, the Roma have long been considered as an internal 'Other' in Serbia, and because of that they have been excluded from full participation in the nationalistically defined 'national community'. Serbian women have certainly experienced socio-economic marginalisation resulting from the specifically Serbian articulation of patriarchy. This form of marginalization ensured that both Serbian and Roma women have a shared experience of patriarchal oppression. However, when in the 1990s Serbian feminists (Misel, 1998; Blagojevic, 1998; Bozinovic, 1996; Milic, 2002; 1996) began demanding their rights as an oppressed group they did not tend to include Roma women in their struggle, perhaps they did not consider the Roma to be a group with whom they shared a historical experience of oppression. Thus, while ethnically Serbian feminists began to develop a political consciousness that relative to Serbian men Serbian women had suffered social and economic marginalisation and oppression resulting from Serbian patriarchy, the 'double marginalisation' and oppression of

Roma women seemed to be invisible to them, as if it were natural, 'just the way things are'. Understanding the trajectory of the development of Serbian feminism sheds light on the double marginalisation that Roma women have experienced. Women in Serbia, regardless of being Serbian or Roma, have a shared experience of patriarchal oppression. However, Serbian feminists have tended only to recognize the oppression of Serbian women, problematising any naïve notion of a trans-ethnic 'Serbian sisterhood', despite the genuine intention of Serbian feminists to bring about social justice and equality, to date Serbian feminism has failed to address Roma women in a way that is comparable to the failures of white feminism in the United States during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (Kania, 2016; Kurtic, 2013).

In the trans-Atlantic West, the lack of awareness over issues of ethnicity and difference on the part of some white feminists has led women belonging to historically oppressed or marginalised ethnic or other groups to propose alternative modes of feminism (Collins, 2000). Such alternative feminisms seek to recognise and articulate the common experiences of oppression and marginalisation that members of disadvantaged groups share. This trend has brought about a thorough transformation of feminism from being defined by a particular group of women, white, Western, middle-class women, to instead become a highly diverse global movement that seeks to achieve social justice through the liberation of women in a way that acknowledges the diversity of the experiences of the majority of women in the world, and enables the articulation of different feminist voices expressing different experiences and responding to different, multi-dimensional experiences of oppression and marginalisation. The necessity of diverse, alternative feminisms was first recognized in the 1960s with the civil rights movement in the United States. Since then 'women of colour' across the world who have been living in poverty and imposed inequality have constructed a diverse range of alternative feminisms that respond to the historical and social specificities of their lived experience (Narayan, 1997). These movements have provided women who historically have experienced multi-dimensional oppression women with voices and active agency within their societies (Weedon, 2002).

Postcolonial feminists such as hooks (1981) and Collins (2002) have observed that marginalisation is understood differently by women with different identities. hooks highlights the need to understand black women's specific experiences of discrimination through studying how the Black nationalists' discussions in the post-War United States were often developed in patriarchal and misogynist contexts, which while focused on ending racism at the same time also, intentionally and unintentionally, reinforced sexism and the oppression of black women. This shows how patriarchal power relations neglect other identities that are perceived as conflicting with patriarchal principals that are set by male dominance. Hill-Collins (2002) further develops intersectional, multi-dimensional feminism by suggesting a 'matrix of domination' in which marginalised groups are themselves internally diverse, containing subdivisions related to factors such as disability, sexuality and citizenship, which create further marginalisation within these groups. In this regard, Sara Ahmed (2000) argues that postcolonial feminisms challenge 'some of the organising premises of Western feminist thought' (p. 111). Western feminists' conceptualisations tend to conceive of power relations as being male-centred; however, deploying postcolonial theorizations, Ahmed questions the underlying premise that makes the feminist approach to knowledge focus mainly on male power. This postcolonial approach, with its central values of 'heterogeneity, multiplicity and difference' (Flax 1990, p.188), lead to innovative thinking regarding the construction of knowledge and power, and the nature of subjectivity, self, and difference. This approach facilitates a deconstruction of rigid binary categories, including binary masculine-feminine identities, and enables an exploration of the internal power relations that exist *within* these dichotomous categories. In such ways, postcolonial feminism opens new ways of thinking and new modes of resistance through non-binary categories, recognising the fragility and permeability of socially constituted boundaries (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002, p.89).

Intersectionality arose out of a critique of earlier feminist research on gender and race that had neglected the ways in which these two factors interact with each other (McCall, 2005), emphasising instead 'multiple subordination'. An example of how this works in 2010s Britain can be found in Afua Hirsch's (2018) recent book *Brit(-ish): on*

Race, Identity and Belonging. Hirsch, a Londoner of mixed Ghanaian-Jewish heritage, traces the centrality of slavery not only to the experience of her being 'Black British', but to *all* British identities, including the white, privileged hegemonic one, describing: 'the intersection of economic, socio-political factors and abolition [which] is one of the most complex and protracted debates in modern historiography', arguing that there 'was no clean break from slavery (2018, p. 61), asking 'Why does it bother me that we avoid and downgrade the true legacy of slavery, and the extent of its contribution to modern Britain?' (p. 63), leading to 'structural, deliberately orchestrated disadvantage, [which] is intergenerational, passed down through families in just the same way as people from privileged families inherit wealth' (p. 65). Hirsch contrasts her middle-class upbringing in 'pretty, spacious Wimbledon' with that of her partner, a second-generation Ghanaian-Londoner who was bought up only a few miles away in Tottenham, 'a black boy with a low-paid single parent in a violent area at a failing school'. While unquestionably feminist, Hirsch's articulation of 'Brit(-ishness)', the Brit(-ish) person as a racialised, gendered forever insider-outsider in white society, her feminism is predicated upon a complex intersection of class, ethnicity, socio-economic, cultural and historical factors that mean that her analysis says as much about those gendered male as it does about those gendered female, as much about mainstream whiteness, Britain's structural 'white supremacy', typified be what she calls 'The Question', *'where are you from?'* (p. 31) and myriad and ubiquitous 'microaggressions', the type of low-level, day-to-day oppression that is also common to the experiences of the Roma in Serbia (p. 81).

Parallels can be drawn between the experiences of women of colour regarding oppression and marginalisation, and those of Roma women in Serbia. In both cases, discrimination according to phenotypic features such as skin colour combine with patriarchal oppression, and issues of issues of identity, citizenship, gender, disability and inclusion-exclusion. Further parallels can be drawn the black feminist experience in the West and the situation of the Roma in Serbia, where non-Roma assumptions about Roma people tend to frame the Roma as a homogenous group with stereotypical identities and characteristics. There is a tendency to ignore the wider historical and political contexts in which they live, and how this may shape their

subjectivities, which in turn impacts on their ability to access and participate in higher education. Therefore, it is useful to build on Hill-Collins and Mohanty's observations when exploring Roma student experiences by taking into account the diverse socio-economic and socio-cultural milieu in which Roma people live.

Therefore, investigating issues related to exclusion of Roma students in Serbian higher education from a postcolonial feminist perspective allows for the interrogation of issues of marginalisation and exclusion that are faced by Roma students. Among these are the gender dimension, and the ways in which the interaction between patriarchy and the socio-political context in which Roma students live shapes the educational experiences of both male and female Roma students. Furthermore, using these postcolonial perspectives provides grounds for exploring how socio-political institutions in Serbia, including higher education, maintain and perpetuate the marginalisation of and discrimination against the Roma. This helps bring about a more nuanced understanding of how racism, class, gender and ethnic oppression intersect with each other in the context of the Serbian Roma's experience in accessing Serbian higher education.

In my research, I seek to, through learning to understand the experiences of Roma students in trying to access higher education in Serbia's racist and racialising society, do something similar: to produce a conceptual framework that while unmistakably feminist, nevertheless researches also the intersection of historical, gender, ethnic, socio-economic and political-economic factors that underpin the intersectional oppression of Roma women and *all* Roma, and which help develop understanding of how Romanes is socially constructed by the dominant population, shedding light ultimately on the construction of Serbian whiteness, so that its deconstruction might for the basis of a new, more inclusive construction of Serbian identity, so that being Roma becomes not 'other' but part of the tapestry for Serbian public and cultural life.

I will now outline the development and state-of-the-art of postcolonial, intersectional feminism in the Roma context, a body of knowledge to which this dissertation seeks to contribute. In 2005 Alexandra Oprea of the Roma Women's Initiative published a

paper presenting a case study of the political-media treatment of the well-publicised case of Ana Maria Chioba, a Romanian Roma minor who was the subject of an arranged marriage in 2003. The paper uses some of the feminist approaches discussed above to examine the anti-Roma racism underpinning the political and media framing of this case, and the various attempts of political figures to 'save' her. Of particular concern was the political-media construction of a 'primitive' verses 'progressive' binary in which progressive feminist principles are constructed as 'foreign' to Roma women (2005, 135). Oprea notes that anti-Roma racism in Romania should be seen in its historical context, which has involved the systematic use of pogroms, slavery and discrimination against the Roma. She further notes that in placing Roma women's concerns at the forefront of the study, she is deviating from the detached, non-judgemental objectivist 'anthropological' perspective common in Roma studies, which she argues tends to homogenise the experiences of Roma women, ignoring 'intersectional identities and multiplied discrimination within Romani communities' (135).

Oprea notes how the exoticising portrayal of the wedding of the 'daughter of the king of the Gypsies' served both to distract from the lived realities of poverty, unemployment and discrimination faced by the majority of Romanian Roma, and holds the Roma community up to ridicule in a majority society where the idea of 'Gypsy nobility' is regarded as oxymoronic. This exoticising (and exaggerated) portrayal extended not only to the Romanian press, but even to the New York Times. Oprea contrasts the depiction of the Chioba marriage with that of the death of Olga David, a poor Roma woman who was beaten to death by security guards for stealing coal that same year: the story only made the local newspapers, whereas the marriage involved a 'perverse obsession with portraying Romani culture as primitive and presenting it as spectacle for the consumption of European and North American audiences' (136). She notes that no Roma feminist was interviewed for her perspective on the marriage. By constructing the Roma as primitive while erasing Roma voices that were critical of the marriage, a situation was created whereby feminism was pitted against 'race', Oprea noting significantly that:

This dilemma is not unfamiliar to African-American feminists in the US, where "people of color must weigh their interests in avoiding issues that might reinforce distorted public perceptions against the need to acknowledge and address intra-community problems" (Crenshaw, 1995, 361). This illustrates one of the dilemmas of intersectionality: being forced to choose between your gender and your race in an environment where they are constructed as mutually exclusive. (139-40)

Situating the Romanian Roma as 'a Third World people' in a European context, Oprea concludes by calling for a recognition of the intersectional nature of Roma women's oppression and for action aimed at 'equalizing opportunity for Romani women and other intersectional beings'. In this way, Alexandra Oprea was the first scholar-activist to employ intersectionality and postcolonial feminism to frame the oppression of Roma women. In a paper on including the experiences of Roma women within the context of 'ground up' social justice, Oprea (2005) comments on white privilege as 'an invisible package of unearned assets', relating white privilege to the unearned and unacknowledged privilege, relative to the Roma, of non-Roma Romanians:

With regard to Romani women in particular, both academics and activists must reflect on how the issues they have write about and/or espouse have excluded the experiences of Romani women – overall, how their empowerment has come at the price of the disempowerment of Romani women. (p. 38)

She further calls for both male Roma activists and white feminists concerned with Roma issues to investigate their own relative privileges as a necessary condition of ground-up Roma social justice. In her paper 'Romani Feminism in Reactionary Times' (2012), Oprea argues that Romani women's experiences and those of 'other people of color' should become 'the starting point' for new race and gender policies in Europe, 'quintessential foundations for feminist and antiracist politics and policies' rather than a 'footnote' or 'special section' in a report. Ideally, for Oprea, Roma feminists would be the primary architects of such policies, 'or at the least very systematically consulted' (p. 19). In its linking of Roma women's struggles to those of 'Third World' women, and in connecting Roma feminist politics to intersectionality and postcolonial feminism, Oprea's work has been ground-breaking.

In a duo ethnographic dialogue, Nicoletta Bitu, a Romanian Roma feminist, and Eniko Vincze, an ethnic Hungarian Romanian feminist (therefore of non-Roma origin), discuss their parallel paths towards Roma feminism (Bitu and Vincze, 2012). Bitu writes of her journey from being a universalist, then specifically feminist social justice advocate, and of how, when conducting fieldwork following anti-Roma communal violence she realised 'I could observe what my male colleagues did not notice: women's roles in such situations, and in the Roma community at large' (p.44). Like Oprea, she comments on the dilemmas of studying topics such as prostitution and begging at a time when 'anti-Roma racism is so powerful across Europe', and states her commitment to 'the construction of a modern Roma identity, one that addresses all the problems Roma women are subjected to at the intersection of gender, ethnicity and class'. She notes the dilemmas Roma feminists when navigating the spaces between universal feminist values and ethnic and community rights, and the insensitivity of white European feminists towards the Roma, and even on occasion their racism. Vincze writes of how a commitment to feminism enabled her to deconstruct 'the authoritarian, ethnicized discourse on the Hungarian minority in Romania', and her subsequent concerns about being a non-Roma researcher investigating sensitive topics such within Roma communities in Romania. This experience led her to understand how feminism must 'support minority women in their efforts to deconstruct both nationalist and racist regimes and patriarchal gender orders both within and outside minority communities', noting how multiple exclusions necessitate 'Solidarity between women of different ethnicities, ages and social classes'. For her Roma feminism is:

> *… a way of assuming the disadvantages and benefits of being in-between, of seeking non-hierarchical partnerships; it is a process of permanently (re)creating solidarities around universal human rights. (all quotes pp. 44-6)*

Thus, as with Oprea, Bitu and Vincze draw upon and adapt to the Roma context the theoretical insights and transformational practices of postcolonial feminism and intersectionality.

The US activist-scholar Debra L. Schulz who spent eight years working with Roma women activists in Central and Eastern Europe wrote of 'translating intersectionality theory into' in the context of a Roma, non-Roma feminist alliance (see Schultz, 2012). Specifically, she discusses the Romani Women's Initiative as a 'model of intersectional feminist practice led by Romani women in collaboration with non-Romani feminists' (p. 37). Drawing parallels between the Roma feminist movement and her historical research on Jewish women's involvement in context-sensitive antiracist alliances in the US Civil Rights movement she notes the influence on the Roma movement of key intersectionalist thinkers such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, and how Roma feminists have been on the political front lines, 'simultaneously fighting ethnic hatred, racism, sexism, violence against women, educational segregation, poverty, extreme social exclusion' (p. 43) in a way that translates intersectional theory into practice. Also writing in 2012, Ethel C. Brooks explored the possibilities of Romani feminism, her article begins with a disturbing incident:

> *… as I was giving a talk on the possibilities of Romani feminist and the politics of recognition … a visibly agitated non-Romani woman in the front row raised her hand, saying in response to my talk: 'I'm sorry, but you can't claim both: if you want to claim feminism, then you must give up your claim to Romani identity. Patriarchy and oppression are central to your culture; being a feminist means renouncing being a Romani woman." [for her] to be a Romani was to be antifeminist; to be a feminist was to be anti-Romani. (p. 2)*

Having dramatically highlighted the survival of anti-Roma prejudice among some Western feminists, the author explores the possibilities of Romani feminism, covering themes of Power, Gender and Everyday Life, and Racism, Naming and Embodiment, and calls for an engagement of activism and theory within the context of Roma feminism.

In a paper I co-authored with Tamsin Hinton-Smith and Emily Danvers (2017) from the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research at the University of Sussex, I sought to address some of these issues in an intersectional way. We argued that at present, policy and practice aimed at tackling Roma exclusion often failed to acknowledge the complex and multi-dimensional (i.e. intersectional) issues facing Roma communities,

including structural disadvantage and social exclusion, and gendered assumptions about Roma women's roles, responsibilities and duties as students in higher education (2-3). We stressed how higher education's 'premium' was not evenly distributed across genders and ethnicities, but that the 'premium' was concentrated in the hands of already privileged groups at the expense of marginalised students such as Roma women, and in some instances 'democratising' access to higher education could even exacerbate inequalities between privileged and marginalised groups, arguing that Roma women's experiences of higher education should be understood in terms of a 'complexity of multiplier effects' (4-5). Echoing this dissertation's concern with 'voice' (see below) we aimed through qualitative interviews to challenge hegemonic assumptions be enabling 'previously silenced voices', noting the 'absence' of Roma women's voices from contemporary feminist discourses (6-7), acknowledging the salience of social class in this intersectionality (8), and of traditional gendered assumptions about the role of Roma women in Roma communities (10), of 'cultural imperialism' within higher education, in Serbia and internationally (11), and of 'dominant academic' assumptions as part of this intersectionality (14). Co-authoring this paper helped me develop for this research an intersectional appreciation of the complexity of Roma exclusion-inclusion in Serbian higher education, and the wider Serbian society.

In sum, the intersectional and postcolonial feminist approach in my research seeks to acknowledge the diversity and complexity of the exclusive 'wall' (Ahmed; 2012, 172). This includes considering how difference, inclusion, socio- economic that Roma in or seeking to access Serbian higher education face. Investigating issues related to exclusion of Roma students in Serbian higher education from an intersectional, postcolonial feminist perspective allows for the interrogation of issues of marginalisation and exclusion that are faced by Roma students. Among these are the gender dimension, and the ways in which the interaction between patriarchy and the socio-political context in which Roma students live shapes the educational experiences of both male and female Roma students. Furthermore, using these postcolonial perspectives provides grounds for exploring how socio-political institutions in Serbia, including higher education, maintain and perpetuate the marginalisation of and

discrimination against the Roma. This helps bring about a more nuanced understanding of how racism, class, gender and ethnic oppression intersect within the context of the Serbian Roma's experience in accessing Serbian higher education.

The above section has highlighted the components of feminisms as they apply to my research. In the opening section I outlined the ways in which power and gender were central features of the feminist movement in its infancy. I however showed that today the focus of feminism goes beyond debates about the marginalisation of women, important as this is, feminism today considers broader issues which includes among others representation of other marginalised groups such as black and ethnic minorities, disabled and gay and lesbian groups among others. In doing so I have also illustrated how important it is to take a broader, intersectional view of marginalisation by taking into how different forms of inequality and marginalisation operate to bring about certain forms of oppressed subjectivity. My approach to researching the experiences of Roma students in higher education from a postcolonial perspective requires not only intersectional understanding of experiences of marginalised groups, but should also incorporate reflexivity. This means that there should be an awareness of the part of the research of the impact they have on the research process and the finding of the research.

3.9.2 Voice: 'Who Speaks for Roma'

This section considers the issue of political representation of the Roma as a transnational minority community (McGarry, 2012). The Roma have suffered 'sustained and genocidal persecution and enslavement' since the early sixteenth century (Gheorghe and Action, 1995, qtd. in McGarry, 2012, p.15), culminating in *O Boro Poraggmos,* (the Great Persecution) at the hands of the Nazis during the Second World War during which up to 1.5 million Roma were genocided (p. 20). In parallel to this, a romanticisation of the Roma developed during the nineteenth century, so that 'alongside the stereotype, dirty, dishonest, child-stealing villain we have the dark, handsome, violin-playing lover Gypsy' (Kenrick and Puxton, 1972, qtd. in McGarry, 2012, p.19). Both issues have affected the ways in which the Roma are represented in

Europe politically, and the nature of their political 'voice'. The political oppression of the Roma continued under Communism, where the '… desired end was surprisingly close to the fascist dream: the Gypsies were to disappear', albeit via forced labour and the suppression of cultural identity rather than by extermination (p.25). McGarry notes a 'Roma Awakening' during the post-Communist era, but also increase in nationalist and racist violence against the Roma (p.28), despite the increased interest of international organisations and NGOs in Roma human rights and equality, the Roma remained 'powerless' and 'vulnerable' as one of Europe's poorest and most marginalised communities (p. 30). However, from the mid-1990s onwards, Roma organisations Europe-wide began to highlight repressive state policies, and demand equality and full citizenship rights in mainstream society, linking 'the politics of representation to issues of visibility and survival', developing structures of representation into the 2000s, and increasing political participation at both the national and transnational levels (p.31). Ram (2010, p. 209) notes in this context that:

> *The EU enlargement process expanded the opportunities and power of NGOs to influence policy in both EU member states and prospective members over the past decade … The INGOs gained a receptive audience at the EU by addressing the interests of EU member states in reducing migration of Roma, by framing their issue in a way that fit an emerging EU human rights agenda, and by acting as a link and information source between Brussels and Roma and pro-Roma NGOs in candidate countries.*

McGarry notes that the purpose of representation is 'to make present what is absent', in the context of the Roma addressing the fact that although they have been in Europe for 700 years, they 'continue to be treated as outsiders, as if they do not belong' in a context where Roma socio-economic interests and identity are 'insoluble' (p.163). Whereas Roma parliamentary representation across Europe is generally not commensurate with their demographic weight, he notes that during the past two decades the Roma's ethnic mobilisation transnationally and at the level of the nation-state has began to articulate a political voice that is not dependent solely in participation in the liberal-democratic process. The transnational dimension to this is particularly important, as this ethnic mobilisation has succeeded incrementally in

drawing Roma issues to the attention of international organisations and NGOs, including the EU in a way that to an extent has started to alleviate difficulties faced by Roma communities that traditionally national governments have been unwilling to address (p. 164).

Crucially, NGO involvement enables a form of representation independent of a democratic mandate, helping to ensure that legitimacy means more than merely 'an 'X' on a ballot sheet', with grassroots level Roma organisations working with NGOs and international organisations to articulate a Roma political 'voice'. This has meant that the Roma can now never be completely ignored by national governments, as was often previously the case, particularly in the Central-Eastern European region. This however has its limitations. For example, according to McGarry, EU policy towards the Roma still fails to address the complexity of depth of Roma needs because it takes an 'ethnically blind' approach, focusing on mainstreaming Roma interests in areas such as education and employment (p. 164-5). For McGarry, while the Roma now have 'access to the corridors of power' and are able to articulate a political voice there that can no longer be ignored, the Roma still do not have 'decision-making capacity', and remain dependent on others (p. 165). Against this, McGarry insists that only the Roma themselves can truly 'know' their political needs in terms of both rights and interests, leading to a situation where 'the Roma social movement' is enabling participation in the 'organising structures of the state' and the development of more effective civil society institutions providing 'enhanced interest representation' (p. 172-3). Noting that due to factors such as poverty and high illiteracy rates mean that Roma participation in domestic democratic political processes remains 'inadequate', McGarry observes how Roma 'transnational structures of representation' increasingly 'give voice' to or 'speak for' the Roma collectively, influencing national governments in the ways described above, concluding:

> *… Roma are learning the gaje [non-Roma] world of political representation, from elaborating Roma nationalism and a sense of solidarity to create formal organizations. In the process, Roma social movement actors must learn the rules of the game to challenge dominant narratives and reaffirm their identity in European society (p. 175).*

Thus, McGarry sees a situation whereby while Roma participation remains inadequate due to a complex array of discriminations and inequalities, Roma activists are articulating a legitimate 'voice' independently of the formal democratic process transnationally, nationally, and at the local level. This has been a major development in Roma representation since the fall of Communism during the early 1990s, although it remains a work in process.

In a 2009 paper, McGarry contrasts the political voice of the Hungarian minority in Romania and the Turkish minority is Bulgaria with the then state of the political voice of the Roma in the region. Whereas the former two minorities have been able to 'conflate shared ethnicity with nationalism' (p. 110), thereby 'guaranteeing electoral support which tallies with the demographic weight [of those minorities]' (p. 119), the case of the Roma in the region has been different: 'Roma nationalism needs to be produced, shared and consumed to be invested with meaning and substance' (p. 115), something he asserts is at best a work in progress. For this to happen, he suggests that 'ordinary Roma must play a part' (p. 115) in the social construction of such a nationalism, transnationally across the region, rather than it being a process driven by a small Roma elite, since what 'matters' for the Roma cannot be articulate politically 'without consulting the Roma themselves' (p. 120). A crucial difference is that as a transnational community that is a minority in every country in which they reside, the Roma lack a 'kin state or homeland' that can lobby on the Roma's behalf; this contrasts with the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania and the Turkish one in Bulgaria (119-20), concluding that:

> *… the presence of an ambiguous nationalism with a lack of clearly defined interests … hinders the political mobilization and representation of the Roma.'*

This is further complicated by factors such as extreme poverty and marginalization, intra-Roma heterogeneity, a lack of education and a distrust of the political system which combine to render the articulation of pan-Roma political and cultural interests through Roma political parties problematic (p. 121).

Turning to the European Union, McGarry argues in a 2011 paper than Roma activism at the non-party political level had by then meant that the EU 'could no longer treat the Roma as a political issue'. However, rather than dealing with the Roma as an ethnicity, EU policy tended to 'mainstream' Roma issues into existing EU policies on areas such as education and employment. This means that 'tailored provisions for the Roma *as a group* are avoided' (p. 131-2), so that 'the prejudices that the Roma endure because of their ethnic identity' tend to be 'ignored'. This means that initiatives such as state-level anti-discrimination policies advocated and promoted by the EU are inadequate 'to alleviate the interconnected social and political needs of the Roma across the EU' (134). Writing in the same year, Roma activist-scholar Márton Rövid also notes how the existing EU legal framework 'guarantees only minimalistic rights to minorities: essentially the rights to enjoy their own culture', this inadequacy renders EU policy 'insufficient to tackle the various patterns of exclusion that the Roma face' (p. 19). For Rövid, the key issues are that: existing EU policy does not address the complex patterns of exclusion, prejudice and marginalization that Roma communities face; EU-driven integration programmes in areas such as housing can only be successful if combined with increasing Roma recognition, ensuring that integration takes place with the consent and active support of both Roma communities and the majority communities in their countries, and; the EU should proactively promote Roma culture in a way that promotes a positive image of Roma culture in a way that breaks down negative stereotypes, with the participation of Roma public figures (p. 19). Effectively addressing the issues of identifying and tackling patterns of exclusion, increasing Roma recognition within nation-states, and the promotion of Roma culture all imply the need for the kinds of Roma civil society organisations described above, which in turn relates to the effectiveness of Roma education and higher education.

Writing in 2014, Aidan McGarry and Timofey Agarin also comment that the EU's emphasis on mainstreaming and inclusion can at best only be the start of effectively addressing Roma marginalization and exclusion. The authors highlight the need to go beyond representation, perhaps a 'passive' form of voice, to embrace Roma *participation* in civil society, and more active form of voice, so that they are sufficiently *present* in public life so that policy-makers cannot merely assume that they know and

understand Roma interests. This requires a level of Roma proactivity that ensures that the Roma have sufficient public voice to be able to influence decisions that affect them directly. This requires again that 'ordinary Roma [are] actively involved in public life, sufficiently to counter the negative stereotypes and prejudices that underpin Roma exclusion (pp. 1987-88).

Also in 2015, McGarry and Jasper in another paper note how:

> *… the dominant images of Roma are owned and reproduced by non-Roma, which construct and sustain Roma as a problematic, parasitic and dangerous community that does not belong in various national contexts.' (p. 770)*

In a similar vein, Gay Y Blasco (2008, p.300) observes how 'across varied representational arenas Roma are consistently portrayed as outside the nation, as its objects – to be managed and controlled – rather than its subjects, observing:

> *… the necessity to examine carefully the relationship between authorship,effect and representation when analysing the production ofhierarchy and inequality in Europe. Neither these categories nor their articulation can be taken as unproblematic when studying representations of Roma. Indeed, it is the disjuncture, the tensions and the ambiguities between representation, authorship and effect that prove to be analytically most promising (p.303).*

Tackling this crisis of representation requires that articulation of social and political representations that are constructed by 'ordinary Roma', observing astutely that 'identities are not fixed but the challenge for Roma is to reverse years of stereotypes and stigmatization', necessitating the active participation of Roma communities in the articulation of voice, representation and presence on their own terms, and thus political ownership of policy (770-1). Lastly, McGarry defines anti-Roma prejudice as 'Romaphobia', which he calls 'the last acceptable racism in Europe (2017, 247), arguing for more 'participation and visibility', requiring:

> *The mobilization of Roma communities in fields of culture, politics and economics [as] the best way to declare belonging to society, to change the narrative of Roma stigmatization, and demand the rights to be included in society as equals. (248)*

As can be discerned from the above, the issue of 'voice' and Roma representation is complex, and conventional approaches based on models of inclusion and party-political representation within the context of liberal-democratic parliamentary structures are likely to be inadequate to effectively address the profundity of Roma exclusion and marginalization. Rather, in parallel to inclusion and political representation, there appears to be the necessity of articulating an authentic Roma 'voice' from the grassroots at the levels of culture, civil society and the wider public sphere. It emerges from this that Roma participation and success in education and higher education in Serbia and the wider region is an essential element enabling the development of a critical mass of 'voice' able to affect real change at the transnational, nation-state and local levels.

McGarry and Agarin make a crucial distinction between 'representation' and 'participation', and argue for the 'meanings of participation in terms of presence, voice and influence', as opposed to the less dynamic and more passive 'representation' (2014, p. 1987), underscoring the need for active Roma participation in policy and decision-making, if historical-social inequalities are ever to be adequately addressed. At present, Roma students in Serbian higher education remain the passive recipients of affirmative action, and a long journey must be travelled before their voices feed into participatory decision-making on the future of Roma inclusion in Serbian higher education.

3.10 Conclusion

In the chapter above I have sought to outline the key concepts and theoretical perspectives that will inform the methodological and analytical framework of this research. The chapter has so far considered the context Roma education in Europe and Serbia. I considered how existing policy approaches are framed within the idea of inclusion. However, there was no focus on the wider issues affecting marginalised groups. The chapter also critically engaged with the concept of widening participation as a concept and related practices. While acknowledging the significance of the ideas underpinning widening participation, the chapter has demonstrated the need for

broader view of widening participation to consider the material and socio-political conditions in which target populations live. In doing so, would mean not merely focusing on access to higher education, but addressing inequality from its roots all the way through social structures of society. The chapter then considered access as a concept and how it relates to this work. I critically investigated how access is a complex concept, but that when well-conceived can be a useful tool for enabling marginalised communities to counter exclusion in higher education and become voiced social actors.

The second part of the chapter discussed poverty and how it relates to access to higher education in generally and particularly Serbia, and impact on access and on the lives of affected individuals. I also discussed the role of discrimination in perpetuating marginalisation based on their skin colour. I argued that discrimination and poverty are interlinked, as discriminated people are less likely to access material resources necessary for survival in society, higher education included. The chapter outlined then theoretical framework that I have used to frame my discussion and analysis of findings in this research, namely postcolonial feminism, specifically intersectionality. I outlined the history of intersectionality in Western feminism, and the ways in which this approach has enabled the articulation of diverse global feminisms, better fitted than a historically white and privileged concept of 'universal sisterhood' to addressing the differing contexts in which most of the world's women experience patriarchy and unequal and exploitative social relations. I then outlined the ways in which a postcolonial, intersectional feminism can be applied methodologically and analytically to my research into Roma marginalisation in Serbia, and specifically Roma access to higher education, as it helps to highlight that access that should not be perceived as an isolated issue but rather as an embedded in a complex intersection of poverty, patriarchy, racism and individual and collective responses to marginalisation. The final section of this chapter discussed the concept of 'voice' and its relationship to political representation and participation for the Roma.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCHING MARGINALISATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological perspectives and assumptions upon which my research on Roma students' access in higher education in Serbia is based. It summaries the assumptions upon which the research was designed and issues that arose in conducting this research. The chapter outlines the key features of a feminist research approach that applies to my research. It demonstrates how the role of power and the need for adopting an intersectional perspective, both key aspects of post-colonial feminism, are crucial to my understanding of marginalisation. I further outline the need for taking a reflexive approach in conducting feminist research. Therefore, this requires an awareness of the researcher as embodied and the need to acknowledge the role of emotion and affect and affect, the latter being the conscious and subjective experience of emotion (Larsen and Diener, 1987). The chapter also considers the notion of voice as an integral part of feminist research approaches. This chapter problematises the notion while acknowledging the progressive potential of contributing to the development of platforms for participants' voices that have been marginalised by hegemonic structures. Further, the chapter emerges with a discussion on the researcher as an insider/outsider or even both; it considers how such positions may influence the research process particularly the data collection process. I argue that although there are challenges in this research approach we still need to consider how researchers influence the research process and outcomes. Finally, the chapter ends up with providing the insights related to participant's recruitment, data collection and analysis and showing awareness of ethical issues during the data collection.

4.2 Research Question and Sub-Questions

As stated in Chapter 1, my main question is:

'How do Roma students, as an ethnic minority, succeed in accessing higher education in Serbia?'

Related to this there are five further sub-questions:

1) *'How do national and international policies impact on Roma students' access to higher education in Serbia, and what policies, strategies and interventions exist to encourage and support Roma access to higher education in Serbia?*

2) *'How are Roma students, as an ethnic minority in Serbia, constructed in higher education?'*

3) *'What is the role of affirmative action and widening participation programmes in enabling Roma students' access to higher education?'*

4) *'How do Roma socio-economic and socio-cultural practices impact on student access to higher education in Serbia?'*

5) *'How does gender influence the life chances experiences of Roma students in accessing to higher education in Serbia?'*

4.3 Feminist Research

More recently, the scope of feminist research has broadened towards understanding the experiences of marginalised groups including with regard to gender, including multiple genders, both genders sexes in relation to through the lenses power relations in and between gendered identities, from women's perspectives so that feminist research is no longer simply about 'women's issues', but becomes an epistemological grounding for understanding social processes, including marginalisation and exclusion, and people's struggles to overcome these. As discussed above in Chapter 3, in its earliest forms, feminist research positioned issues of gender identities, power relations and roles at the centre of inquiry.

Thus, today feminist research creates new forms of knowledge not only about women's experience of oppression but about the experiences of marginalised groups (Maynard 2012), and it is often 'engaged' research which foregrounds social justice issues, with the intention to make a social difference (Kelly et al., 1994; Wickramasinghe 2009) through, among other things, creating a collective cultural capacity for raised aspiration and imagining and realising better futures. This means

that gaining knowledge by considering experiences of those who are oppressed by being other than the dominant or hegemonic community leads to a deeper understanding of the issues that are important not only to women, but also to all within groups that have had historical and on-going oppression, social exclusion, and socio-economic marginalisation. It is in this sense that I consider my research to be feminist, as exploring the experiences of marginalised Roma students in higher education and seeking to provide a platform on which issues affecting Roma students in higher education in Serbia move from 'the margins to the centre' of policy debates (Hesse-Bibber 2012, p.3) constitutes research that is inherently 'engaged' and emancipatory. My feminist research thus doubly explores the gendered nature of the oppression of Roma women both in mainstream Serbian society and within Roma communities, while at the same time theorising the entirety of the Roma experience of marginalisation and oppression – of all genders – through a feminist onto-epistemology and methodology. Recognising the importance of women's or other oppressed group's lived experience means challenging existing knowledge constructed by socially dominant voices (white, patriarchal, privileged in political-economic and socio-economic terms), and constructing new knowledge from a feminist perspective that has hitherto been unvoiced and excluded: thus, the goal of feminist research becomes 'unearthing subjugated knowledge' (Hesse-Bibber 2012, p.3), a one of the principal aims of my work, since feminists sharing my perspective tend to ask questions that place the lived experiences of marginalised groups at the centre of social inquiries and the construction, articulation, and dissemination of new knowledge and ways of knowing. Crucially for my research, feminist epistemology has progressively explored the complex intersections between gender and other social categories such as ethnicity, 'race', class, and sexuality, exploring the implications of these intersections for feminist knowledge: my research seeks to do this in the context of the study of Roma education. Crucial to this project is my adoption of an intersectional approach (Hill Collins 1998), considering how, in the case of the Roma, ethnicity, class and socio-economic and political-economic factors intersect to bring about exclusion of Roma people from higher education in Serbia, mindful of how as an 'insider-outsider' researcher aiming to produce new knowledge on Serbian Roma in higher education in a transformational way I should 'examine reflexively [my] own

assumptions and authority', to avoid 'making recommendations that are not necessarily appropriate for the people in the contexts [I] study' (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012, p. 587).

 As we have seen above feminist theorists and researchers such as Hill Collins (1998), and hooks (1981) postulated the multidimensionality of women's experiences, arguing that these experiences cannot be put into a single, monolithic, universalising 'feminist' category, as if all women have one single experience as women. A feminism that was truly universal would, rather than privileging and universalising the lived experiences of white, relatively privileged women from the Global North, need to acknowledge the diversity of women's experiences in a vast diversity contexts across the globe, in which local histories, cultures, gender and socio-economic dynamics would shape different intersectional contexts. Thus, by the early 21st century, feminist research began to emphasise issues of difference regarding race, class, and gender (Hesse-Bibber 2012); similarly, Letherby (2003) was concerned with the development of feminist research that considered the ways in which the researcher was located within her research and how this shaped the knowledge produced by that research. Particularly, Letherby was interested with the location of the researcher's subjectivity within her research, an approach I have sought to acknowledge at the end of Chapter 2 of this dissertation, and elsewhere within it. In a similar vein, Hughes and Lury (2018) champion the use of qualitative research methods in feminist research, since by capturing marginalised or silenced voices it is useful in exploring the lived experiences of marginalised groups.

4.4 Emotions and Researching Intergenerational Discrimination

This section outlines the role of emotions in the research process. As earlier alluded to, intersectional feminists tend to resist the objectivist idea that research can be conducted in an entirely 'objective' manner, with the researcher positioned separately from the research subjects and research process as a discrete, knowing impartial observer. Rather, as in other fields of qualitative research, there is a growing acceptance within the feminism that as a researcher cannot analyse the lives of others without turning the analytical gaze on herself, positioning her in relation to her research topic. A significant aspect of this involves the need to acknowledge not only

the impact the researcher has on the research process, also, how the research may impact on the researcher, not only intellectually, but also in terms of embodied emotions, necessitating an awareness that the qualitative researcher is an embodied process and that a two-way relational dynamic is established between the researcher and the research, and that to a significant degree the researcher's self is both subject and object of the research. This in turn challenges the idea of there being a crude and simplistic binary between mind and body. Therefore, emotion and affect are important aspects of feminist approaches to qualitative research.

The significance of emotions in feminist research has been well articulated by several theorists (Bowles & Duelli-Klein, 1983; Smith, 1987, 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1983); Feminists Jaggar (1997) and Sprague and Zimmerman (1993) make the case for acknowledging the importance of embodied emotions and values as forming the critical lens in feminist research. Jaggar recognizes emotion as a central aspect of knowledge building, and argues that it is unrealistic to assume emotions and values do not surface during the research process, influencing the research process, and shaping the ways in which the researcher constructs knowledge, from the points of view of both the researcher and the researched. Emotions and affect, therefore, constitute an integral part of why a given topic or set of research questions is studied and how it is studied. This insight is significant because it enables the researcher to go beyond a naïve intellectualism or objectivism, and factor in an emotional and affective dimension to the research, this reflexivity is of crucial importance in contexts involving historical and social oppression and marginalisation of minorities, since people living in such situations experience their interaction with their socio-political and socio-economic contexts through a highly complex set of culturally learned emotional responses, as happens frequently to the Roma in Serbia and surrounding countries. In such circumstances, emotion is an important factor when gathering qualitative data through interviewing. Interviewing involves listening to your research participants and recounting issues back to the participants for clarification. As Phoenix (1994) observes, it is difficult to research or interview participants with whom you share some form of identity either as a woman interviewing a woman as a Serbian Roma in higher education interviewing the same. In such situations, both the interviewer and the

interviewee will react to personal narratives of oppression and marginalisation though powerful and complex emotional responses which are as much part of the data, perhaps an even greater part of the data, than factual or intellectual content. Thus, when the researcher shares a common experience of oppression and marginalisation with her participants, this will inevitably evoke powerful emotions that will shape the research and the ways in which new knowledge is constructed – therefore an awareness of this dynamic needs to be factored into the methodology. For example, interviewing a Serbian Roma student might well trigger memories of my own experience of discrimination – it would be surprising if it did not. Unacknowledged, this would impede the researcher's ability to pay close attention to what the interviewee is saying and colouring the researcher's interpretation of her words; acknowledged, this reflexivity builds empathy and trust between the interviewer and the interviewee, deepening and enriching the data.

My previous experience while conducting qualitative research in the field was that listening to personal accounts of poverty and exclusion from people with whom I shared an identity and culture made the interview process very emotional indeed – it is important that I move away from a positivist approach to interview data, that parallels 'versions of traditional natural science research (whose objects are entirely different)' to 'acknowledge the influence of the social', which 'depoliticizes and individualizes' the interaction, with an awareness of 'power interactions' and the possibility of projection between the interviewer and the interviewee, or vice-versa, with an awareness of individuals as both 'the products and producers of discourse', in line with Black Feminists' resistance to white Second Wave feminism's of the homogenizing nature of representation, to embrace the emotional and affective aspects of the interaction in its social-political context (Dunne, Pryor, and Yates, 2005, 35-8).

Emotions can impact on how the research progresses and the questions that one asks when interviewing. For example, when one of my participants started talking about his mother being committed to a mental hospital, I could not ignore the emotional impact of this narrative, even though widespread biomedical pathologisation of the Roma, and the Serbian state's consequent use of mass confinement within mental institutions

was not the topic of the research. Similarly, on another occasion a participant was talking about how his trans-ethnic relationship with his girlfriend broke down under the pressure of ethnic discrimination in Serbia. I found listening to this account to be a deeply emotional experience, even though it was not exactly the focus of my questioning – however, such data nevertheless provide an essential context to the core questions, and should be acknowledged as doing so. Thus, not only are the emotions an essential aspect of conducting the qualitative research process, but the emotions can also have a real and very substantial impact on the ways in which knowledge constructed out of the research is shaped and perceived, and are indeed a form of data as of themselves. Accordingly, I am likely to have responded emotionally to my subjects in ways in which an outsider-researcher might not have done, this must be acknowledged by the researcher. An 'outsider' researcher might lay claim to greater objectivity, she would nonetheless miss out on much of the richness and granularity of the data. This raised awareness of the role of empathy in 'insider' research and of emotional responses as data raised several practical issues for me as a qualitative researcher, such as my emotional distraction during the process of interviewing, particularly when participants talked about their experiences discrimination and poverty during their journey through all phases of education.

I realised how my emotional responses to participants' narratives might lead me into over-identification with my participants, leading in turn to my not allowing the participants to be different from my own subjectivity. Alternatively, I might run the risk of projecting my internal emotional experiences on to others, thereby objectifying myself in the person of the participant. An awareness of the centrality of reflexivity and empathy in 'insider' qualitative research, and learning to use them constructively has been a significant learning curve during my journey into qualitative research.

4.5 Voice and Representation in Researching Marginalised Groups

We have encountered the concept of 'voice' in its political context above. I will now address voice as it relates to qualitative research. 'Voice' is widely used in the qualitative social sciences, particularly in feminist research (Ashby, 2011; Letherby, 2003). It often describes an intellectual position that addresses the question 'from

whose perspective is the world being described' relate to feminism that is, how early feminist research was concerned to give women a voice. Because of this, it is important to take the discussion of 'voice' further and reflect on yet another important aspect of feminist qualitative research. Whilst research is an embodied exercise, feminists also base their research on the idea of giving voice to marginalised groups. In the following sections I will discussion this to some detail.

'Voice', as a concept, is concerned with the way discourses differently frame data according to the perspectives of those in dominant or subordinate positions, the role of narrative in these processes, and the question of who is narrating, why and how. Increasingly, 'voice' is becoming recognised for the way it frames critiques of the 'dominant knowledge-form' which is 'seen to be central in construction to subordination' (Moore and Muller 2010, p. 194). The social relations between domination and subordination can also be understood as a knowledge relation. Much knowledge tends to be constructed from hegemonic or 'authoritative' perspectives. In these circumstances, the dominant perspective becomes imbued with the notions of authority relating to theorisation and the construction of what is considered 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' knowledge, a hierarchy of knowledge that values the apparently objective over the subjective, the intellectual over the emotional, the empathetic and the intuitive, the mind over the body. On such grounds, hegemonic knowledge-producers tend to perceive knowledge that is constructed through the experiences of subordinate groups often as 'illegitimate' knowledge, lacking objectivity, intellectual rigour, and critical distance (ironically, such knowledge-producers are frequently blind to the biases produced by the privileged social construction of their own subjectivities). For example, when black women were finally able to construct within academia their knowledge from their own intersectional perspectives, the forms of knowledge they constructed were often questioned and undermined by elite academic interests (Brown 2012; Nayak 2015). This shows how the voice of those who are deemed to be 'subordinate' in socio-political terms can be questioned and often silenced by elite, objectivist, 'authoritative voices (Brown 2012). Such acts of 'silencing the voice' become part of a supposedly 'inherited natural' position for Black women Nayak (2015, p.9). This does not only demonstrate the

relations between different forms of knowledge, but also highlights the power relations that distinguish the relation of powerful dominant groups and towards historically subordinate groups. Knowledge relations and different knowledge forms contribute to the development of varying social perspectives and thus establish power relations between different groups; thus, what is deemed to be 'known' is predicated upon the epistemological position of the 'knowers' of that knowledge. The postmodern perspective, which includes postmodern feminist perspectives, on knowledge argues for a strong emphasis on problematising both the social construction of knowledge and of knowers, and the deconstruction of narrative authority (Ahmed, 1998). It further suggests that in understanding a social theory one should scrutinise how that theory came to be framed, and what socio-political perspective(s) it might represent, roblematising the positivist view that knowledge should be based on generalisable objectively collected methods and data, as if such a thing is ever possible in qualitative social science (Moore and Muller, 2010).

Therefore, adopting a postmodern perspective which focuses on such subjective experiences, 'giving voice' is mostly associated with research that is concerned with the experiences of oppressed, marginalised groups hard to access or at-risk groups. Thus, one frequently reads of 'giving voice' to women, black or minority groups, but it is uncommon to hear about white middle class men being 'given voice'. The point here is not so much about the oppressed groups themselves; rather, it is about questioning what the notion of 'giving voice' means in practice it is a contested concept. Within the social sciences, theorists such as Nayak (2015) and, Bogdan and Bikles (1998) have questioned whether it is possible or desirable to 'give voice' to any group or individual. Firstly, it is important to ask questions about whether research such as this could or should 'give voice'. Whose voice is it really that I am representing? Who benefits from the telling? Does voice assume speech? What is voice in qualitative social research? All these questions highlight some of the problematic implications of claiming to 'give voice', and what it means methodologically.

'Voice' as a concept suggests that knowledge is created based on individuals' membership of a particular group rather than abstracted and generalised 'general knowledge'. This means that knowledge is constructed according to the socio-political

position of the 'knowers' that represent a particular group, who become the constructors of new knowledge. Thus, 'the field of knowledge is re-presented as a cast of characters engaged in a drama of competing, antagonistic interests and struggles' (Moore & Muller, 2010 p. 193). In this way, knowledge and knowers are strongly linked. Voice discourse 'privileges the knower, or the knower's imputed membership category, as the truth criterion' (p. 193). Utilising such postmodern perspectives to the understanding of 'voice', this research helps reinstate the voices of people whose forms of knowledge might not be consistent with what is regarded as legitimately 'known' by the general or 'common sense' discourses in the society they live in, in this case Serbia. Atkinson et al (2003) add, and I apply this perspective to my research, that the celebration and representation of voices implies giving speaking subjects (groups or individuals) a special significance, an opportunity to make their voices heard.

This assertion poses questions about the specific significance of 'giving voice' to marginalised subjects, it in turn raises questions regarding the significance of marginalised voices, why certain groups might need to be 'given voice', and the extent to which 'giving voice' is linked to certain political agendas and interests – as if 'legitimate' authoritative voices did not have a political context or agendas. Thus, 'voice', or the absence of voice, emerges as a marker of difference, which in turn is related to the ways in which these groups become marginalised or oppressed by dominant groups. The irony in claiming to give voice to a marginalised group is that this act is often driven by the significance of the marginalised groups relative to the dominant ones. However, the dominant group's concern for the oppressed group is likely to arise not out of concern for the oppressed group *per se*; rather, their concern is likely to arise from the financial and political gains attached to working with such groups, of from concerns regarding economics or security and stability.

Another critique is that 'giving voice' emphasises the marginality of marginalised group by assuming this group is always oppressed and they need to be liberated or 'rescued'. However, this liberation often comes from a dominant group acting as 'saviour', which tries to shed light on the lives of the marginalised group. This happens, for example, through posting pictures of these groups which depict aspects of these lives in public places without asking the marginalised groups' permission. For instance, Nayak (2015)

states that dominant white ideologies or practices cannot be made relevant to Black people simply by having Black faces in their literature. Lorde's statement 'Black feminism is not white feminism in black face' (Nayek, 2015) thus resonates with the argument that power appears as external, pressing the subject into subordination by legitimising the action through using the image of the marginalised face without that person being really involved (Kraft 1986, p. 150). Such a paternalistic approach to 'giving voice' has many risks, involving the assumption that marginalised groups are by their nature dependent, and in need of a sponsor in the dominant group to 'give them voice'. Another risk is internal to marginalised groups themselves. This involves such groups identifying themselves as an 'oppressed group' in a way that means they seldom feel empowered to make their voice 'heard'. This form of self-oppression was evident in this research in accounts of participants who felt fatalistically that they could not do anything to improve their situations. A further risk here is often the same tools, such as the use of 'inclusive' visual images that are supposed to empower these people sometimes yield the opposite effect: disempowerment (Ahmed, 2012).

A further fundamental assumption of 'giving voice' is that only certain people can give the voice to oppressed groups. Orner (1992) questioned why it is only the oppressed people who speak, and not the 'outsider' researchers or the people who belong to dominant groups. He suggests that by encouraging only the oppressed to speak, researchers are letting our experience as privileged groups to be accepted without being questioned. Ruth Behar (1993) argues that that as researchers we are often trying to give voice by revealing information about others, while also revealing very little or nothing about our own subjectivities as researchers. By doing so, we automatically position ourselves in powerful dominant position regardless of being an 'insider' or an 'outsider'.

The last critique of 'giving voice' I shall consider is that instead of attempting to 'give' voice as if it were a 'gift' or some sort of patronage, we need instead to work towards facilitating the voice and thus the agency of the oppressed (Lloyd, 2009; Ellsworth, 1989). This radically engaged approach to voice should ensure that researchers do not obtain ownership of 'voice' to give it to somebody else, and researchers do not need to bring silence to the light but to facilitate or assist the articulation of their

participants' voices throughout the process of research. As Ashby (2011) points out, the point is not about how to determine what 'truth' is, but to reflect what participant's intended meaning of what they want to share.

However, while acknowledging the potential limitations of 'giving voice', it does not mean that the issue of voice and the ways in which this relates to qualitative research and participation in higher education is redundant; rather voice remains important and in many ways my research offers the opportunity for Roma students experiences both of discrimination and of their tenacity in the face of such marginalisation to access and succeed in higher education in Serbia. Of significance however, is the need for awareness and thus a continued reflexive approach in both my analysis and writing of the issues raised in this discussion about the problematics of voice. I will have to be aware of my own subjectivity and experiences in this context and in many ways passion on issues of marginalisation of Roma people, that it does not unnecessary sway my representation of my participants' voice. This is clearly a significant challenge, on which as a social researcher I need to reflect, learn and act.

Thus, rather than attempt to 'give voice' (which I have neither the power nor the inclination to do) I instead seek to 'empowering people to be heard who might otherwise remain silent' (Bogdan and Biklen 1998 p. 204) — qualitative research as an empowering platform for voices that otherwise might remain silenced. While participation in qualitative doctoral research on the Roma in Serbian higher education cannot of itself empower my participants, it can capture Roma voices that otherwise might remain unheard, bringing their perspectives to wider attention; it might also help boost participants' self-confidence as participant-actors in higher education. Voice is also concerned with giving space for people to talk about things they would otherwise not talk about, or even be able safely to discuss. For example, experiences of discrimination in contexts hostile to the idea of raising awareness and building resistance to such oppression may make people wary of talking about their experiences, likewise asking people to talk about traumatic personal experiences which may be taboo, or humiliating.

This above discussion highlights the complexities of attempting to 'give voice'. It shows

how risky it is for the researcher to attempt to give voice to certain groups, and that such attempts run the risk of marginalising already marginalised groups yet further. Thus, as Lloyd (2009), Ashby (2011), and Ellsworth (1989) argue, the researcher should be careful about claiming to 'give voice'. They suggest that instead of giving voice as researchers we should assist and facilitate participants' voices and that researchers should be reflexive and declare their positionality in their research (Moore and Muller 1999). The following section considers another aspect of feminist research that is closely linked to giving voice, conducting research as on the insider-outsider continuum.

4.6 Doing Research at 'Home'

The above sections have so far explored the role of emotions and the notion of giving voice and their impact on the qualitative research process. Another issue that arises in feminist research is how not only voice, but how knowledge in general, is presented based on the researcher's perspective and the cultural group to which they belong: the onto-epistemology of reflexive, qualitative research situated knowledge. This section will discuss the perspectives of the researcher as an 'insider', or an 'outsider': put simply, an 'outsider' researcher is one who approaches the field externally from its context, the early anthropologists, privileged white men studying 'tribes' in remote parts of Africa or Oceania without necessarily even knowing the local languages typify the 'outsider-researcher'; contrastingly, and 'insider' researcher is one who is researching a field context in which she was born or spent a considerable part of formative life. Rather than being a binary, insider-outsider is perhaps better thought of as a continuum: while there are researchers who are absolute insiders or outsiders, this is becoming less common in contemporary ethnography, and many researchers embody aspects of both ends of that continuum (Naples, 1996; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Carling at al., 2014)

Researcher membership or 'belongingness' to the communities being researched has long been discussed in qualitative research (e.g. Asselin, 2003; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Brown, 2012). Among the issues that arise regarding such 'belonging' is the question of whether researchers position themselves as insiders or outsiders or even

both, and the implications these positions might have on the research process. The issue of being an insider or an outsider is greatly emphasised in feminist research as a methodological issue influencing the integrity of the research. This is due to the importance placed on the involvement of the researcher in the entire research process, from the development of the research, from thinking about the topic, the development of the proposal, collecting and analysing data, and lastly reporting the findings from a context where the researcher is perceived as either a member of a given community or as an outsider (Asselin, 2003). This is because being an insider or outsider contours how participants in the research respond to the issues the researcher seeks to explore, and subsequently this has implications on the nature and quality of the data collected (Brown, 2012). However, being an insider or an outsider is not just about how participants view the researcher, but is related also to conceptual and relational issues regarding where and how researchers may position themselves in relation to the subject they intend to study (Dwyer and Buckle 2009; Carling at al., 2014). In taking these positions it becomes clear that the researchers may well have their own biases whether they are aware of them or not (hence the need for reflexivity as an integral part of the research process). Their biases are not just about the favourable (or indeed pejorative) views they may have about the subject, but could also be internalised experiences from belonging to the researched communities themselves. Therefore, in talking about the positionality of researchers, Rose (1985: 77) emphasises that:

> *There is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one's biases. And if you do not appreciate the force of what you're leaving out, you are not fully in command of what you're doing.*

In this respect, Angrosino (2005) further supports the idea that understanding the researchers' backgrounds in terms of gender, ethnicity, social class, sexuality and other factors is fundamental to the research and therefore is as an integral part of framing a methodology, gathering data, understanding a narrative, analysis and theorisation, and the dissemination of researching findings. Researchers in this field are encouraged to declare their relationship(s) to the community they are studying, and aim to establish a 'non-hierarchical, non-manipulative research relationships which have the

potential to over-come the separation between the researcher and the researched' (Reinharz, 1983, cited in Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 62).

It has therefore become an established practice among many social science researchers to discuss the notion of 'insider and outsider', including the implications of these positions. For example, Serrant-Green (2002, p. 38) states that:

> *… there appears to be as many arguments for outsider research as against, with the same issues able to be raised in support of outsider research, as against it.*

Arguments against being an insider in a research project often question the closeness of the researcher to the participants on the ground, stressing that perhaps the researcher 'knows too much' and could too much resemble those being researched, compromising objectivity (Asselin, 2003). Further, being an insider is critiqued for the inaccurate assumptions that can be made by both the researchers and the participants (Watson 1999; Armstrong 2001). For instance, the participants might assume similarity between their experience and that of the researcher, and thus give an incomplete account of their experiences. Researchers, on the other hand, may run the risk of clouding their perceptions completely with their own personal experience instead of the respondents' experiences. Thus, data might end up being shaped by the researchers' own experiences rather than those of the participants. Commenting sceptically about the influence of her *insiderness* in a research, Watson (1999, p.98) states 'I remain unclear whether this is my interpretation of an actual phenomenon, or if I am projecting my own need . . . onto my participants'.

Despite such critiques, being an insider has its own advantages. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) state that being an insider provides researchers with rapid access and acceptance to the researched communities, which in turn makes the participants often more open to discuss certain issues they would otherwise be. This allows greater depth when collecting and analysing data, an example of this is how in the data presented below, as a native speaker of Serbian, I was able to identify and explain racist Serbian Romaphobic words to non-Serbian-speaking readers in a way that enhances their understanding of the discourse that would not have happened if I had

simply translated, say, *cigani* as 'gypsy'. Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p.59) emphasise that the issue here is not so much about being an insider or an outsider necessitates:

> *… disciplined bracketing and detailed reflection on the subjective research process, with a close awareness of one's own personal biases and perspectives, might well reduce the potential concerns associated with insider membership.*

The key point here concerns the ability of the researcher to provide a narrative that endeavours to research participants' perspectives and experiences of the social phenomenon being researched.

Doing research from feminist perspectives does not encourage an intentional separation between the researcher and the researched community. The relationship between the two is mostly discussed through encouraging researchers to establish rapport or friendship. Qualitative feminist research problematises this relationship by rejecting the essentialism that is suggested by the dichotomous separation between the positions a researcher (whether 'insider' or 'outsider') could have in relation to the participants (Fay 1996; Dwyer and Buckle 2009; Brown 2012). Reflexive feminist research encourages fluidity and multi-layered understandings of the human experiences. Being a member of a group does not mean complete sameness, and not being a member of group does not mean complete otherness (Naples and Sachs, 2000). Referring to Fay's (1996) analysis concerning the importance of the 'other' in relation to the 'self', Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 60) develop their notion of 'the space between' which refers to 'the ways in which we are different from others requires that we also note the ways in which we are similar'. This notion provides a fluid space for the dialogue between the different positions (namely, 'insider-outsider') a researcher might have in relation to the participants.

By being a Roma woman who grew up in a Roma family and having worked with various Roma activist groups in Serbia, the UK and elsewhere, I was able to develop my knowledge about Roma issues in a way that helped me not only understand the experience of Roma students accessing higher education, but also to improve my knowledge about myself. This reflexivity positions me in a more 'insider' position vis-à-

vis my participants, which further facilitated my access to the researched community. The contacts, including the gatekeepers, were all a result of the connections I had with people from living and working in Serbia before I began my doctoral research. I wonder whether I would have had this much success in finding participants if I had not been involved in Roma rights activism. Almost certainly I would not have done. One of my gatekeepers was an NGO called the Vojvodina Roma Centre for Democracy in Novi Sad which works directly with Roma students in the area where my research was planned to take place. Therefore, I was able to ensure that all my interviews were arranged in advance by my gatekeepers, this saved my time and reduced my costs, and enhanced access, and ultimately the depth, richness and granularity of my data. Although the story of my access to my researched community might seem to suggest an unproblematic notion of insiderness, my status as an 'insider' was in fact problematic and fluid. Up until I went to undertake the fieldwork, I thought that I was unproblematically an insider in the community that I was going to study. However, upon arrival at the hotel in which I stayed during fieldwork, I found myself speaking to the receptionist in English. Unconsciously, I spoke in English to a receptionist instead of Serbian, a language that we both spoke as a mother tongue. This was the first incident that led me to scrutinise my position as whether I was insider, or outsider or something of both. Further scrutiny occurred when I introduced myself to some of my participants. Though I spoke in Serbian, I found myself saying that I was a doctoral researcher from a Western university who wanted to study Roma students' experience in higher education. Through my introduction, I declared my belongingness to the Roma community; however, I contradicted this by claiming to be different when wearing my researcher's hat. This made me question who I in fact was relative to my participants, initially felt very uncomfortable with my new uncertain 'self', however. I could not easily identify myself and my positionality, and this feeling of being 'incomplete' which made me very uncomfortable, feeling that I was not the 'complete' Roma as I had hoped to be (Hinton-Smith, Danvers, and Jovanovic, 2017). This feeling of being an 'incomplete self' did not last for long. As soon as I started to communicate with participants and gatekeepers in Romani I felt as if I were an insider again, and sensed the appreciation on the face of my participants.

However, talking about the interview and my fieldwork unconsciously distanced me to a position that revealed my differences to the researched community. This made me wonder whether I was switching between two opposing identities, or whether these identities were interconnected. I was not aware of what name to give this uncertain feeling, but 'incomplete' seems to come close. During the interviews my incompleteness was evidenced by the way I would use 'you', 'us', 'we' and 'community'. In the interviews, I realised that I often used these different words to refer to the participants as being different to me, and other times I found myself included in them. This meant that I had spent my fieldwork in a 'space between' (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009), a reflexive awareness of this helped in my analysis of the data. This made me wonder to what extent was I 'writing myself' in my research, as if I were producing a kind of autobiography related to my socio-cultural contexts. Although this vacillating in the 'in between space' did not seem to have negatively influenced the interviews, it has significance regarding the research and the type of knowledge produced: this needed to be acknowledged. Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p.57) strongly advise researchers to consider their shared and unshared experience the as 'this issue confronts both researchers who are members of the group they are studying and those who are not, for there are costs and benefits to each status'.

Negotiating the insider-outsider binary made me appreciate how it is not really a binary at all, but more of a continuum, one's positionality on which is dynamically shifting. This understanding helped in gaining information about the issues I was researching. Floating in the 'space between' allowed me to gain access to information and knowledge I would not be able to access otherwise, and at the same time instigated my emotional response that positively affected the type of questions I asked afterwards. As a researcher, I am part of the process of the research and I do not claim to have any naïve objectivity, but rather a personal set of relationships to the various, different aspects of my research.

Also, I explored 'the space between' when talking to my female participants. In that space, I was aware of the different positions I embodied, which included my being a Roma women who shares certain experiences with female participants who came from

the patriarchal Roma culture that had influenced our upbringings. At the same time, I was aware of the differences between us in that I had a Western education, was living abroad and thus was relatively privileged vis-à-vis my participants on the ground in Serbia, with all the oppression and marginalisation that involves. Utilising what Few et al (2003) and Brown (2012), term as 'sister-to-sister talk', I was able to gain the participants' trust through forms of cultural competences and mandates and talk about home issues that they would not often allow researchers of another ethnicity to discuss with them. Although I was well positioned to build rapport with my female Roma participants, I was very careful not to overstate the familiarity, so as not to assume cultural homogeneity (Moffat, 1992). Being a Roma woman researching other young Roma women did not allow access to more data, but allowed me to different data because of my shared identity with these participants, and improved the depth and richness of the data gathered. The similarities between us did not suggest that we were identical, nor did it assume that all the young women that I interviewed were part of a homogeneous group. This situation is elegantly rephrased by Moffat (1992, p.207) when he states that 'identifying with "them" does not necessarily mean you are like them, or that they are like one another, or that they all trust or identify with you, or that they want to be studied by you'. Conducting such 'sister-to-sister talk' made most of my female participants open to me, trusting that I would represent their private experiences appropriately.

Struggling in the 'space between' did not only happen in the fieldwork, but it was included through the process of writing the proposal and preparing for fieldwork. During those stages, I discussed (and continue to discuss) aspects of my research with some of my close non-Roma colleagues. Most of the time the discussion would start with an anecdote about Roma communities and their struggle, to explains a point in my research. While doing that, it is the researcher's identity as an insider to this research community that is often foregrounded. However, I have realised that sometimes this can get very emotional, and it occasionally made me feel offended by some comments my friends made about the Roma or the context of the study. When this happened, I would start my 'defence' by saying something like 'you were not part of this oppressed group and so you won't understand….' Reflecting on the ways in

which such narratives developed with my friends and the way I responded to them highlights the tension within my hybrid insider-outsider identity. Most of the time, I feel more of an outsider when talking about Roma affairs, feeling that I am closer to this group of non-Roma friends with whom I am always happy to share my Roma personal space. However, when they ask or made comments that show their outsiderness regarding Roma issues, I unconsciously distance myself from them and assume a position that is much closer to my being a Roma 'insider' rather than an 'objective' researcher. As a researcher, I feel happy to discuss technical issues about the topic and my research ethics and methodology, but sometimes I realise that I see in the topic several personal stories that relate directly to my own personal experiences as a Roma woman. Being aware of my positionality in this regard has allowed me to be very careful during the fieldwork as to the extent to which my emotions could influence my interaction with the participants and the processes of data collection.

During the process of conducting my doctoral research, I feel I have changed a lot as a Roma woman in comparison to when I started. I am no longer the same young Roma woman who came to the University of Sussex to study a Master of Arts in International Education and write her thesis about Roma education in Serbia. I realise that I am as Roma as my participants, and that I probably share similar stories and experiences with them which could reveal my 'insiderness', but I also understand that I am different to them because of the type of Western education I have received, my experiences of acquiring knowledge at university, the length of time I have spent abroad from Serbia, my fluency in English, my reading in the literature, and my access to relatively privileged networks and spaces. Most of these experiences that I have had since I started working on Roma issues and my education stress my 'outsiderness' in relation to my Roma insiderness. This tension between these two aspects of my personal and professional subjectivity allows me the freedom to float between 'neither nor' in the 'space between'.

4.7 Participant Recruitment

4.7.1 Study Location/ Field

This study has drawn fifteen (15) participants out of which ten (10) are Roma students from the University of Novi Sad and five (5) are Roma activists working with Roma students from Novi Sad, Vojvodina (north of Serbia). The rationale for choosing this university was that, firstly, is in the province of Vojvodina whose Educational Secretariat office is thought to be one of the best regional offices in providing support for Roma students accessing higher education in Serbia (Kresoja 2007). Additionally, the University is renowned for its implementation of inclusive policies in the form of fee waivers and scholarships specifically for Roma students and as a result has relatively large number of Roma students studying there. Thirdly, the University of Novi Sad is the only university in Serbia known to have a Roma Student Association as part of the student union (Kresoja, 2007).

4.7.2 Data Collection

I conducted life history interviews. By 'life history interview' I mean: a life-story that is told to a researcher by a participant; which is more than merely descriptive and contains nuance, expresses perception, feeling, emotion and affect; and which provides cultural, economic, educational, political or social context as to why the life developed in the way it did. Life history data was enabled through semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions (Goldman et al, 2003). The interview sample consisted of ten (10) Roma students. These interviews on average lasted about three and half (3.5) hours. Interviews were conducted in an office arranged by my gatekeeper at times prearranged for me. While I would have loved to select my participants myself, my gatekeeper was helpful in finding willing participants on my behalf. Aware that this would have brought up ethical concerns about willingness I had to actively ensure that these participants were in fact willing by going through a strict consent process. This willingness to take part in the study was encouraging, but at the same time it was emotional for me to witness their eagerness to share their life stories and not to have anything in return. Also, some of the experiences, specifically for six of the participants were so emotive and I could not help but cry when they recounted

family experiences of poverty and experiences of racism they had in early primary school. Having said that, their accounts of resilience to pull through their disadvantage were equally heart-warming as their stories of oppression were upsetting. The interviews with professional field-workers from NGO's were semi-structured and lasted about an hour and half. These were conducted at the participants' convenience: most of the interviews were conducted in the participants' offices.

4.7.3 Sampling

My initial plan was to conduct six life history interviews with students from Vojvodina University of Novi Sad. However, using the gatekeeping arrangements I had in place I managed to recruit ten student participants. Of these, three were law students, four were studying mechanical engineering, two studied pharmacy and one was a business administration student. With regards to gender, five were female and the other five male. For the professional participants, I achieved my goal of interviewing four from organisations involved in Roma advocacy, and had an additional interview with a country facilitator for an international organisation, the Roma Education Fund. Throughout I used pseudonyms (see the Table 2) to protect anonymity in what is a relatively small community.

Table 2: Student Participants (pseudonyms)

PARTICIPANTS (pseudonyms)	GENDER and AGE	OCCUPATION	AREA OF STUDY
Jagoda	Female, 25	Student	Tourism and Hospitality
Milijan	Male, 23	Student	Law, Department of Internal Affairs
Jela	Female, 22	Student	Pharmacy
Borko	Male, 20	Student	Graphic engineering and design
Blagoje	Male, 24	Student	Faculty of Technical Science at department of Energetics and Process

			techniques
Jakov	Male, 23	Student	Faculty of Technical Science at department of Energetics and Process techniques
Ana	Female, 23	Student	Law
Darinka	Female, 23	Student	Energy and process engineering
Marko	Male, 20	Student	Law
Vanja	Female, 24	Student	Pharmacy

4.8 Why Life History Interviews?

The 'life-history interview' methodology is also known by other labels: these include narrative, autobiographical and auto/biographical research within the wider field of biographical research methodology. The use of the term 'biographical methodology' denotes research that utilises individual stories or other personal documents to understand lives within a social, psychological and/or historical framework (Merrill and West 2009). The life history interview is the most appropriate data collection method for answering 'why', 'how', 'what's it like' and 'what does it mean to you' types of questions (Goodson and Sikes 2001). Such types of interviews help the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the personal experiences of the interviewees. Life history interviews are mostly about the personal, the emic (cultural knowledge) and the idiographic (individual case) experiences of the individuals, in contrast to more positivist methods that seek to establish objectivity (Goodson 1992). In addition, such interviews not only highlight the aspects of an individual's experiences that the researcher intends to explore, but also brings to the research aspects from the history of the individuals that might have shaped their subjectivities and their perceptions, but of which the researcher might not have been aware Bullough (1998, p. 24) suggests that such research is predicated on the idea that 'to understand an educational event one must confront biography', while Plummer (2001) suggests that:

> *… life story research at its best always brings a focus on historical change, moving between the changing biographical history of the person and social history of his or her life (p.39-40).*

Accordingly, the life history method is appropriate for my research, since I am seeking to understand the personal educational experiences of Roma students in higher education. Life- history interviews are well-suited to this research because, as discussed above, Roma students' accessing higher education is not simply a matter of outreach, enrolment and numbers, but rather is shaped by the students' long-term experiences with and engagement with a complex of often oppressive and marginalising cultural, economic, historical, political, social and structural factors.

All interviews were face-to-face in-depth, informal, unstructured life history interviews (Kvale 1996; Reay et al 2001), conducted in the Serbian language, in which I am fluent and highly literate. I shared some of my life experiences with my participants to establish trust, confidence and a 'common ground' between us, encouraging participants to be open and frank (Goodson and Sikes, 2001) I used open-ended questions, aimed at capturing the nuances of (Goldman, et al, 2003) of participants' histories, experiences in education, motivations for taking part in higher education, and their experiences in accessing higher education. I was alone with my interviewees during the interviews (Walsmsley, 1995, p.73). Reflecting on my status as an 'insider' researcher relative to my students enabled me to better establish a rapport with my participants, and conduct the interviews in a sensitive and ethically informed manner (Walmsley, 1995, 73-4). I took steps to ensure that the participants 'owned' the research in that they were aware of its context and purpose, were comfortable in offering their data and felt in control of it, and were confident in my ability to accurately represent them through data gathering and analysis (Walmsley, 1995, 74-5)

To better understand the barriers and enablers that Roma students encounter in accessing higher education there was the need to consider events over their life courses including early life educational opportunities. Therefore, using life history interviews enabled a deeper understanding of how students from marginalised

communities negotiate and overcome hurdles to accessing higher education (Reay et al 2001; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Gorard et al 2006). In conducting the interviews, I tried to remain aware of ways in which the social setting frames the interviews and shapes that data, and of the problematic nature of 'truth' in life narrative interviews (Walmsley, 1995, p.74), and endeavoured to treat all aspects of the narratives as informative and therefore as data. In conducting the interviews, I sought to capture the ways in which each participant 'storied' their life as they offered a narrative about it, and in the phase sought to relate this to the participants' cultural, economic, educational, political and social contexts (Adriansen, 2012, p.41), seeking to capture the participants' perceptions of their lives and their 'life worlds' (p.42).

In using life-history interviews, I was exploring how participants' different individual experiences, aspirations and difficulties in education intersect with wider public discourses, cultural beliefs, customs and socio-economic circumstances. In doing this, the purpose was to avoid the common trap of presenting people's experiences as homogenous and internally coherent (Abu-Lughod 1991). Instead of producing a smoothed-out narrative of perceptions and experiences, these interviews revealed the personal contradictions, conflicts and contestations that shaped Roma student experiences in HE in Serbia, and the dilemmas they face in their daily lives.

In the course of planning my methodology, I became aware of some of the limitations of the life narrative methodology: almost inevitably, this methodology will involve only a small number of participants, so that this kind of qualitative data cannot necessarily be generalised in the same way that quantitative data can be (Goldman, et al, 2003) – with life narrative data we are dealing with the individual experience, the personal-political, and the embodied, so when analysing the data it will be necessary to locate these experiences in their cultural, historical, institutional, political-economic, and social contexts; further limitations might involve issues of forgetting, false memory, embellishment and aggrandising on the part of participants – care in conducting the semi-structured interviews will go some way towards mitigating such tendencies, however, I will also seek to triangulate student-derived data with a parallel set of semi-structured interviews with local professional Roma NGO workers working in Roma

inclusion in Serbian higher education, allowing me to identify areas of commonality and difference between the two sets of narratives, these two different yet related sources of qualitative data, in combination with data gathered through the literature review, enabled me to address some of the limitations of the life history narrative qualitative method (Goldman, et al, 2003; 577). Issues related to my participants' positionality, supposed shared understandings, and relatively equal power relations as discussed above might be thought of as an advantage of the life narrative method, as discussed above. However, given my similarities with my participants, there is a hidden danger that I might remain unaware of my own role in the construction of their narratives, creating a convergence of opinion that might not necessarily reflect their unmediated views, but rather represents the ways in which my participants and I co-constructed narrative in the specific context of the interviews (Adriansen, 2012, p. 51). To a degree, this co-construction is an inevitable consequence of being a close 'insider' to my participants, using this form of qualitative data collection. Nevertheless, as a researcher, maintaining an awareness of this dynamic during the interviews and the data analysis process helped me to retrieve from the data much of what was unique to the participants' narratives, while acknowledging that a degree of co-construction is almost inevitable in this context.

During the life-history interviews (Kvale 1996; Reay et al 2001), I obtained long, rich and in-depth narrative data. However, an important limitation of the data as presented in this dissertation concerns the relative brevity of the data selected above. As detailed in the chapters above, Roma students in higher education are very few relative to the size of the Serbian Roma population. This posed major challenges for anonymity and confidentiality. Moreover, they face, again as detailed above, a complex intersection of marginalisations and oppressions. These include social and structural racism in society at large, including the threat or even the use of racially motivated violence; severe economic and social inequalities that act as a very significant barrier to Roma participation in higher education; active discrimination in university, both institutional and from peers, faculty and support staff; high drop-out rates including 'constructive drop-out – analogous to 'constructive dismissal' in employment – whereby the lives of Roma at university can be made so difficult that drop-out becomes almost inevitable; very poor progression and employment

prospects; and for female students both patriarchal resistance to participation in higher education, and racialized sexual harassment or even sexual assault in institutions of education at all levels. Details of students' experiences of these are presented in the data below. However, the smallness of the potential participant pool makes it very easy for the student-participants to be identified, even using anonymisation; this, combined with the potentially serious consequences for participants of being 'outed' as a participant in this research renders participants both a 'hard to reach' population and a 'vulnerable or at risk' population (Kennan, 2016). The ethical concerns arising from this situation meant that it became ethically impossible for me to present here long life-narratives in all their richness and nuance, creating a significant research limitation; however, ethical concerns regarding the confidentiality, well-being and even safety of the participants had to be paramount.

4.9 Semi-Structured Interviews with Local Roma Non-Governmental Organization Workers

In addition to the students' life history interviews, I conducted five semi-structured interviews with Roma activists who directly support Roma students. They were used to gain more in-depth understanding of some of the issues mentioned in the research questions, such as policies and initiatives, Roma culture, and gender issues. These interviews would enable me to triangulate data from my life history narratives, since otherwise I would not be able to identify issues of embellishment, aggrandisement, false memory and forgetting that sometimes are part of life history narrative data. Denscombe (2007) suggests that using such interviews helps with the exploration of the complexity of the phenomena. Cohen et al (2000) and Yin (2003) argue that semi-structured interviews help to provide in-depth understanding of the phenomena, while keeping track of the issues the research seeks to investigate. Further, this type of interview allows the respondent the freedom to respond in a way that may raise new questions.

In using semi-structured interviews to gather life history data, I could explore the perspectives and opinions of the people who are working at the local level to provide

support for Roma community. The Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) worker shed important light on the many issues that Roma communities face, and provide vivid narratives about compatibility and contingency between the policy and the reality.

4.10 Data analysis

The data gathered in this research were analysed using a thematic analysis approach (Vaismoradi et all., 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method involved 'identifying, analysing and reporting themes within data' which are further used in interpreting various aspects of the research (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 79). The life-narrative data gained through this process was analysed according to the following themes, which in turn related to the sub-questions above, which are addressed in detail in the conclusion to this dissertation:

1) Policies and interventions and how they affect Roma participation
2) Racism, exclusion and the Roma as a Serbian ethnic minority
3) Poverty, and socio-economic and socio-cultural factors affecting Roma participation
4) Gender, sexism and patriarchy
5) Aspirations

From these were developed sub-themes to better categorise the data:

1) Policies and interventions and how they affect Roma participation
   - Serbian state and governmental policies and interventions
   - NGO/international policies and interventions
   - Institutional policies and interventions in Serbian high education
2) Racism, exclusion and the Roma as a Serbian ethnic minority
   - State/structural racism
   - Social racism
   - Institutional racism
   - Peer and faculty racism

3) Poverty, and socio-economic and socio-cultural factors affecting Roma participation

- Poverty and social and economic exclusion
- Poverty as a barrier to participation, completion, and progression
- Social class
- Cultural perceptions of the Roma/Roma perceptions of the majority culture

4) Gender, sexism and patriarchy

- Gender discrimination and Roma education
- Social and institutional sexism
- Sexism and racism
- Patriarchy in Roma and majority cultures

5) Aspirations

- Aspirations for attainment and progression
- Aspirations for career and employability
- Aspirations for the social elevation and development of the Roma minority
- Aspirations for mentoring
- Aspirations to promote inclusivity and contribute to the wider Serbian society

This approach was useful because, unlike other forms of analysis, it is not attached to any theoretical framework, and thus can be applied to any approach depending on the aim of the study (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Each of the above-mentioned sub-themes I have analysed and unpacked to be able later on to respond to my sub-research questions and later to the main research question.

One of the requirements of thematic analysis was that I did the transcription, where my proficiency in Serbian set me in good stead. Therefore, prior to analysing data from interviews, the first step was for the interviews to be transcribed and translated, this I undertook myself; to ensure accuracy I had a Serbian-speaking proof-reader double-

check the translations into English, in the light of the discussion around the problematics of being a researcher-translator discussed above.

Doing this has helped me to understand the data more clearly, and begin the preliminary analysis. After transcribing, all data were uploaded into Nvivo computer software used for managing the analysis of qualitative data. Nvivo was useful for analysing and organising data into themes. The transcription phase involved identifying initial, common themes that emerge from the data, to allow codification and organisation of the data, and subsequently analysis and inductive theorisation. Using Nvivo identified further themes that I added to those identified in the earlier phase. The interview transcripts were analysed to identify patterns and to categorise and organise the data into initial themes (Kvale 1996; Frith and Gleeson 2004), supplementing the themes identified during the transcribing phase.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

I was aware of potential ethical questions arising from interviews around issues of Roma identity. These involved representation, because of the negative stereotypical views common in Serbian about Roma people. Being identified as Roma is not something that Roma people who are trying to succeed in Serbia may always want to publicly declare. Therefore, there was a risk that people may take offence if I had approached them assuming they are Roma. This aspect of the study was handled very carefully, and therefore I needed to ask questions in a sensitive manner. I sought to preserve confidentiality using anonymisation and pseudonyms; a limitation of this approach, however necessary given the precarity of my participants, was than it would probably raise ethical concerns were I to reveal richer demographic data on my participants – while this would be highly desirable from the point-of-view of data richness, the non-maleficence vulnerability of my participants is paramount. The right to decline to answer questions and the right to withdraw from the research at any time was assured. Care was also taken to ensure that interviewees understood that the proposed study is not connected to any institutions or government departments to which they may be affiliated, and that participation is entirely voluntary. Data collected were anonymised and stored in a password-protected computer to ensure

the anonymity of organisations and individuals who took a part in this research. Furthermore, transcribed MSWord documents have been protected with a password. This study was conducted under strict University of Sussex ethical codes of conduct, which are referenced to national and international standards, and subject to ethical review and approval, which was required from the University of Sussex prior to commencing any fieldwork activities.

4.12 Conclusion

Above I have discussed key features of feminist approaches to my research. I started by outlining how and why the post-colonial feminist approach is useful in exploring experiences of Roma students in higher education in Serbia. Intersectionality (Collins, 1998; hooks, 1981; Crenshaw, 2013) was positioned as a suitable theoretical lens through which to analyse the subject as the participants experience multiple, intersectional forms of discrimination based on the identities. The chapter also included a discussion on the issues of emotions, voice and researcher positions and how they shape the research process. I considered the advantages and limitations of giving voice and my position as Roma researcher in investigating these issues. I have argued that although these issues pose challenges to the research process, taking a reflexive approach is useful in dealing with the limitations that these issues present.

CHAPTER 5: EXPERIENCES OF ANTI-ROMA RACISM IN SERBIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

5.1 Introduction

In my literature review in Chapter 3 above, I discussed the impact of institutional racism on the Roma's access to higher education. I argue that institutional processes and cultures can create an environment in which racism exists and persists via policies, and exacerbated by a socio-cultural milieu in which negative attitudes towards certain groups, such as the Roma, go unchallenged. I argued that even the acts of individuals should not necessarily be perceived as isolated incidents occurring to random unfortunate individuals, but should be understood in the broader socio-historical context in which they take place because institutions should have an ethical responsibility to develop cultures of inclusivity and mutual respect even for marginalised. Therefore, when individuals act in a discriminatory manner and are not reprimanded, their actions are in effect sanctioned by the institution. I drew on Sara Ahmed's work (2012) on policy and performativity to show how attempts to address discrimination via policies, such as affirmative action in the Serbian context, and practices of institutional racism can easily become ways for an institution to 'keep face' and avoid further scrutiny while discrimination and institutional racism continue persist, adapt and mutate. Therefore, a critical analysis of discrimination, inequality and the attitudes of higher education institutions in relation to the context of Roma access to higher education are required.

In this chapter, I present findings on the impact of discrimination on Roma students in higher education in Serbian. Using data gathered from the life-history interviews of Roma students in Serbia, I answer the research sub-question: 'How do experiences of discrimination and institutional racism affect student access and participation in higher education?' To understand the influence and interaction of different kinds of discrimination on Roma access to Serbian higher education, I will start by discussing racial discrimination, including peer harassment. I will then focus on gender

discrimination from socio-cultural perspectives, and self-discrimination at the intersection of racism and gender in institutions of higher learning. By self-discrimination I mean an individual's internalisation of social forms of discrimination so that the individual manages and polices herself in such a way as to unwittingly embody, enact, and reproduce racist and patriarchal expectations.

5.2 Institutions and Racial Discrimination in Higher Education

Historically, racial discrimination has been shown to exist in many societies and, in terms of access to higher education, the impact is felt by groups perceived to be different (Dotterer & Lowe, 2015). Discrimination includes the specific social attitudes of systematic racial discrimination within the institution, as well as the wider social and political structures. As Ahmed (2007; 2009) explained, physical or verbal violence toward those considered 'other' is not merely an individual act, but reflective of wider institutional attitudes of racism. My experience whilst conducting my research was that it was common for participants to talk about experiencing discrimination as part of the educational system that negatively affected their experiences and contributed to a struggle throughout the educational process, including accessing higher education. They talked about systematic exclusion based on their skin colour and ethnicity, and the effect of this on their experience of education and the learning process. My participant Milija stated that as a student in primary school he was labelled by ethnically 'white' children as being 'disabled' because of his Roma ethnicity:

In primary school I remember going to a school with white children who considered me disabled; not because I was disabled, but because I was Roma and considered incapable of learning.
(Milija)

Another interviewee described an instance where a lecturer stereotyped her identity due to the colour of her skin:

When I came to the professor to register my exam score -- that I passed with nine out of ten – the professor asked me: "Sorry, where are you from?" When I responded that I am from Novi Sad he said "Because you are dark skinned I

thought you were from another country." I could see he was surprised that a Roma woman passed the exam with a nine and already finished the study. (Jagoda)

The above quotations illustrate how ethnicity and skin colour can create prejudiced expectations of the capabilities of Roma students. They also provide examples of how racial discrimination can often be embedded in Serbia, via attitudes and practices. The Roma are often classified within the education systems in the region as being 'disabled' or having special needs because of their skin colour and ethnicity (O'Nions, 2010; Ilisei, 2013). There is often an assumption that all Roma children are remedial, for example. (Telles and Steele, 2012) This seems to be in keeping with the Black feminist arguments regarding 'pigmentocracy' that I discussed in Chapter 3. This suggests that racism is based on the assumption that people with dark skins are incapable or less capable compared to people with white skins (McGarry, 2017 2012; Telles, 2014; Lynn, 2008) In the Serbian context, it also illustrates how educational institutions, instead of challenging racism, become places where racism is nurtured and perpetuated. it is not only peer who categorise Roma as disabled, official assumptions about Roma intelligence in the education and healthcare systems mean that they can end up in special needs or segregated schools with limited resources and support to help them progress through the education system (Shattuck, 2012). Regarding segregation, O'Nions wrote in 2010 that

> *The Roma have been victims of assimilationist educational strategies, which promote one national vision for education while applying a deficit theory. The focus on deficit has also led to widespread educational segregation.*

This means that while segregation has now been prohibited across the EU (and there for the new and aspirant EU states of the region), meaningful integration is proceeding at a very slow pace. Moreover, while separate schools for Roma and non-Roma children are now illegal, many institutions are resorting to 'internalised segregation, whereby Roma children are educated in the same building but not in the same classroom as non-Roma. The effects of segregation are significant, damaging career prospects through low attainment, limiting attainment, and damaging ethnic relations,

promoting intolerance and suspicion of the other (2010, p. 9-10). In the context of segregation/desegregation Ryder et al (2014) observes how:

> *…desegregation within schools and communities needs to be aligned with wider structural change. Present forms of governmentality encompassing neoliberal and assimilative policy agendas and 'responsibilisation' … individualises and pathologises Roma exclusion. There is a need for governmentality as applied to the Roma issue to be supplanted by new policy approaches predicated upon social justice … In effect there needs to be a fusion of 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches where at the grassroots aspirations can be articulated and partnerships formed to deliver and monitor policy.* (p. 534-5)

My data underlines the ways in which the legacy of segregation and other forms of institutional education in the Serbian school system is perpetuated into higher education, career, and almost certainly throughout the lifespan. As stated in Chapter 2, many Roma drop out of school at an early age, reducing further the numbers who progress to higher levels of education. According to statistics by UNICEF (2010), only four per cent of Roma children population attended pre-primary school, compared with 33 per cent of non-Roma children in Serbia. Moreover, lack of attendance leads to high dropout rates, especially in higher education. From my interviews, it emerged that institutional racism is apparent in more than just the recruitment process. It is also demonstrated in the actions of those in positions of relative power and authority over Roma students, such as lecturers, tutors and university administrators who casually draw on common social stereotypical views about Roma:

> *… the criminology class professor, there I had lot of problems. Actually not, actually yes ... He is lecturing about stealing. In an amphitheatre in front of 600 students he starts talking about how Gypsies stole his bike. Then in his next lecture about house burglary he again gives Gypsies as an example. In another lecture he is talking about a Gypsy drill for stealing. In fact, it is not called Gypsy. It is a hand drill. But he referred to the drill as a Gypsy drill because it was about burglary.*
> *(Milijan)*

The word translated as 'Gypsy' here is *chigani,* a highly pejorative and racist Serbian word for Roma comparable to the 'n-word' used for people of colour, or the English

word 'Pykie' for 'Gypsy'. This quote illustrates the extent to which racism is often embedded in Serbian institutions, and how it plays a role not only in shaping student participation in higher education, but their experience of racism in general. In this context, stereotypical cultural views about the Roma as thieves, lazy, incapable or even congenitally 'disabled' are manifested and, ethically and professionally, are problematic for the institution if they are institutionally enabled rather than challenged. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Phillips (2011) argues from a postcolonial perspective that racialisation spans the micro, meso and macro levels. In his argument, individual prejudice and racialised discrimination are still a dominant ideology. These quotes show just how low Roma people are regarded in society by some individuals, and the ways in which they are prejudicially criminalised and even pathologised. The data also demonstrate how individual acts of racial discrimination (the Criminology professor giving examples of Roma as thieves) cannot be considered as exceptional, but rather as a collective act if not punished by the institution and guarded against by its principles and mission. Philips (2011) also asserts that institutional racialisation gradually accepts the numerous disadvantages experienced across connected experiences, created through institutions' regular operations, regardless of the intent of individual actors. In the case of Roma, being perceived as 'other' along racist lines has become so normalised that institutions do not recognise it as a problem.

> *… one classmate, Rista, was making very pejorative and bad jokes about gypsies in front of me and everybody was laughing in the class. I was always feeling embarrassed after that. Like I did something wrong."*
> *(Jela)*

> *…whenever they say something bad about Roma I can't do anything. I think it is pointless. No-one thinks it's wrong. And I don't want to cause trouble for others or for myself by telling them it is not right. I have to live with it.*
> *(Jakov)*

The students' experiences described in the above quotes, show how acts and attitudes of racism are normalised in Serbian higher education institutions, not only by academic staff, but also by Roma students' ethnically Serb peers. Apparently, even today, despite the various initiatives outlined above, it is acceptable to publicly make racist

jokes and derogatory comments about Roma in Serbian institutions of learning. Roma students are also expected not to respond to such discrimination. Their decision to remain silent, illustrates a desire not only to not be perceived as a troublemaker, but also demonstrates an acceptance that the expression of negative views about Roma is 'normal'.

Accusations of racism can damage the reputation of higher education institutions if unacknowledged and not rigorously responded to. As creators and shapers of knowledge, such institutions have the power to normalise such racist and anti-social behaviours and attitudes such as racism. As Ahmed (2012) states, 'describing the problems of racism can mean being treated as if you have created the problems' (p. 152). Endorsement of these views is not just about the individual, but is also widespread in society. My interviewee's silence and feeling of wrongdoing, shows how she sees herself as an 'outsider within', as feminists of colour were considered within white middle class feminism (Collins, 1998) as I discussed in Chapter 2. Through a postcolonial, feminist lens we can see how experiences of oppression and marginalisation based on skin colour intersect with patriarchal oppression, and issues of identity and gender. The subordinate attitude of the interviewee is also linked to gendered cultures within a patriarchal society, which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

When left unchallenged, acts of discrimination encourage others to behave in a similar way thereby perpetuating racism. This is demonstrated by the fact, according to my participant, the professor not expect to have his racist views challenged; apparently, nobody, apart from my interviewee, in the class expressed a view that his comments might be offensive. Within higher education institutions, academics create and influence student behaviour and, as an authority figure, might be said to reflect the collective attitude of the institution, if he goes unchallenged, the institution is complicit (Phillips, 2011). However, if identified and called by its name, institutional racism 'becomes personalised' because it becomes about the reputation of the institution (Ahmed, 2012 p. 146). And when it comes to reputation, the success of the individual is interpreted as a collective success whilst a failure remains that of the

individual because an institution's image – and 'whiteness' - must be protected - 'promoting diversity can be a method of protecting whiteness' (p.147). The 'whiteness' in my context is the majority white population of Serbia. So why is there this disparity in the interpretation of success versus failure and the collective versus the individual? It is the way in which higher education institutions 'allow racism and inequality to be overlooked' (Ahmed; 2012, p.14) whilst appropriating the 'language of diversity' when necessary: something similar is happening in Serbia, where, despite the anti-racist measures mentioned above, and measures to promote Roma inclusion in Serbian higher education, anti-Roma institutional racism within higher education apparently continues with impunity.

In this way, institutional racism not only affects the pre-existing values of the institution, but also inhibits the new diversity agenda if individual attitudes are ignored by the institution or viewed as individual failures 'bad apples', 'a rotten egg', rather than institutional failures. It is also worth noting that it is difficult to hide a negative stereotypical attitude by an institution via its members when the focus of the racism is a visible difference, such as skin colour. In my research, it was interesting to see how the issue of skin colour appeared to shape my interviewees' identities and sense of self. As Lynn (2008) argues, whiteness is highly valued and is thus at the top of social hierarchy, while dark skin is at the bottom: Serbian national identity is predicated in large part by whiteness. Of further interest is how the pigmentocratic racist hierarchy relates skin colour to intelligence (Lynn, 2008). Most of my research participants felt that their skin pigmentation had an impact on their learning experience at university. They described how experiences of racism led them to adopt a negative self-image and an acceptance that their skin colour was problematic, ultimately developing a guilt about being dark-skinned. The majority also believed that, if their skin was lighter they would have received more favourable treatment and have access to more or better opportunities. One participant who wanted to work for the police said:

> *'…It is very difficult for an employer to accept Roma working in the police. It is normal to prefer a white person…also…. I had always problems approaching a girl if I am a dark -skinned boy myself … There is always the fear issue linked to*

how people react -- not to mention the rejection of their friends and family…'
(Milija)

This quotation illustrates a form of self-prejudice (Major et. al, 2003), the forming of a negative self-image based on the pre-conceived ideas of others, a lack of confidence and fear of following a profession; not being accepted because of one's skin colour has come to be perceived as 'normal' because it is no longer questioned in Serbian society – hence the ultimate futility of approaches to Roma inclusion based on enrolment and numbers. Clear divisions based on skin colour exist because of the assumption that skin colour determines personal character and ability. Harrison & Thomas (2009) asserted that race is still one of the most commonly used descriptors in modern society: 'skin colour is more salient and regarded more highly than one's educational background and prior work experience' (p. 1340). A sentiment reflected in the following quote from a Roma student participant:

> *'…After first class … he (the professor) asked us to turn the computers off but I didn't know how to do it. He was standing behind my back … I unplugged it and everyone laughed. He told that story to everyone … I asked him what to do, but he told me we learnt that already. I told him I wouldn't have asked if I knew how to do it, but he just told me to try to remember and gave me a negative mark.'*
> *(Blagoje)*

> *'… I do not know if it was luck or not that I did not have this problem because … I am not dark- skinned -- it is not so obvious … My uncle has a lot of problems because he is very dark- skinned.'*
> *(Borko)*

Here, again, we see an example of self-subordination based on a lack of self-confidence and internalised perceptions of inadequacy predicated upon on an arbitrary pigmentocratic set of prejudices on the part of the majority community.

5.3 *Racial Peer Harassment: An Institutional Problem?*

Peer harassment is described by Olweus (1978, p. 218) as an 'uncompromising clash', including physical and verbal violence, mistreatment, oppression and social manipulation -- such as social exclusion, itself a form of what Johan Galtung has called 'structural violence' (1969). 'Structural Violence' refers to a form of violence where in some social structure or social institution may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. Institutionalised ethnocentrism, nationalism, racism, and misogyny are examples of structural violence.

The key component that categorises peer harassment from general peer conflict is the imbalance of power between the offender and the target (Olweus, 1978). Olweus identifies differentiations between peer conflicts, bullying, harassment and peer abuse which I have found crucial to my research because of the imbalance of power between the minority Roma students and the ethnic Serb majority. I use the term 'harassment' in my study to describe physical and verbal violence, or abuse performed by those in authority as well as peers, based on racial, cultural, gender and other differences (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995). The problem of peer harassment has long been recognised, with many studies focusing on the perpetrators rather than the victims of bullying (Olweus, 1978). The consequences of peer harassment and bullying, as described by Olweus, can leave a lasting effect on the target. For a long time, it was assumed -- mistakenly -- that non-aggressive, socially harassed children were not at risk of developing long-term adjustment difficulties (Parker & Asher, 1987). Current literature, however, shows that children who were victims of peer harassment or rejection frequently experience problems later in life, such as lack of confidence, feelings of isolation, social anxiety, and depression (Juvonen & Graham, 2001; Olweus, 2003, 2007). In an ethnically diverse classroom, students who are in a statistical minority are likely to be more exposed to harassment and vulnerability (Phillips, 2011). Several participants of my research shared their experiences of physical violence in primary school by their peers based on their skin colour:

> *'... Here children discriminate more. I don't blame them … I was beaten every day by other kids. … They didn't beat me hard inside the school, but I would always fear my way back home... I don't recollect very well, but kids would yell, "There he is!", and chase me like in cowboy and Indian movies. I had to run to*

save myself. '
(Blagoje)

The quotation not only illustrates the fact of the interviewee's experience of racial violence in school, but also how he lived in fear because of it. The context described shows a broader picture of societal views on difference and race which are reproduced and sustained within the school environment. The confidence to behave violently on the part of some white Serbian children derives from their majority dominance and sense of superiority, entitlement and impunity -- based on their skin colour, views inculcated, perpetuated and reproduced by their families, the wider society, and key Serbian institutions, including education and higher education. The interviewee here does not seem to blame the children who were violent toward him. Instead, he attempts to understand and justify their behaviour, whilst viewing his skin colour as bad luck (as did Borko). This ingrained perception is continually reinforced within poor Roma society and has a deep, negative effect on children's confidence which they take with them into the school environment. Gordon (1989) describes the consequences of this as the 'hidden injuries of racism', evidenced in the quotes below in which interviewees tell of how they ultimately refused to go to school:

> *'…One day, my mom woke me up for school and I refused to go. She asked me why. I didn't explain. Just said I was done with school … '*
> *(Blagoje)*

> *'… we had a sports class and they (classmates) were calling me 'Gypsy [Cigani]'. Because of that I was fighting twice with them and I was always beaten by them… Once they beat me by kicking me badly because I am Roma. Then I said to my brother that I do not want to go to school anymore… Then my brother went to school and fought with all of them… That's how I am now studying…'*
> *(Jakov)*

Generally, those perpetrating peer and social harassment tend not to be identifiable by particular behaviours or personality characteristics, but rather are reflective of the wider social environment in which children are socialised and exposed to the values and beliefs of those around them. This is how children learn who to like and dislike. The impact of experiencing racism from an early age can result in low self-esteem and have serious negative effects on both the physical and mental health of schoolchildren

-- especially those already vulnerable due to lack of social support and acceptance (Juvonen and Graham, 2001). For them, the effects of harassment are generally internalised and accepted, leading to self-discrimination that I will discuss further in the next section. Individual acts of racism can be viewed in relation to the broader context in which they take place. Racism is often nurtured and perpetuated by society and results not only in the harassment of Roma children in school, but of any ethnic minority group, such as ethnic Hungarians Serbian Jews, Muslims, and others (CoE, 2017). Acts of harassment in turn have a negative impact on children's experiences of learning and educational success. Some of my interviewees talked about their shock at their white peers' sense of impunity when talking about Roma as non-human on Facebook:

> *'… Recently one girl posted on Facebook that Roma people are not human blah blah blah … Roma are the hot topic now in a negative sense … Then she went on our (Roma) celebration to make a picture and wrote 'who said that I am not allowed to go to a Roma celebration?'…*
> *(Ana)*

This quotation illustrates how harassment can take place unchallenged, and how the perpetrators escape facing any consequences. It also shows how culturally embedded racism has become, to a point where there is not even a hint of awareness of how one's actions and views may do harm. For Roma children experiencing racial harassment, the impact on their self-worth and confidence in educational terms is such that many ultimately require various levels of support and adjustments made to mitigate the difficulties they face to participate in school and remain motivated to go further to study higher education, as discussed above, school drop-out rates for Roma children are high. In the absence of institutional support, peer support, family support and social support, it is almost impossible for Roma children to sustain continued involvement in education. They are left to manage the situation for themselves somehow, acclimatising to -- and even justifying -- racial harassment against them:

> *'I didn't realise that [was discrimination] I didn't want to. It would discourage me and I lived better without [acknowledging] it…'*
> *(Marko)*

Here Marko articulates how it seemed better for him not to realise the reality of racism, but just to live with it, as if it were the natural order of things, Borko says something similar, that racism is almost a 'right' for the racist, and tries to conform with normative Serbian attitudes:

> *'…friend of my friend came and says something negative about Roma in front of me. I feel very bad but I do not say anything… he has a right to his opinion…what do I have now to argue with him? … I feel very unpleasant inside me '…more and more I am thinking like my Serb classmates and I do not see prejudice anymore.'*
> *(Borko)*

For Ana, casual, unchallenged racism renders peer-to-peer higher education interactions almost impossible:

> *'… I have colleagues in the classroom who will hardly exchange two sentences with me…'*
> *(Ana)*

The above quotations illustrate some of the difficulties that anti-Roma racism cause for Roma students in higher education, and how these difficulties negatively impact their educational experiences. They also show how racial discrimination is linked to power: in addition to emotional hurts experienced by the Roma students as targets of racism it is expected that the Roma must suffer in silence, surely a serious institutional failing of the first magnitude. Interviewees talked of suppressing their anger to avoid causing trouble and adding to established negative prejudices against Roma people. This is closely linked to what Sara Ahmed describes how somebody who is reporting the racism will be considered as a trouble maker (2012). Ahmed observes that when a black person stands up to racism, they are often seen as being forceful and exaggerating of the original incident, coining the term 'defensive fantasy' (2012 p.159). They can also be viewed as threatening and aggressive because of the general stereotyping of black people. The oppressed are expected to accept their subordination in return for a highly conditional tolerance and a temporary suspension of physical violence and intimidation, just to 'fit in'.

However, it would be wrong to assume that all Serb students are racist in this way:

> *'… all of them know that I am a Roma woman and they do not have anything against it. For example, one girl she grows up in Vranje where there are a lot of Roma next to the Roma house and she said to me: ' I do not have anything against that really'. And they are fine with that (being Roma). This helps me a lot because if they do not mind then I do not mind as well.'* *(Jela)*

The fact that there are Serb students who are prepared to be tolerant of the Roma is a further indictment of the institution for its failure to inculcate a meaningful culture of anti-racism, and its complicity in normalising racist behaviour.

The quotations above show how discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation impacts on Roma students' perception of themselves. There seems to be a general belief -- and acceptance -- that their skin colour is indicative of something being wrong with them, a kind of self-pathologisation. Understanding why this happens would be helped for understanding how the power of discourse and relations between the subjugated and powerful works. Roma students who find themselves able to accept a 'disabled' tag because of their ethnicity simplify their lives by being better able to put up with humiliation and harassment, it is a self-reinforcing vicious circle.

Peer racial harassment should be treated in the same way as violence and abuse in school. Teachers tend to be more tolerant of verbal harassment among students because it lacks the evidence of blood and bruises (Bodensteiner, 2000). When a student claims harassment, a dispute often initially occurs regarding whether the confrontation indeed took place (Bodensteiner, 2000). However, in the Serbian context schools themselves can act as spaces for reinforcing, rather than challenging, racist views and tendencies. Not only might the institution itself *have de* facto practices of classifying Roma as disabled based on their skin colour, but also Serbian teachers' attitudes often reveal a lack of will to challenge racist attitudes and actions. Hence, racial harassment continues to be proliferate in Serbian schools and educational institutions generally, including higher education (see Rorke et al 2015, p.

60 for a discussion of how educations systems in DRI countries can serve to construct and perpetuate antigypsism).

The above discussion illustrates how discriminatory attitudes are prevalent in Serbian society and how individual acts of racism play out in the Serbian educational context, shaping the experiences of Roma children. I have also shown how racist views about Roma should be seen in the broader socio-political context in which they take place: racism develops and is nurtured -- not just by individual acts, but by the socio-cultural and political context in which people find themselves, and institutional racism within schools, universities and other public institutions. Understanding racism in the Serbian educational context requires a broader understanding of how politics, institutions and culture interact to bring about discrimination.

5.4 Gender Discrimination: An Intersect of Prejudices

Gender discrimination intersects with racial discrimination in the complex of unequal social relations that so often thwart, despite policy initiatives, Roma access to higher education and other acts of inclusion. It is widely agreed that patriarchy brings with it the subjugation of women; in hegemonic society men are seen as being more worthy of investment in education than women. Men are also seen as more likely to take leadership roles which are better paid than those of most women (Ravnbøl, 2010). In my study, female participants talked of their struggles as girls in the education process. In their accounts, it emerged how gender oppression intersected with racism to shape negatively their higher education learning experiences and environment. As discussed in my literature review in relation to the correlation between higher education enrolment and family background, I emphasise that in any patriarchal context -- not just the Roma community -- family has a crucial role in creating the opportunities to secure the future of the next generation (McPherson and Schapiro, 2006). Family support in relation to education seems to be primarily for males, with an expectation that females will merely get married (for a case study in the Romanian context see Ilisei, 2013).

Traditional Roma patriarchal culture is very evident in the pervading attitude that women are primarily expected to be homemakers and carers, with the fear of racialised rape as a factor justifying non-participation in secondary education:

> *'... I was not encouraged to go to school at all. My mum did not allow me to go to secondary school because she was afraid that somebody would rape me there...'*
> *(Jagoda)*

Or gender roles within the 'patriarchal family' as a further inhibitor for participation in higher education:

> *'… my grandmother…. she was telling me 'What are you going to study? Study is not for you. You should get married' … My parents have always expected me logically as a girl to clean the house, go to the shop … always to be divided who are men and who are women in the house … That was normal, but now I am changing my opinion about the patriarchal family. I do not like it.'*
> *(Jela)*

The above quotations suggest that Roma girls have a double burden of socio-cultural and personal expectations – the fear of racialised rape at school and patriarchal expectations of gender roles at home intersect to form a powerful racist-patriarchal and social-familial inhibitor to Roma women's participation in education beyond the most basic level: here is a good example of multiple, intersectional oppressions at work affecting young Roma women wishing to succeed in secondary and tertiary education (see Ilisei, 2012 and Kyuchukov, 2011 for parallel examples from Romania and Bulgaria).

Those wanting to depart from general expectations are more likely to have problems building their private and emotional lives, and risk rejection by their communities. Rejection does not come about because of education *per se*, but because of the expected age that girls should marry and have their own families (Ravnbøl, 2010). Girls who prioritise their own education beyond a certain age often have difficulty establishing their own families within the Roma community because they will be considered too 'old' for marriage within the patriarchal familial context. Accounts from

NGO staff indicate that female Roma students who do manage to start a higher education degree often drop out of university in their second or third year because of fear of racism and/or family pressure regarding their eligibility to marry (UNICEF, 2014):

> '... girls who are studying […] have problems to find a boyfriend. Many of those girls are alone ... That is a very big problem that we can realise for all these years ... They are not accepted in the community from where they come ... There exists the fear that there are not going to get married never, ever so they drop out from university and get married if there is opportunity. For example, my sister was the best student at Pedagogy University, but in the last year of her study she ran away with a boy illegally to Austria to get married. She never finished her study ... Also, we have another girl who met someone in her last year of the study and she got married in two days.' (NGO staff)

Because of these societal attitudes, girls are more likely to be excluded from education than their male counterparts (Kyuchukov, 2011). The unequal treatment of girls is evidenced in Jela's grandmother's question "*What are you going to study?*" and her sharing of the widely held cultural view that girls should marry and have a family of their own. The quote above also makes clear that cultural expectations within the patriarchal family are gendered – by misogynist assumptions and expectations about women's ability to study. The implication is a double discrimination of Roma girls relating to what Collins (2002) calls 'the matrix of domination' in which multiple factors conspire to subjugate. In the case of female Roma in Serbia, their chances of accessing and, ultimately, completing education are greatly reduced both relative to men and relative to Serbian peers (Jelčić, 2014). An unequal view of eligibility for education between genders is not just prevalent in Roma society, in Serbia the extent to which sexism is shown and experienced depends largely on social class (Ball, 2010). To challenge structural racism and sexism, however, Roma women also have to challenge and deconstruct patriarchal power structures, thereby highlighting the multiple subordinations and struggles they face in accessing higher education.

5.5 Self–Discrimination or Internalised Oppression: Race and Gender

Above I have described the role of the patriarchy in discrimination. I have shown how institutions, institutional policies, and culture all play a role in influencing the experiences of Roma in education and impact on access to higher education. In the section on gender above, I explain how Roma experiences of accessing higher education should be viewed in the context of intersectionality by considering how gender and racism intersect to complicate the marginalisation of Roma women particularly. Collins' (2002) 'matrix of domination' describes how marginalised but internally diverse groups relate to different factors (gender, class, citizenship, sexuality, disability) creating multiple marginalisation. Therefore, to better understand racial discrimination in the Serbian higher education context, there is a need to focus not only on exclusion and marginalisation based on ethnicity, but to consider additional factors that reinforce and multiply marginalisation and exclusion. Hence, intersectionality within post-colonial feminism forms the theoretical framework of this research.

5.6 Racism and Self-discrimination

In addition to the issues of gender within an institutional context, there is a need to consider the impact of racism on Roma subjectivities and the influence of this on Roma educational prospects. As Crocker and Quinn, (1998) state, experience of racism and discrimination can lead to low self-esteem and related mental health conditions. If continually challenged or ridiculed, self-esteem can be radically diminished, resulting in self-perceptions of worthlessness. Continued racism -- not only in the form of physical and verbal abuse, but also from negative messages and images gained implicitly or explicitly from institutions, individuals and general society -further weaken positive self-image (Hill, 1999; Whaley, 1993) as the following quotes attest:

> *'I went through a phase when I felt it was pointless to live because it really makes you feel depressed that you are seen differently by people because of the colour of your skin. Especially at school I just felt useless…'*
> *(Darinka)*

At school, Jela's ethnicity became an object of ridicule from her Serbian peers:

'…I had the feeling that everybody was looking at me differently… It was obviously my skin colour… I felt very strange. …. I decided to tell them: 'I am Roma'. They did not believe me. They were thinking that I am going in a solarium and that I am joking… '
(Jela)

The above quotations illustrate the impact of racism on the interviewees' self-perception and outlook on life. Clearly, Jela went to school with an understanding that her skin colour would be a problem for her based, one might assume, on previous experiences of discrimination. While relaying this experience in her interview, Jela appeared to be uncomfortable and continually looked at the floor. Her attitude might be explained by what Sara Ahmed describes as 'discomfort' and lack of self-confidence resulting from 'failure to fit' in (2012, p. 155). The impact of this failure to fit can be self-isolation to avoid unpleasant encounters, as well as self-discrimination whereby individuals choose to avoid or remove themselves from mainstream society by refusing to take part in, or access is services, including higher education. In my study, accounts of participants removing themselves from the education system were common. As were experiences of not taking part in events outside of the Roma communities, Borko hesitated to be officially declared Roma to access affirmative action initiatives:

'Affirmative actions are really good because you have a lot of advantages … but … you need an official letter to declare yourself as Roma … It's negative because of prejudice'
(Borko)

Jakov self-silenced:

'…I could never talk normally with them and I would try to avoid them when I saw them. Or I would just answer yes or no [because] I was afraid of what I might tell them because they can negatively interpret or abuse my words. I've learned that people do not have a positive attitude. This was happening through my whole education.''
(Jakov)

These interviewees appear to have made an apparently considered decision to avoid social events or activities involving non-Roma people. What is significant here is how

their reasoning seems to be linked to feelings of discomfort and shame associated with their experiences of racism (Blum, 2002). The following quotes relate specifically to school dropout:

> 'When I was younger in primary school, I dropped out of that school. It was just that I couldn't do it. I was failing and really felt like a failure. I had been bullied and called names because I was Roma. I didn't say that was the reason at the time, but it played a big part.'
> (Jakov)

Marko felt that racism made education not worth the effort:

> 'I changed courses … I was constantly called names and then I decided it was not worth it.' (Marko)

> ' … I think most young people drop out of university because they think, "If Roma are not capable or cannot be employed, why bother with studying?"…'
> (NGO staff member)

These individuals chose to exclude themselves because of their experiences of racism demonstrating that being continuously subjected to racism becomes deeply embedded in one's mind and ultimately influences the decisions one makes. As other participants stated for example Ana admits to even avoiding showing affection for her boyfriend in public as the colour of his skin gives away his racial identity:

> 'He has dark skin, and they (classmates) know we are all the time together … we do not hold hands … We keep pain to ourselves' (Ana)

By not holding hands the couple hopes to avoid embarrassment and distance themselves from the negative image associated with Roma in their society. In so doing, they reject and deny their ethnicity, and internalise their 'pain'.

Milija self-pathologises, '*I had no confidence in myself … I was convinced I had a defect because of my colour*', whereas Borko felt he could pass-for-white, '*I hid that I was*

Roma … It's not so obvious for me because I am white. I can fit in.' Whereas Jela felt shame on account of who she is, '*I was ashamed because I was Roma.'*

These Roma students seem to have internalised dominant ideas about the shamefulness and defectiveness of being Roma, or the supposedly inherent superiority of whiteness. Although often it begins as a kind of survival strategy, self-prejudice ends up supporting and legitimising the social racism from which it seeks to hide as these students eschew education, marry early, and hide their identity (Joksic, 2015). Those born with a whiter skin consider themselves fortunate, as it allows them better to hide their ethnicity: by 'softening' (appearing less black) their appearance some they hope to be perceived by the dominant community as less 'aggressive' and thereby less subject to prejudice (Ahmed, 2012, p.160).

The actions taken by Roma students because of racism, discrimination and prejudice, such as dropping out of school early and hiding or rejecting their ethnicity, ultimately contribute to racism and the very stereotypes Roma people are constantly fighting against, that is the Roma's supposed lack of interest in education or being seen as 'disabled' because of their skin colour.

5.7 Gender and Self-discrimination

In addition to self-discrimination resulting from experiences of racism, gender and racism intersect to bring about gender-based self-discrimination. Jagoda dropped out of university to get married and for financial security:

> *'It's more difficult for us girls, because we are expected to be wives … So, at*
> *some point I stopped the course to get married obviously because I couldn't*
> *afford to pay the fees…'*
> *(Jagoda)*

Whereas Ana's friends dropped even out of secondary school for similar reasons:

'I know many other girls who stopped school to get married. Of course, their

own decisions…'

(Ana)

The ubiquity of this practice among young Roma women was confirmed by an NGO worker, with racialised rape and assault as a further driver of dropout:

'… in the last year of secondary school … girls disappear …at the ages of 17 or

18 they disappear. Because they are expected to get married, they do not need

to go to school because sombody might attack her, and she might lose her

virginity (according to their parents).'

(NGO staff member)

These quotes show how the issue of gender in a patriarchal society adds to the marginalisation of girls, particularly in relation to education, as female Roma students decide to exclude themselves from education:

' …being Roma obviously meant that as a girl I had to handle the pressure from my family to study. At school they did not give us support since we were seen as incapable of studying'
(Jagoda)

For Darinka pressure from the patriarchal family and the casual racism of the teachers intersect to form a patriarchal-racist and familial-social barrier to participation in education:

'.. I know I am expected to be a wife, but it is hard when family pressure you to leave school and … My teacher would say Roma girls never make it in education. She says they will end up getting married early anyway….'
(Darinka)

Roma girls must manage both established cultural gender roles and expectations insofar as they must be wives first and foremost and accept that they are not deserving of investment in education, and also established racialised views that Roma

are incapable in terms of education. This double bind offers powerful evidence of the complex or prejudices and exclusions behind the lack of representation of female Roma in education.

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have used qualitative data gathered in the field to illustrate how intersectional discrimination impacts on the educational experiences of young Roma. I have also shown how institutional racism -- by way of educational practices and socio-political and cultural contexts – influences the educational experiences of young Roma negatively. I have shown how understanding institutional racism and discrimination in the Serbian context, and its impact on access to education for Roma, requires more than just a focus on racial discrimination in the classic sense. Rather, it must be considered in the context of how acts of everyday racism impact on the very identity of Roma people and how, under such conditions, the Roma have come to the view themselves. Roma people are often seen as responsible for the perceptions made about them, without sufficient understanding of how and why their actions are the result of widespread and deeply embedded racial discrimination combined with patriarchal oppression. Thus, it is also need to consider an intersectional approach (Collins, 1998) to better understand how discrimination can lead to poor access and completion rates for Roma in Serbian higher education.

CHAPTER 6: POVERTY AS A BARRIER TO ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION

6.1. Introduction

The previous chapter has illustrated how discrimination affects students of Roma origin in their educational journey to access higher education. This chapter will build on the intersectionality explored above to illustrate how poverty intersects with racial discrimination and patriarchy in impacting the experiences of Roma youth and wishing access to higher education. Using data from interviews with Roma students in Vojvodina, I will illustrate how poverty intersects with a broader socio-political and socio-economic context to impact on access to higher education – specifically for the disadvantaged Roma community. The chapter begins by outlining the relationship between poverty and discrimination and describes how it shapes life chances for the Roma minority in Serbia. Thereafter, it explores the pathways in which poverty operates in limiting educational attainment for young Roma children from poor backgrounds in Serbia. Finally, this chapter investigates the struggles of the few Roma students who do manage to enrol into higher education institutions, and argues for the consideration of the broader definition of widening participation as discussed in Chapter 3 above in higher education level to reduce the influences of poverty and discrimination on limiting access.

6.2. Poverty and Discrimination

Over the past three decades, researchers have explored the issue of poverty from multiple dimensions. Although most have been concerned with the ultimate alleviation of poverty, they tend to offer conflicting perspectives on the issue. As described in Chapter 2, poverty does not refer only to a lack of income, but also to limited access to opportunities for human development. Lister (2004) conceptualises poverty in this broader sense and from non-materialistic aspects, such as lack of voice, self-esteem and dignity, as well as shame, stigma, denial of rights, and diminished citizenship demonstrating how a lack of material resources can have a negative impact on a non-

materialistic sphere of society in terms of unequal access to citizens' rights. Discrimination is an issue frequently associated with poverty. It is described by Bobo and Fox (2003, p.319) as 'a complex system of social relations involving actions, subtle or overt, that serve to limit the social, political, or economic opportunities of particular groups.' Discrimination has been historically linked to a plethora of contemporary social issues such as poverty (Austin, 2006), although there are limitations to the range of social research methods that can be used to quantify and effectively measure discrimination in social settings (Austin, 2006).

That discrimination is worsening the issue of poverty in Serbia is evident from the negative perceptions of the Roma community in society. International bodies have cited apparently high rates of unemployment among the Roma, who constitute approximately two per cent of the total population (UNICEF, 2014). Popovic & Stanković (2013) more specifically report that only 51 per cent are employed out of the 74.9 per cent of the Roma in Serbia who can work. Roma employment tend to be on part-time and/or on short term rather than full time permanent jobs. Despite being a young population, 70 per cent of those aged 15-59 years have never been employed. Moreover, there is little research data available on European Roma populations, which are widely settled across the continent and often stigmatised by the mainstream population. Most recently, a census carried out in the UK in 2011 indicated that the Roma populations – along with other minority populations -- are not treated equally within the general population (EU-UNDP, 2012). In Serbia, census reports on the Roma are incomplete as Roma often decline declaring their ethnicity (and other details) for fear of alienation, racism, and hostility (Dawson, 2016). Roma populations have been known to engage in 'ethnic mimicry', where they identify with part of the majority population to avoid pejorative stereotyping (Miskovic, 2013). Although considerable efforts have been made to tally the numbers of these minority populations, there exists no complete picture depicting the state of education within the Serbian Roma populations (Miskovic, 2013). This lack of basic foundational data complicates the direction of research on the issue.

As discussed above, discrimination in education for the Roma population is evident at multiple levels. The position of the Roma in Serbia illustrates the magnitude of the situation where 66 per cent of the population lives in poverty (UNESCO-IBE, 2012) and more than 50 per cent of adults are uneducated. In comparison, only a fifth (20 per cent) of non-Roma Serbians are uneducated (Roma Education Fund, 2007). Familial financial difficulties and social discrimination account for the largest percentage of dropouts from education in the country (Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2015); this is a worrying situation, given that education is of key importance to the economic advancement of Roma in the country (Dawson, 2016). From a feminist perspective, opportunities accorded to women in Roma society are less attractive still: Less than 30 per cent of the female Roma population in Serbia have meaningful employment (UNICEF, 2014) and even fewer are employed formally. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2006) in Serbia, the unemployment rate among Roma women is four times greater than that of men. Moreover, most Roma women (51.4 per cent) are functionally illiterate, complicating their access to life opportunities (Joksic, 2015) and perpetuating the cycle of poor living conditions – particularly among the disadvantaged majority of Serbian Roma.

There is also the issue of legal invisibility, whereby the identity of many Roma individuals is not legally recognised, and an unknown number of Roma have come to Serbia from Kosovo, due to even worse difficulties with war and conflict there. This phenomenon has led to a *de facto* situation among the Roma and has presented a major difficulty for the minorities as they try to access government services and utilities (Joksic, 2015). Discrimination is rooted in the most basic of processes in Serbia, from a general lack of information, to civil registration, access to financial services and means, and discrimination within higher administrative offices. The Serbian judiciary system has also been subject to several accounts of discriminatory judgements against Roma through varying interpretations of current laws. According to Jelcic (2014), legal invisibility 'is an inherited phenomenon, with the parents and grandparents of young Roma equally excluded from the Serbian legal system.' This is despite the fact that Serbia has ratified to the following universal laws: the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial

Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education (Roma Education Fund, 2007, p. 20). Legal invisibility increases the likelihood of Roma girls participating in risky behaviour, such as drug abuse and unsafe sex (Jelicic, 2014). Nationally, little regard has been given to discrimination; laws have often been formulated from initiatives instigated by the international community, rather than by the domestic government (Dawson, 2016).

The lack of a proper monitoring system on the extent and quality of education amongst young Roma is another indicator of discriminatory practice within Serbian governmental administration. Only four per cent of young Roma children engage in what should be mandatory pre-school education – with many Roma not staying in education beyond primary school (Jelicic, 2014). Tellingly, the Serbian government has been reluctant to provide the resources to initiate affirmative measures to encourage young Roma to enrol in secondary and higher education institutions (see Chapter 2); this is illustrated by a female interviewee currently studying law in Serbia:

> '*For me, it is horrible that the Government give a quota of only two per cent for Roma and invalids. That is very little and limited.........should be different … should not limit us to less than two per cent. (Ana)*

Within the same argument (note the bracketing of Roma and 'invalids'), it is necessary to consider that the illiteracy rates amongst the Roma limit their access to life opportunities, a further form of structural violence. A study by the UK's Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that children living in poverty are more likely to have low achievement levels (Chowdry, et al., 2009). Perpetual discrimination from a tender age propagates low achievement, which in turn establishes attitudes carried into the future. Serbia's educational system has not provided an enabling, multicultural environment, which might foster the intellectual development of young Roma children. There is also an absence of a plan to help students from other cultures enjoy the educational benefits of the local educational system through the provision of infrastructure, staff, and other resources that promote the process of learning. A study by UNICEF (2014) concluded that educational systems in most European countries are

short of the requirements necessary to provide an enabling environment for Roma children who are often segregated. The situation is further exacerbated by age limits for enrolment, which stipulate that primary school enrolment should begin at the age of eight and half years with late admission restricted up to 16 years (Joksic, 2015). Roma adolescents, many of whom fall outside this age group, are thereby denied the chance to become literate in a society in which literacy is essential to life success. Subsequently, they are forced to enrol in adult schools that do not have the appropriate pedagogic approach and no not impart the skills needed to begin the educational journey.

Many organisations have officially stated that assessment within the Serbian school system is discriminatory for Roma. UNICEF, for example, asserts that the systems used to gauge student performance in Serbia are rooted in linguistic and cultural bias (UNICEF, 2009), resulting in the limitation of Roma students' educational performance and their achieving of insufficient marks to advance their education. Moreover, general Serbian society has adopted the stereotypical mind-set that education offered by schools attended by Roma is of lesser value (Joksic, 2015). This could be at least in part due to the inflexibility of the Serbian education system that does not acknowledge or allow for the difficulties in communication that Roma children often face (Miskovic, 2013). Additionally, the lack of recognition of foreign certifications -- such as diplomas and degrees -- perpetuates the dire hardship of Roma lives (UNICEF, 2014).

Thus, Serbian society has played a pivotal role in promoting poverty through discrimination, and institutional constraints have prevented a consensus on the impartial treatment of Roma. According to the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (2014), most administrators within the Serbian education system do not have the means or capacity to identify discriminative practice and apply due process for penalisation. These limitations arise from the failure of the country's Ministry of Education to outline standard procedures that recognise types of discrimination against Roma among school stakeholder groups -- ranging from third parties in institutions to fellow students within minority groups (UNICEF, 2009). This is despite the presence of the doctrine of the Bases of the Education System (Article 44 part 4) in the Serbian constitution established a few years ago (Roma Education Fund, 2007).

Consequently, Roma children have grown up in a niche that reinforces their lower position in society, often characterised by abject living conditions and poor income hindering further educational advancement.

The Serbian government has failed to acknowledge the presence of Romani culture among Roma populations (Miskovic, 2013). In the Serbian education system, schools rarely recognise the Romani language as a component of multicultural diversity. Joskic (2015) asserts that education in the national minority's language is rarely offered in mainstream schools. Recent research carried out by the European Union discovered that the problem stems from institutionalised racism in the training programmes for Serbian teachers (Popović and Stanković, 2013), which did not cover multicultural education or mutual respect, especially regarding students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Essentially, a discriminatory perspective was ingrained from the outset and therefore not recognised or considered as an issue to be addressed or challenged.

The gap between poor Serbian Roma and poor non-Roma Serbians is an important indicator of the degree to which the former suffers marginalisation, discrimination, and exclusion in Serbian society. Roma in Serbia are treated with disdain, and considered unworthy of support or respect (EU-UNDP, 2012). Destitute non-Roma Serbians are perceived as being in need and requiring support and respect (Amnesty International, 2012). This unbalanced perception pushes Roma ever further below the poverty line and therefore into the margins of public life. European Union funding designed to help those most in need in Serbia between the years 2007 and 2013 was not spent on alleviating the problems of the Roma who still have outstandingly high rates of unemployment and individuals living in poverty (EU-UNDP, 2012). However, international and regional polities, including the UN and EU, have noticed Serbia's discriminatory practices and attempted to institute mechanisms to mitigate them. The UN has extensively aided the Serbian government in closing loopholes in its legislation that allow prejudicial perceptions against minority communities (UNICEF, 2009). The EU made respect for Roma and other minority groups an official target, which must be achieved before Serbia can join the European Union (Roma Education Fund, 2007).

These somewhat feeble efforts at inclusion, driven by external pressures from the UN and EU, which include educational policies to aid the Roma specifically, have ultimately fallen short of achieving the intended outcomes for economic and educational improvement. Combined with other challenges -- such as barriers within employment and employability -- the situation for Roma in Serbia has ultimately worsened with the population sliding ever further into poverty with poor living standards, health and education (Joksic, 2015). The reliance on formal education to end poverty within a system that is defunct is not adequately supported by corresponding job opportunities within the private and public sectors. Additionally, the tightening of the vice of discrimination within the labour market has significantly undercut viable opportunities for those who are qualified.

Overall, the discrimination against the Roma amid a conglomeration of factors -- such as bad living conditions, poor wages, and nutrition -- has further worsened the gap between rich and poor. As some of the most marginalised individuals in the country, a history of derogatory stereotypes has created a substantial gap between the mainstream and minority communities (Miskovic, 2013). An overview of the Roma educational system has revealed significant rifts between the theoretical and practical applications of reforms; most policies appear to serve merely statutory purposes while the situation on the ground challenges the logic of their framing. Although the intervention of regional and international organisations may have increased the pressure on the Serbian government to foster inclusive policies, most stakeholders within Serbia's educational system remain prejudiced, preventing Roma individuals from achieving educational success (Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2015). Additionally, hurdles in the employment sector, such as prejudicial hiring procedures, further frustrate successful Roma students of the chance to work and earn the type of salary that would bring real difference to their lives.

6.3. Poverty and Education for Young Roma

The poverty into which most Roma in Serbia were and are still born impacts on opportunities to gain the necessary standard and level education to subsequently access higher education. The effect of poverty on educational opportunity starts at pre-primary education level and includes primary, secondary and pre-university education. According to the UNDP (2014), the average length of schooling for Roma in Serbia is five and a half years -- the average is 11 years for non-Roma (UNDP Serbia, 2013). Motives for abandoning school vary widely and include family economics, lack of change in educational institutions, high rates of discrimination, and lack of support for future generations to overcome difficulties in learning (UNICEF, 2014). Persistent socio-economic handicaps have severely affected young Roma outcomes in education and limited their chances of accessing higher education (Roma Education Fund, 2007). Poverty is inversely correlated with educational attainment (Iqbal, 2006). However, outlining the influence of poverty on education is complicated because of the interaction of the dynamics involved and the complexities of grasping its benefits (Coley, 2013).

One of the main influences of poverty notable in the Roma population is readiness for school. According to Ferguson and Bovaird (2007), readiness for school education establishes a child's ability to progress in academic and social contexts in educational environments. This preparedness involves proper cognitive development, emotional wellbeing, positive attitudes towards new experiences, as well as general knowledge and skills for the appropriate age group. Various studies have shown how poverty affects the readiness of a child for school in the dimensions of neighbourhoods, home life and health (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Ferguson, et al., 2007).

Roma children that brought up in poor settings are held back by social disorganisation and limited resources for child development (Amnesty International, 2012). The influences of the neighbourhoods are concomitant with child and adolescent outcomes (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). The home environment involves variables such as learning opportunities, parent-child interactions, the warmth of family life, and physical housing conditions. Longitudinal investigations for outcomes on the HOME scale – consisting of a myriad of factors assessing the home environment -- revealed

that there is significant correlation between the quality of living spaces and income (Ferguson, et al., 2007). For most Roma populations in Serbia living conditions are often bad (Joksic, 2015). Drawing from research findings by Ferguson et al. (2007), these conditions may well have a negative effect on the cognitive development of young Roma.

The school environment is an amalgamation of factors affecting a child's psychosocial development in the context of the educational environment (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Poor Roma children are not able to access quality education in Serbia due to the prevalence of discriminatory practices in schools (Ribeiro, 2014). With a limited range of alternatives, parents opt to enrol their children in schools that suit their economic conditions. As explained in section 5.2, these schools often have administrations that do not have the human and material capacities to eliminate inequitable practices. As interviewee Blagoje asserted:

> *'I was the only one with different colour skin. I would always be frightened going home. I felt like they were hunting me.' (Blagoje)*

Encountering barriers like this to their educational attainment, the situation can be very stressful for students wanting to do well at school.

Poverty also affects the health of children and families. Parents who live in poverty are more likely to suffer from poor emotional and physical health than those in better income positions (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997), and record high levels of anxiety affecting their cognitive, social, and emotional health (Ferguson, et al., 2007). If ill or injured, Roma most often visit doctors working in primary health care (62 per cent), whilst only 14 per cent are treated effectively. In many cases, serious health conditions remain untreated after diagnosis (Popovic & Stankovic, 2013). A study by the UNDP in Serbia found that the Roma population does not have access to quality health services whilst being more prone to chronic diseases than the majority population (UNDP Serbia, 2013).

Roma children live within societies that have very high incidences of poverty, which affect them from a young age. In search of evidence to support the correlation

between school readiness and poverty, social scientists have carried out several studies. A study by Magnuson et all. (2005) found that children from low-income families had a much-reduced vocabulary in comparison to those from financially stable families. Ferguson et al. (2007) also asserted that poor children are often enrolled at school at a cognitive and communicative disadvantage, and schools are rarely able to compensate adequately.

The effects of poverty for children born into poor families can be analysed serially based on their level of educational attainment. In a study investigating poorer children's level of education, Chowdry et al. (2009) looked at the variables affecting children's performance over several educational levels. They found that from birth to the age of five, children from poor backgrounds are already at a significant disadvantage in terms of emotional, social and cognitive development. Instead of levelling out over time, the gap between students from low and high-income families progressively widens as children grow and develop. Young Roma are also impacted by their social networks, their parents and their teachers who exert significant influence on their educational development (Chowdry, et al., 2010). As a result, Roma children often lack the skills required to prepare them for learning in an educational institution, lack of proper role models, and a lack of support (Chowdry, et al., 2010).

From birth through to primary school, the gap in educational achievement augments rapidly. By the age of 11, almost 25 per cent of children from poor backgrounds drop out of the education system (Chowdry, et al., 2010). In a longitudinal study conducted outside of the Roma context, Gregg & Washbrook (2009) found that poor children, who may have performed relatively well in primary school up to the age of seven, subsequently see their performance dwindle as they approach the age of 11; moreover, their performance is less likely to improve over that period. Children are supposed to perform well if they are resolute, believe in the value of education, have a sense of self-control, have no behavioural problems, and have not yet come into contact with discriminatory practices such as racist bullying or patriarchal marginalisation of girls. However, most studies assert that students from indigenous backgrounds often lack these attributes that subsequently has a negative impact on their educational advancement (Guerrero, et al., 2016). Psychological and social

factors account for the biggest gaps between wealthy and poor students (Chowdry, et al., 2010).

Gaps in educational attainment in secondary schools follow a similar trend to that distorting early education and primary school. Studies by Chowdry et al. (2009) suggested that gaps increase substantially between poor and relatively rich children; the author highlighted the importance of decisions made in early life in influencing achievement in the later teenage years. The researcher also noted differences in the families' expectations of secondary education; poor parents often have poorer expectations of their children in comparison to richer parents. This is attributed to less family interaction, limited access to facilities at home such as computers and the Internet, risky behaviour due to neighbourhood influences, and bullying. Differences are most marked, however, in relation to the expectations of rich and poor with regard higher education.

Ferguson et al. (2007) advance a hypothesis that spans the contexts of students' economic background and their social environments; they assert that children who lack consistent support from their families and communities have a higher probability of dropping out of or failing in higher education. As discussed earlier Roma populations are often treated with hostility by the mainstream population; therefore, educational stakeholders tend to be from mainstream society and treat those from minority populations as undeserving. Such is the environmental context into which most young Roma are born, and it is bound to negatively influence academic attainment as the student advances through the educational system.

It has long been asserted that poverty has an overarching and persistent influence over the performance of children in schools (Sutton, et al., 2007). The effects of poverty on behaviour are many, and come with additional socio-emotional variables. Young Roma raised in poverty are marginalised in this way. They are also at higher risk of exposure to the risk factors resulting in failure than those from non-Roma backgrounds. Haveman & Wolfe (1994) assert, in a non-Roma context, that for every 10 per cent increase in family income, there is a 0.2-2 per cent increase in the number

of school years completed by children and young people. Many longitudinal studies –
carried out particularly in the US and Europe -- have confirmed the link between
poverty and lower educational attainment.

Although the methodologies used may differ, most studies in this area indicate that a
reduction in poverty can increase levels of educational attainment (Brooks-Gunn &
Duncan, 1997). Furthermore, a study by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in the US
in 2013 showed that increases in income for poor families had a positive relation to
children's educational outcomes (Coley, 2013). The logic may be expounded in
economic or sociological terms: families with higher incomes are able to provide better
learning environments, improved nutrition and safer living conditions for the
development of their children. Equally, high quality parental interactions linked with
higher income foster positive cognitive and communicative development in children.

Overall, the influence of poverty on young Roma is far-reaching. They are early on
exposed to multiple drivers of poverty as they navigate through the educational
system. In most cases, these students' studies are derailed due to influences from
home and in the institutional environments themselves, which are host to various
social and psychological factors negatively affecting their cognitive development and
emotional wellbeing. Parents also play a pivotal role in the education of Roma
children, and shape the home environment. To increase educational attainment,
academic educationalists and social scientists have advocated mechanisms that reduce
children's exposure to risk factors. Important among these strategies is reducing
poverty through increases in income brought about by policies encouraging access to
higher income for minority populations. Other avenues are described in section 6.4
below.

6.4. Poverty and Access to Higher Education

In section 6.3, I outlined various drivers of poverty that many Roma in Serbia are born
into, and how their access to decent pre-university education is limited. Nevertheless –
and despite considerable odds against them – some Roma have been able to prevail

and successfully navigate pre-university education so that they are then in a position to seriously consider higher education. For Serbian Roma, however, this stage does not spell the end of their challenges. For instance, they are dependent on funding from organisations such as the Roma Education Fund (REF), which can impact their personal aspirations.

The value of higher education among poor families cannot be underestimated. According to Iqbal (2006, p.37), 'Education can help a family climb out of poverty directly by increasing household income, through increasing the productivity of self-employed workers, or by enabling access to higher-paid jobs.' Similarly, according to a report by the EU and the UNDP (2012, p. 21) 'Education determines future life chances, and is crucial for finding stable and decently paid employment.' However, the process of getting a college degree or certificate involves several steps before further or higher education may be considered, each with its own set of challenges. The low rates of admission, entry, and completion for young Roma in Serbia are clear – and given the challenges that most young Roma face in their journey through education this is unsurprising.

Entry into tertiary institutions in Serbia is incredibly competitive and based on grade averages accrued over the preceding secondary school level, in addition to enrolment exams as part of the admissions process (UNICEF, 2014). Many Serbian students prepare for these exams by employing private tutors. The lack of access to such resources for Roma students tends to result in their enrolment in less attractive higher education institutions taking less popular courses (Kertesi and Kézdi, 2013): Roma students often abandon further studies (Roma Education Fund, 2007) in favour of short-term opportunities that offer lesser, but more immediate rewards. Additionally, the progression of Roma students with lower grade averages through self-sponsored programmes to tertiary learning institutions is almost impossible without formal and stable employment.

Participation in and completion of compulsory primary education is a precondition of appropriate employment and access to further and higher educational opportunities

(Milovanovic, 2013). The alarmingly low rates of Roma enrolment presented in section 6.2 is not the only determinant of future life chances, but it should be a point of concern for Serbian educational systems. As stated in a report by the Roma Education Fund (2007, p.29), 'The most pertinent problems for Roma are their very low enrolment rate and very high dropout rate'. Completion of secondary school education is a gateway to skilled employment and/or higher study. As such, enrolment and completion figures are a predictor of the efficiency of a country's educational systems (UNICEF, 2014), and the Serbian education system is clearly failing young Roma.

According to a report by UNICEF (2014), children of Roma heritage in Europe have been adversely affected by several institutional barriers to accessing education. Chief among them are the heavy costs of education, which are incurred directly or indirectly. The endemic poverty of the Roma minority complicates the provision of even basic amenities, such as decent clothing to attend school (Popović and Stanković, 2013). The generally low perception of the Roma by school management, teachers, non-Roma parents and peers means that they are not supportive of Roma access to higher education (Ribeiro, 2014). In many cases, the ethos and institutional culture of many institutions alienates children of Roma origin (Joksic, 2015). The problem is exacerbated by the lack of teachers of Roma origin who might motivate the upcoming generation. Instead, educational staff are often deficient in the skills of classroom management and motivation, and often fail to meet the needs of children of Roma origin (EU-UNDP, 2012). Consequently, young Roma are less confident in their learning despite years of 'ethnic mimicry' and interaction with peers from the majority population (Miskovic, 2013). The rigidity of school systems – even insofar as assessment is concerned -- does not allow for Roma needs, and is detached from their daily life experiences (Joksic, 2015).

Growing up in deprived circumstances creates a daunting situation for older Roma students, particularly those who are expected to support their parents in sickness and in old age. In many cases, students and potential students prioritise earning money, often sidelining education to provide basic amenities for their parents and siblings. Although education is a fundamental human right under Article 28 of the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), there is evidently less effort dedicated towards improving the literacy rates of Roma children in Serbia. Studies by UNESCO emphasise that individuals who do not complete at least compulsory education are at higher risk of experiencing lifelong poverty and of not reaching their potential. The limited number of quality studies that exist to illustrate the returns of education in Serbia mean that there is a gap in consciousness of the dynamics of Roma poverty and educational attainment in the wider Serbian population.

Increased access to education is related to greater income equality (Omoniyi, 2013). According to Omoniyi (2013), increases in educational attainment can aid individuals living in poverty to seek better opportunities. As , under conditions of patriarchy, the basic unit of the society and socialisation, the family plays a significant role in furthering access to education (Austin, 2006). According to the Popovic & Stankovic (2013), low-income families sometimes prioritise higher education more than other levels of education and are often keen to enable their children to attend with their limited resources, to help improve their life chances. However, Roma parents tend to have responsibility for many dependents in conditions often of extreme poverty and marginalisation (Amnesty International, 2012), and families with over four children are unlikely to be able to invest in their children's higher education in the way suggested above (UNICEF, 2009). Therefore, Roma parents must prioritise costs and the promotion of education is inevitably viewed as less important than basic needs such as food and clothing (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). The situation is even worse for families of young Roma where a member suffers from a chronic illness, which due to poverty and poor housing and healthcare is frequently the case (Miskovic, 2013).

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Serbian Government provides student loans and scholarships for students in secondary and tertiary education. However, the amounts are usually low and cover basic costs only, such as accommodation and other simple expenses (Roma Education Fund, 2007). Similarly, scholarships offered by organisations such as the Roma Education Fund and the *Romaversitas* programme are usually awarded on supposed merit, as defined by hegemonic interests, with many young Roma failing to meet the necessary criteria (Momcilovic and Jovanovic, 2015).

Finance for Roma students does not cover all-encompassing education and is congruent to demographic factors. Families of Roma students are also entitled to forms of social aid, but require proof of enrolment of children in school (Joksic, 2015) – yet more factors resulting in Roma youth choosing to forego education in favour of employment and consequent high school dropout rates (Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2015).

Access to higher education can be improved upon through a range of initiatives. Gaps in data, knowledge, and capacity regarding the Roma population need to be addressed first (Joksic, 2015), however, to inform practical provision and the allocation of funds. The historical lack of data on Roma affairs complicates attempts to estimate the degree and effectiveness of change instituted in Serbia by the current government. Although the Serbian government has the Education Management Information System (EMIS), the disparities in demographic data on Roma in Serbia remain unaddressed. There is also a need to engage the Roma community in the design of educational programmes to enhance their access to higher education and improve their learning opportunities, making the Roma genuine partners in educational development, rather than the passive receivers of top-down 'reform', often framed with only poor knowledge of the economic and social realities in the field. This would enable the input of the minority and allow for the rectification of obsolescent 20th century bureaucratic structures that persist in the contemporary educational arena in Serbia. There is also a need to re-evaluate institutional capacities and reform attitudes towards Roma to allow effective community development.

6.5. Overcoming Poverty for Young Roma in Access to Higher Education

I have outlined in the previous section the financial challenges that many Roma face in Serbia that deprive many of decent primary or secondary education. Nevertheless, some Roma students have been able to overcome the many hurdles in the way of accessing higher education, and study and succeed in university. This by no mean

suggests that the financial struggle is over, however. As my interview data confirms, most Roma who access higher education negotiate their way despite dire financial circumstances. Details of their excruciating experiences are given in interviews by some male interviewees:

> *'I started working when I was 13. I never had lunch at school from elementary school to university' (Jakov)*

> *'I slept in a garage during one year. It was open on all sides. I had a sofa with water under it. I dug channels to survive and pay for my studies.' (Blagoje)*

These experiences provide an insight into the depth of poverty from which successful Roma students emerge. As mentioned in section 6.3, Roma students often carry out physically challenging jobs to support themselves and sometimes their families during their studies, militating against access to higher education for disabled Roma. We can also see that affiliated challenges affected by lack of finance include nutrition and health also restrict academic attainment in higher education. Interestingly, some of the respondents mentioned obtaining government support during their journey through higher education, supporting findings describe various incidences of discrimination in relation to education in Serbia:

> *'… actually you work two jobs to support yourself? YES. Do you have any support from the family? (She starts crying) mum and dad support my sister and I am crying because this is a first time I talk about this…it is very difficult for us in Serbia to study and additionally coming from such a community (Roma) like ours and nobody understand you and everybody judges you and you have to be the best, I needed to show and prove double my values in order for people to respect me' (Vanja)*

The above quotation puts into question higher education policies adopted by the government to increase enrolment, matriculation and completion of programmes.

Female students from Roma communities face more intersectionally complex challenges. According to the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (2015), they are

susceptible to sexism and violence up to and including sexual assault, rape and the threat of rape, in addition to background poverty and racism. As such, they are at a higher risk of dropping out of school than male Roma students (Miskovic, 2013). Familial patriarchal pressures towards early childbearing prevalent in poorer communities also prove extremely harmful to educational attainment in higher education, or even secondary education (UNICEF, 2016). Roma culture sees women as subject to men and therefore allows men to exert hegemony over women in any way he desires (Joksic, 2015). Despite legislation covering issues of sexism and gender-based violence, there is little follow-up in Roma communities (Amnesty International, 2012). Below are examples of this as told by some of my female interviewees:

> *'There is always the expectation that I will get married, so no one talked to me about studying or anything. Even applying for places to study you see people look at you like you are wasting your time because you won't succeed.' (Jela)*

> *'They did not want to let my sister study. If I want to go somewhere out of the country to continue studying they will not give me permission.' (Vanja)*

These quotations illustrate the negative influence of both patriarchy and stereotypical assumptions about the Roma in the majority community in limiting female Roma students' educational attainment. Many Roma parents believe that the primary role of women in society is childbearing. There is also an expectation that they will not go far from home. For female Roma, access to higher education is coloured by the view that they will not succeed and instead should be married, and are therefore not worthy of investment in their studies. Education provides a platform for feminists to assess social norms and promote efforts for social transformation. According to Stromquist (2016, p. 190), 'Education serves in transmitting knowledge about issues that have been ignored, and teaches women to think politically.' Sexual discrimination is one of multiple challenges that the young Roma girls I interviewed discussed in relation to access to higher education.

Having negotiated their way through often very challenging primary and secondary school systems, determined students often highly value their higher education. I have classified several factors that enable Roma success in accessing higher education into

two categories: aspirations/escape and desiring difference. Students are often determined to escape the deprived conditions they hail from and yearn to make a difference once they start earning money for themselves. While male Roma were mainly inspired by escape from racism and poverty, female students were inspired to escape a wider set of challenges, including sexism, racism, poverty and violence. Examples of these differing aspirations are illustrated in the quotes below:

'…[I entered higher education] to get out of poverty and not be like my mother who was beaten every night by my alcoholic father. My father was *gambler, I was waken up every night by noise when my father beat my mother…drunk, beating her, like killing her… one day you have everything another day nothing.'* (Ana)

'What inspired me for years was watching how my parents were tortured because they only finished primary school …selling fruits and vegetables in the market. Summer and winter, they are always outside in the cold or heat. And I thought about whether I wanted that life for myself (Jagoda)

Some male students' aspirations were couched in similar terms:

'I dreamt of becoming somebody and not to suffer anymore.' (Jakov)

'… not to suffer like my parents do.' (Borko)

The ambitions of some young Roma to experience a different life is a major enabler of educational attainment, and policies and practices should be tailored to make the best of this. Higher education provides opportunities to experience life in different contexts by learning from new experiences previously unexplored (Guerrero, et al., 2016); contrastingly, poverty perpetuates itself in cycles from one generation to the next generation, and under current circumstances few individuals are able to manage to break the cycle – the need for reform of access policy and practice is both urgent and important, the better to socially capitalise on young Roma aspiration, to create a

collective cultural capacity among the Roma for raised educational imagination and the capacity to imagine collectively better futures and to actualise them (Sellar and Gale; 2011, 124-5).

In general, the main reason for Roma students to undertake the struggle to enter higher education is the desire to escape poverty and to 'make a difference' for themselves and their communities. As stated by Chowdry et al. (2010), attitudes and behaviours of parents and children from low socio-economic backgrounds play a significant role in educational attainment.

6.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have illustrated the ways in which poverty limits Roma students' access to higher education in Serbia by outlining contributory factors such as discrimination in perpetuating the endemic cycle of poverty that most Serbian Roma face. The history of hostility towards the Roma in Serbia has penetrated multiple levels of educational, healthcare, social, and legislative systems and restrained life chances generally. With regard the education system specifically, only a relative handful of Roma manage to successfully negotiate their way through all the barriers to accessing higher education. Efforts towards reform by the Serbian government and NGOs have been marred by the racism and pejorative and stereotypical attitudes still all too prevalent in Serbian society and institutions. Moreover, institutional reforms in education have not had the desired effect due to socio-cultural influences present in both the Serbian mainstream (racism and physical and structural violence) and the Roma minority (patriarchy, self-loathing/ discrimination). The few young Roma who do succeed do so from unusually strong personal motivation and a desire to have a better life than their parents and communities, sometimes there is also an element of luck. Future reform initiatives in Serbia's educational system should, therefore, be geared towards eliminating negative attitudes in the wider society and in institutions, creating more equitable platforms for both the mainstream and minority populations, the improvement of cultural knowledge and the alignment of it towards positive development, and the addressing of wider socio-economic and political issues, based on quality empirical evidence.

CHAPTER 7: SUCCESSES: ASPIRATIONS OF ROMA STUDENTS IN HE AND SUPPORT FOR THEIR EDUCATION

7.1. Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I have outlined some of the challenges Roma students face in seeking to access the Serbian higher education system. In the following section, I explore further the process of how that barely two per cent of young Roma acquire the aspirations for continuing their education into higher education and the factors that influence attainment despite all the barriers they must overcome. In this chapter, I also look at the effect of cultural capital on the aspirations to access higher education.

7.2. Aspirations

As we have seen, aspiration can be envisaged as something that goes beyond the elite, privatised and individualised notion of 'aspiration' to embrace a collective socio-cultural mode of aspiration as cultural capacity to imagine better futures on the part of the marginalised within a politics of aspiration (Seller and Gale, 2011); aspiration can also be gendered, racialised and classed (Burke, 2006) understanding this deepens the appreciation of what 'aspiration' means in the Roma context, where Roma women particularly face an intersect of sexism, racism and class oppression, and a culture of low aspiration is imposed upon the Roma through dominant political, media and educational discourse, and low aspiration is in turn internalised by the Roma themselves as a form of self-oppression (see above).

Educational aspirations are part of the framework necessary to achieve in higher education (Guerrero, et al., 2016). They constitute the inner meaning of the significance of education in terms of social and economic influence, rather than just the personal need to attend school (Brüggemann, 2012). From a young age, the aspirations of most young Roma women living in traditional communities are shaped by their social setting, which includes the home and school environment, dominated by patriarchal assumptions and practices (Kyuchukov, 2011). A research report on marginalised communities by the Higher Education, Internationalisation and Mobility project (HEIM, 2015, p. 44), Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research at the

University of Sussex, cited that '…lack of aspiration is one of the barriers that does not allow the young to develop themselves'. Yet the magnitude of the struggles which poor Roma populations encounter in their search for better lives, has the effect of lowering their aspirations to the mere meeting of immediate needs (Kyuchukov, 2011). The challenges faced include a lack of opportunities; expected gender roles; chronic, cross-generational poverty; fear of social exclusion, intimidation and racist and misogynist violence; and caring responsibilities for the young, the sick or disabled, and the elderly (HEIM, 2015; Battaglia & Lebedinski, 2014). Despite the increasing modernisation in the Balkan region, poor Roma communities continue to experience challenges in accessing and completing education (Brüggemann, 2012). The lack of significant support further multiplies the gap in educational aspirations between the mainstream and minority populations in Serbia (Themelis and Foster, 2014). The results are socially devastating: as Engberg and Allen (2011, p. 786) observe, 'The resultant talent loss translates into social and economic losses at both the individual and societal level'.

In the previous chapter, I noted how the Serbian government recognises higher education as paramount to the economic advancement of the country (Obradovic, 2012). The Roma students I interviewed tend to see tertiary level education as a pathway out of the challenges faced by traditional Roma minority life, but as outlined above are all too often unable to access it. The existing literature shows that factors such as 'socio-demographic, aptitudes and previous achievements' are known to have the potential to affect one's performance in higher education (Shulruf, et al., 2008, p. 214). Shulruf et al. elaborate by stating that the period in which students spend in school affects their journey throughout school and beyond. Students from poorer families are usually under-represented in higher education (UNICEF, 2016) with only a few achieving successful educational attainment up to university level (Wilkin, et al., 2009). These worrying trends affect most economies in Europe, and have prompted studies investigating the typical features that foster the success of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The lack of sufficient reliable data of Roma students in higher education -- due to fear of alienation, racism, and hostility by the mainstream population (UNICEF, 2014) -- complicates the broad conceptualisation of the

inspirations and motivations of those who do reach higher education. Many Roma students in higher education are not happy for their ethnicity to be revealed - unless their access has been because of affirmative action projects necessitating disclosure of ethnicity (Momcilovic and Jovanovic, 2015). In order to gain a better insight of their aspirations in relation to higher education, I interviewed 10 Roma undergraduate students who had publicly revealed their ethnicity.

According to UNICEF (2014), the lack of significant effort by the current Serbian regime to engage in fighting Roma poverty has further increased the gaps between individuals of higher and lower socio-economic status. As we have seen, one measure to tackle this has been the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion' – a 10-year initiative (2005-2015) encouraged by the World Bank and Open Society Foundations to 'close the gaps between Roma and the rest of society' (Momcilovic and Jovanovic, 2015). Although the initiative saw a significant proportion of young Roma from poorer backgrounds enrol in higher education, the results of this initiative appear to have been only partially successful (Jovanovic, 2015). Jovanovic said:

> *'The Roma Inclusion Index shows some progress in literacy levels, completion of primary education, and access to health insurance. But all in all, the daily life of Roma remains a struggle no other ethnic group in Europe faces'.*

Moreover, the increased enrolment rates in both male and female students and the percentage of students from minority backgrounds did not match that of conventional students (Kolarcik, et al., 2012). According to Devlin (2010), the lack of achievement of poor students -- even with benefit of access to higher education -- further augments the challenges of the students. This justifies the need to engage in research that considers the factors that drive students from low socio-economic backgrounds – especially Roma in Serbia - through tertiary education systems.

'Raising the aspirations' of individuals from poorer backgrounds is regarded as one of the best methods to increase participation in higher education and eliminate social exclusion within modern societies (Burke, 2006, p. 720) -- although this perhaps is

controversial as it suggests that widening participation is about cognitive restructuring rather than dealing with inherently unfair and structurally violent socio-economic and institutional structures and practices. It has, nevertheless, been used successfully to foster engagement within young people in the development of personal and economic competitiveness in the propagation of lifelong learning in disadvantaged communities. According to Burke (2006), the use of untested approaches which are 'not based on theory' has led to a colossal failure in tackling social exclusion and promoting educational attainment, likewise, in the Roma case, the lack of a reliable evidence base from which to plan action. In her opinion, the use of unproved methods as the foundational concepts for implementing social change is tainted by problematic conventions that often fail to decode the underlying racial, gendered and classed identity formations. In this regard, the levels of participation of Roma in higher education have not been elaborated sufficiently to initiate effective planning and implementation. The literature on individual student aspirations has been utilised as a building block in conceptualising the success of students in higher education since the beginning of the 21st century: in a review of past literature from multiple contexts, Sellar and Gale (2011, p. 122) ascertain that aspirations, though a private concern for students and individuals, are a rudimentary condition of entry into higher education. Unlike other entry conditions, these are not heavily influenced by administrative considerations. In this regard, student aspirations have been referred to as the foundation of institutional engagement and policies aimed towards promoting capacity-building activities for students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Brüggemann, 2012).

Studying the aspirations and motivations of Roma students entering Serbian higher education requires a more complete understanding of Roma society. In this regard, I will begin by exploring the concept of multiculturalism and 'happiness' within a community. Sara Ahmed (2010) uses McMahon's (2006) definition of happiness as 'the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality-of-life-as-a-whole favorably'. She proposes that the state of happiness in multicultural communities is dictated by the magnitude of social and physical ties among the members of the populations. Communities are closely knit and happy when the members of a given community see

themselves as alike. Similarly, unhappiness or social discord is caused by the failure of different communities to interact, which may lead to severe ideological or physical conflicts ranging from 'individual differences to global terrorism' (Ahmed, 2010, p. 123). Regarding the Roma community in Serbia, there is a disparity between the Roma and non-Roma communities attributed to decades of discrimination (European Union, 2014). We can therefore say that the physical and social ties between these cultural groups are weak, and liable to promote social discord, marginalisation, and social unhappiness. Furthermore, from a postcolonial feminist perspective, there exists social conflict within the poor Roma communities; Kyuchukov (2011), in his research on the choice between traditional values and educational aspirations for Roma girls, asserts that social traditions influence their attitudes towards education. Within the traditional patriarchal Roma family structures, access to education, especially higher education, is all too often viewed as an unwarranted and unwanted influence of Western society, so young Roma find themselves 'somewhere between contemporary society and traditional Romani culture' (Kyuchukov, 2011, p. 104).

The primary influence of the social environment – especially socialisation from parents -- is a prominent predictor of individual access and success in higher education (Devlin, 2010; Guerrero, et al., 2016). The importance of the social and cultural environment in influencing student aspirations indicates the need to explore further aspects of the socio-cultural influences for students in minority populations. Devlin (2011) asserts that researchers must first grasp the underlying social-cultural environment of a population to understand the experience of students from low-income backgrounds. In her research 'Bridging Socio-cultural Incongruity: Conceptualising the success of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds in Australian higher education', Devlin (2011) emphasiseshow cultural competence is the primary institution-specific socio-cultural variable affecting students. In a similar study, Reddick (2011) describes cultural competence as a framework affecting the educational achievement of poor minorities: an amalgamation of information networks often availed to socially and economically advantaged families and perpetually passed to subsequent generations. These information networks are fundamentally important in educational achievement. These social groups have often been referred to as the 'ruling classes' and monopolise,

or near-monopolise, instituting the dominant cultural practices in the society (Devlin, 2010). Although familial influence and socialisation are of basic importance, these groups have always possessed hegemonic capabilities to analyse individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds and come to specific verdicts predicated upon a set of assumptions held within the socially dominant community. However, recent research has identified a decline in the interest towards such forms of culture, especially in high-income countries (Gripsrud, et al., 2011). The authors indicate that in modern society where careers cannot be made without education qualifications, traditional notions are slowly declining with the irrelevance of high culture.

Nevertheless, studies have confirmed that cultural factors still have a broad effect on students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Reddick et al. (2016) argue that students from 'High Minority High Poverty' backgrounds may not attain access to institutions of higher learning due to their deficiencies in cultural capital. On the other hand, students from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds have increased access to culture hence possess the relevant social and cultural resources to access and flourish in higher education; moreover, they are more accustomed to societal practices and have the relevant knowledge about myriad perceptions, values and customs needed to succeed academically (Devlin, 2010). In this regard, they are inclined to feel more contented and 'happy' in the higher education context. Students of disadvantaged socio-economic status (do not have access to the informational privileges that their wealthier and better-connected peers enjoy (Reddick, et al., 2011). They can be uncomfortable and feel out of place in the higher educational institutional environment (Ahmed, 2000). As Sara Ahmed asserts, minority populations are unhappy and 'do not feel the atmosphere' of higher education due to their lack of privileged social and cultural skills and knowledge, networks, dispositions and the required elite cultural habits.

Research by Behnke et al. (2004) has identified a positive correlation between parental educational attainment and their children's educational aspirations. They concluded that families with parents of lower educational attainment were often characterised by offspring with low educational aspirations. Parents can be significant role models in

the family setting and can positively or negatively influence the decisions of their offspring (Guerrero, et al., 2016). This theme of parental influence and its correlation to parental educational achievement was evident in some of the interviews undertaken during my research. According to one 23 year-old female law student, her main influence was her mother who had studied for a bachelor's law degree. Moreover, her sister's educational aspirations emanated from the achievements of her aunt who was at the time studying for a bachelor's degree in pharmacy:

> *'Law ... My mum finished law and I wanted to be like her. My sister is studying Pharmacy at university like our aunt ... I want to finish and become somebody...To get a job.'*
> *(Ana)*

Another interviewee, a 20 year-old male law student, attributed his aspirations to his girlfriend's educational attainment:

> *'I wanted to study law because of my girlfriend who wanted to move to Novi Sad to study law. I was not a good student but she really inspired me.'*
> *(Marko)*

The first situation can be attributed to a social multiplier where there is evidence of positive social interactions among individuals. From a postcolonial feminist viewpoint, women are supplementing their traditional familial roles with modern influences, such as higher education, to fight for economic, social and cultural justice (Mishra, 2013). The second scenario demonstrates peer-to-peer inspiration and motivation, where individuals in a similar age group develop common aspirations and pursue them in unison.

Expectations from parents also play an important role in the creation of aspirations in their children regarding higher education. In a study investigating influential factors in male and female students, Alhawsawi (2014) found a positive correlation between parental expectations and educational achievement. The concept of parental expectations has its roots in the late 20th century when researchers explored various psychological influences on educational attainment (Battaglia & Lebedinski, 2014).

Parental expectations are the recommendations made by parents or parental figures when assessing the potential of educational attainment of their children (Guerrero, et al., 2016). Some assessments contribute to forming a strong base for educational identity and shape future ambitions and dreams. In the university-specific context, lecturers and other staff, such as student advisors, possess the power to assess students' talents and needs in a similar way to families (Devlin, 2010). Alhawsawi (2014) makes a similar argument, stating that educators and support staff, properly trained and resourced, can have the capacity to compensate for the lack of cultural capital that students from low socio-economic status backgrounds might otherwise have acquired from their family background. Reddick et al. (2016) refer to these individuals as essential inputs in the creation of social capital; they possess the necessary cultural and social 'reservoir of resources' needed to help make good the cultural poverty of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds (Devlin, 2011), they have the potential to influence the students' attitudes, motivation and aspiration positively (Prieto-Flores & Feu, 2015).

The influence of faculty and support staff as cultural capital enablers for students was among the themes that emerged during the semi-structured interviews carried out on successful young Roma students in Serbia. A 25-year-old male respondent asserted that the Dean of his school was a crucial enabler of his studies:

> *'I.C. was the dean at that time, and he is still a very important motivator and supporter of my studies. He told me that I reminded him of himself, and he told me, with confidence, that his grandmother was Roma. One time, I had no money to apply for my exams. The cost was 200 dinars per exam. I had five dinars -- simply not enough to cover that fee [....] So I went to him and told him. He asked me if I need the money only for this examination period and I said yes. He told me to bring him a petition, which I did, and he signed it. Thereafter, everything was fine. I was shocked, but heard other stories about him as well. I think he never rejected anyone.*
> *(Blagoje)*

The response above is consistent with the observation of Guerrero et al. (2016, p. 596) who stress that 'contemporary research indicates that High Minority High Poverty graduates have limited access to educational resources and hence lack capital'. The

type of help offered by the Dean may be categorised as 'community capital' (Moll and Greenberg, 1990) whereby *I.C.* saw the Engineering student as a member of his community and therefore availed him with the necessary resources to achieve his aspirations (Guerrero, et al., 2016). In this instance, the Dean can empathise the student's experiences and offer support, becoming a role model for the student, giving him individualised attention. Personal mentoring and tutoring aids in the formation of strong relationships between faculty and students allows for the delivery of positive results (Prieto-Flores and Feu, 2015), although the climate of racism and prejudice still all too prevalent in Serbian higher education institutions frequently militates against the formation of these kinds of beneficial relationships in the case of the Roma. In the late 20th century, several researchers, such as Ladson-Billings (1994), advocated the hiring of faculty from minority backgrounds to address these kinds of issues. Subsequent studies indicated that hiring such faculty did indeed lessen the disparity between mainstream and minority populations. An example such an initiative in Serbia is the Roma Teaching Assistant programme initiated as a pilot program in 2002 by several NGOs with the aim of introducing Roma teaching assistants to mainstream schools to promote social inclusion (UNICEF, 2014). According to Battaglia and Lebedinski (2015), the programme was successful in mitigating previously existing large gaps in both attendance and school achievement.

Aspiration, Guerrero et al. (2016) argue, has been absent from much current research. According to the authors, aspiration is 'the ability to maintain dreams for the future in the face of barriers' (Guerrero, et al., 2016, p. 597). Aspiration gives people the power to want to change and go on to succeed (Alhawsawi, 2014). During my research, this concept was evident in several responses from interviewees. In the first response below, a 25-year-old female business student describes how she maintained her dream of becoming a successful business person from a tender age:

> *'What inspired me the most was watching how my mum suffered. I remember one day in winter and my parents were selling cabbages and potatoes and my mum was not feeling well. I felt sorry for her, and I decided to help her. At the business premises, I felt defeated and humiliated. That was the key moment when I decided I would never allow myself to have that kind of life. Especially as*

a woman, to be considered as a slave and an object for biological reproduction, who is only going to deliver babies and serve the family….'
(Jagoda)

A similar quote is shown below from a 25 year-old male Engineering student who describes here his inspiration for success in higher education:

'… Then one day my grandmothers' friend from Novi Sad visited us and told me about the University. She also told me story about God and I started going to church every Sunday. Our priest, D., helped my brother and I to become 'real people'. I wanted to become a priest myself, to study theology. But money was a problem. After high school, there were university expenses in Belgrade and I couldn't do it -- it was a long way in the future and I couldn't find financial support. It is very hard to be a good man; I can't forget what he (the priest) did for me, my brother and my family and I think it is not easy. Maybe my position inspired me. I had to do things my colleagues didn't have to do -- to think about the future and learn to fight. Many of my colleague did not graduate from high school or enrol in university, but had much better conditions - much, much better.'
(Blagoje)

Access to help and support, coupled with individual aspirations, are the primary themes that emerge from the data in overcoming the obstacles around access to higher education and success for Roma students.

In the last decade, government and non-government organisations have invested heavily in campaigns seeking to 'raise aspirations.' However, as Sellar and Gale (2011, p. 122) report, the shifts in culture around higher education have altered the conventional mode of operation of administrative policies from 'Keynesian social contracts to individualist politics of aspiration building'. This implies that under market-driven, neoliberal, individualised political-economic conditions the formulation of aspirations has shifted from the institutions themselves to the individual student, placing the aspirational initiative with the individual aspiring student, a shift hardly likely to benefit Roma students, given the conditions described at length above. Efforts undertaken towards articulating Roma inclusion initiatives often associate higher educational achievement with a good life or happiness, and work by identifying barriers to accessing and succeeding in higher education, however on its own such an

individualistic 'aspirational' approach is unlikely to succeed on its own, given the depth and breadth of Roma exclusion in Serbia. Barriers to educational attainment can be overcome (Prieto-Flores and Feu, 2015), but the government should work together with individuals and communities not dispensing with the 'old-fashioned' 'Keynesian social contract' approach to support the accumulation of various types of capital that can positively affect educational attainment, while dealing decisively with the deeper structural problems in Serbian society and institutions.

Educational attainment is often part and parcel of social upward mobility. The history of the discriminatory nature of the Serbian educational system has perpetuated low levels of education, and hence stagnant or retrograde social mobility for the Roma (Miskovic and Curcic, 2016). Consequently, the 'vicious circle of poverty and exclusion' has remained and continues inflicting numerous costs on the Serbian economy, as well as doing structural violence to Roma individuals and communities (Brüggemann, 2012, p. 10). There is need, therefore, to support and help young Roma to develop the aspirations they will need to negotiate their way through the higher education system. Moreover, there is a need for individualised aspiration building to challenge the attitude that educational reform can only be initiated at the institutional level (Prieto-Flores and Feu, 2015).

Overall, individual aspirations play an important role in advancing Roma students and ensuring educational attainment. These variables are interrelated and should be integrated alongside high expectations from social and family networks. Without family support, students may lack the resources and values needed to 'survive' in the higher education context. The role of higher education institution's social environment and institutional culture should not be downplayed in considering the dynamics of access, widening participation, and inclusion-exclusion, particularly with regard to countering institutional racism and the creation of a genuinely inclusive higher education learning environment, under the ethical principle of mutual respect. It is through institutional leadership and positive and enabling interactions between students and faculty and support staff that Roma students will become enabled to

overcome or bypass barriers which might otherwise foster a lack of aspiration for educational achievement.

7.3. Support for Roma Students

The wider community plays a crucial role in helping students and aspiring students to overcome the psychological and social barriers (low self-esteem, stress, fear of failure, fear of interaction with new individuals, negative attitudes from the community) arising from social division and unhappiness (Battaglia and Lebedisnski, 2015). Support for students from low socio-economic status backgrounds should take place on the institutional, social and political levels. In this section, I explore how these such support can play a role in ensuring educational attainment for Roma students, showing how previously published literature and research have illuminated various pathways through which institutions and the community in the broader context can promote educational achievement for poorer students from marginalised backgrounds. I also investigated faults in the current support systems for Roma students and propose better pathways and practices for the promotion of higher education for the Roma minority.

7.3.1 Institutional Support for Roma Students

In recent years, publicity about the Roma population in Europe has increased the number of initiatives designed to foster their progress – in particular, through educational advancement. Amongst the widely known pedagogic support are scholarships and bursaries, affirmative action, through NGOs who have been significant contributors to improvements of the Serbian education system since 2001 (Roma Education Fund, 2007). Almost two and a half decades later, despite various shortcomings, the work and role of some of these institutional supports are evident.

The Roma Education Fund (REF) is non-governmental organisation dedicated to providing funds to support the educational activities of Roma populations (Momcilovic and Jovanovic, 2015). It coordinates with regional, national and international organisations to identify the financial barriers facing the enrolment of Roma students into higher education institutions (Padilla-Carmona & Soria-Vílchez, 2015). It also

identifies and analyses systematic gaps in the provision of educational facilities for Roma, and highlights discriminatory practices. The REF further engages in the evaluation of resources, curriculum and assessments to ensure that they are inclusive (Roma Education Fund, 2007).

The REF's engagement in Serbian education began after the country passed legislation to bring about reforms to its educational sector (Roma Education Fund, 2007). Over the last decade, the organisation has set a strategic direction that has: gradually initiated the removal of enrolment barriers for Roma students in Serbia through the formulation of legal and institutional frameworks to mitigate access challenges; provided financial support for children; mitigated the over-representation of Roma in special schools; and facilitated donor coordination of education activities (Miskovic and Curcic, 2016). Furthermore, the REF offers support and assistance to develop Roma educators through initiatives such as the 'Roma Teaching Assistant Programme', and supported initiatives to eradicate the negative experiences of the Roma in education (Padilla-Carmona and Soria-Vílchez, 2015). The REF has also provided policy development support for the higher education sector and has a role on its advisory council.

The REF can assist Roma students who meet two criteria: they must openly declare themselves Roma, and provide evidence of extracurricular activity in Roma organisation to ensure direct links with the Roma community (Momcilovic and Jovanovic, 2015). Prior to application, the REF will provide information on available scholarships to Roma students and prompt them to submit their details at the appropriate time. It will subsequently ensure that the application process is not marred by corruption or unfairness. Students who qualify for grants are then monitored after being awarded funding for tuition fees and maintenance costs (Padilla-Carmona and Soria-Vílchez, 2015).

The role of the REF in sustaining Roma individuals in higher education programmes is substantial. Three types of fund are currently available to Serbian Roma students (Padilla-Carmona & Soria-Vílchez, 2015): The 'Roma Memorial University Scholarship

Program' (RMUSP) has been running since 2001 and provides funding for students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in accredited countries; the 'Roma Health Scholarship Program' (RHSP) has been running since 2008 and provides funding to Roma students undertaking courses related to medicine specifically within accredited medical institutions; the 'Roma International Scholar Program' (RISP) has been running since 2007 and provides for Roma students pursuing studies outside their home country. Student applicants can also access corresponding support for internships, language studies and local projects within the above-mentioned scholarship programmes.

Since its inception, the REF has significantly increased Roma access to education within its countries of operation, Albania, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and other countries in the region. According to the organisation's 2014 annual report, the number of students enrolled in REF scholarship programmes within its areas of operations has consistently increased. From 2013-2014, the number of students enrolled in its scholarship programmes globally was 1,453 - almost double the 813 students who were admitted on to university courses between 2008 and 2013. In 2014, 1,427 out of 2,218 Roma who submitted applications to study at higher education level were selected -- a 64 per cent acceptance rate (Roma Education Fund, 2015). Of the 88 beneficiaries of REF funding from Serbia and Macedonia, 52 completed their studies and graduated – 60 per cent of the total number entering higher education. Of the rest, 34 per cent postponed their graduation and six per cent dropped out (Roma Education Fund, 2015), although those who postpone are at a high risk of not completing their studies. The dropout rate is relatively high, and the REF has been urged to focus on reducing it, alongside increasing access to higher education (Jovanovic, 2015). The REF has also come under criticism for the lengthy processes Roma students must complete to access their support Joksic (2015) states that there is no fair access to funding -- particularly for children from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds who cannot afford to meet some of the conditions laid out by the REF.

The *Romaversitas* Foundation Program (RV) is an international initiative that provides educational support for Roma wishing to access higher education (Kurt Lewin

Foundation, 2011). The 'Training and scholarship program of young Roma people in higher education' is the main programme that provides resources for access to higher education in its member countries. Established in 1997, the programme has fostered access to higher education for young Roma (Padilla-Carmona and Soria-Vílchez, 2015). It has two main objectives: to foster and increase access to higher education through the encouragement of positive attitudes toward higher education on the part of the Roma (Velkovski, 2015), and to provide avenues for the strengthening of social interactions between Roma and non-Roma students, mitigating prejudice within society through social development (Padilla-Carmona and Soria-Vílchez, 2015).

The RV differs from the REF in that it engages in 'social development' besides economic funding (McGarry, 2010), aimed at nurturing Roma culture and strengthens cultural identity within the Roma community. In this way, RV manages to raise the aspirations of young Roma by contextualising their heritage and increasing their levels of responsibility in the wider Serbian community (Momcilovic and Jovanovic, 2015). The organisation also offers training to poor Roma students with low educational attainment from earlier phases of education. Its conditions of access resemble those of the REF in that Roma students must participate in at least one extracurricular activity for their community.

Support structures instituted by the RV often focus on academics and the community. Velvoski (2011) describes how the RV integrates the two elements described above into educational strategies including tutorials, skills and capability development, and intercultural education, and training. Several investigations into the programme have shown it to have achieved positive results. According to a longitudinal study by the Kurt Lewin Foundation (2014), the RV has met most of its objectives and delivered on a range of commitments it was established to deliver. More specifically, the organisation has been credited with promoting cohesion among young Roma populations as they apply for support for the dual motives of gaining educational support and belonging to part of a wider Roma community (Velkovski, 2015).

In recent years, the REF and the RV have collaborated in the creation of the largest institutional support framework for Roma in Vojvodina from 2012 to-date. According to my analysis in Momcilovic and Jovanovic (2015), these organisations have made the largest contribution to encouraging access to higher education in Serbia through joint initiatives that have enabled the pooling of knowledge and resources for a common cause and thereby improving the lives of young Roma. Their actions have far-surpassed other institutional support frameworks, such as the Serbian government's affirmative action programme, in increasing educational enrolment of Roma students. The two specific aims of the joint project between the REF and the RV were:

- To aid Roma students in increasing their educational attainment. This has involved initiatives geared towards the achievement of higher grades, increasing enrolment rates, mitigating dropout, and increasing graduation levels.
- The collaboration of resources to encourage and enhance a sense of culture and identity among Roma populations.

However, like the REF, the RV is faced with the challenge of ensuring sufficient balance in its selection of eligible candidates for its aid programmes (Joksic, 2015). Consequently, the RV has instituted dynamic strategies that ensure that inefficiencies within the selection process are addressed.

Collaboration efforts by both the Vojvodina Roma Centre for Democracy (VRCD) and the Roma Education Fund (REF) combine long years of experience and greatly contribute to the overall success of empowering and encouraging the success of Roma students (Roma Education Fund, 2014). Before commencing their work, these organisations conducted in-depth needs assessment analysis to identify issues in society that cause low aspirations among the Roma. Thereafter, the programme coordinated recruitment and awareness programmes that reached students in high schools and in tertiary institutions (Padilla-Carmona and Soria-Vílchez, 2015). Outreach programmes are constrained by resources; however, they should be further developed, as I have argued elsewhere, in the future through diversified funding from

more diverse sources and assistance capacities through new initiatives from both public and private sectors (Momcilovic and Jovanovic, 2015). Overall, the programme proved successful in meeting the needs of Roma students, as I have argued (Momcilovic and Jovanovic, 2015). Through collaboration, the joint venture proved capable of tapping further resources and the two organisations had a wider reach than either would have had working alone.

The 'Roma Access Program' (RAP) is another institutional support programme for Roma students wanting to access higher education (Padilla-Carmona & Soria-Vílchez, 2015). It is a university-sponsored programme designed to encourage postgraduate students to realise their full potential. This programme is sponsored by the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, Hungary, and aims to prepare the Roma students as future role models (Kurt Lewin Foundation, 2015). The programme has two main units: the 'Roma Graduate Preparation Program' which involves a preparatory course for prospective masters and doctoral students, and the 'Roma English Language Program' (RELP) which takes the form of an English course lasting up to eight months in order to enable Roma students to achieve the requisite language proficiency for higher study in the English-speaking world (Kurt Lewin Foundation, 2015). Past analysis of these programmes indicates that RAP has managed to improve on its aims and objectives in the provision of necessary social and study skills. However, RAP only offers courses a limited range of subject areas in the social sciences and humanities (see Garaz, 2014 for a critique of this). Therefore, students wanting to engage in other disciplines cannot enjoy the full benefits of their scholarships (Padilla-Carmona and Soria-Vílchez, 2015), although higher study in the humanities and social sciences is important, because at present most Roma students seem to be opting for vocational type degrees (engineering, pharmacy, and so forth) important though this enrolment is, it is important that a generation of Roma social researchers and intellectuals are trained, to increase Roma cultural capital and research and creative capabilities.

Affirmative action is another tool that has been heavily utilised to increase access to higher education within Roma communities. However, the use of the technique since its establishment has been mired in debate. According to Garaz (2014, p. 295),

supporters of the approach argue that 'it is necessary to have temporary policies favouring socially disadvantaged candidates over the advantaged ones for participation in various mainstream institutions.' Arguments against affirmative action include its potential to cause further social exclusion and marginalisation, its ineffectiveness, and its having an ultimately negative impact on performance (Garaz, 2014). There exists, however, considerable evidence to suggest that affirmative action at both state and private level increases the educational achievement of Roma students in several European countries (Garaz, 2014; Velkovski, 2015). Serbia is among a small number of countries, which have initiated state-wide affirmative action to mitigate discriminatory practices in the enrolment of Roma in higher education (Velkovski, 2015). These initiatives were instigated after a general reform of educational policy in the early 21th century: 'Roma students who scored at least the required minimum points in the entrance exam' (Garaz, 2014, p. 296). Other countries with significant numbers of Roma citizens – such as Hungary and Macedonia - have government-instituted initiatives offering economic and academic support to students. Existing studies have illustrated that affirmative action is plagued by a lack of data pertaining to Roma populations in Serbia specifically; however, economic and academic development cannot be wholly accounted for due to Roma hiding their identities (Velkovski, 2015). To try to mitigate the problem, the REF has proactively collected statistics and data to identify Serbian Roma students' social-cultural and academic environments (Roma Education Fund, 2015). Most reports of this type show how affirmative action often fails in the face of oppressive and discriminatory practices with regard access to educational services, because of the divided nature of the of the society and the prevalence of a Serbian nationalism based to large degree on whiteness (Garaz, 2014; Pantea, 2015). Over time, the organisation has augmented its database with demographic and social data and established the first Roma students' socio-economic database in Europe; this has served as a basis for affirmative action practices (Pantea, 2015).

The socio-economic backgrounds of Roma students who apply for scholarships are generally far more disadvantageous that those of the mainstream Serbian population. However, an in-depth analysis revealed that affirmative action often seems to target

the most privileged individuals within a disadvantaged group (Pantea, 2015). In a study analysing the usefulness of affirmative action in creating access to higher education for Roma students, Garaz et al. (2014) suggest use of an 'integrative model of affirmative action', which recognises this phenomenon and relies on peer to peer influence to snowball social change. However, Pantea (2015) cautions that the use of affirmative action is insensitive to the silent tensions and muted expectations of many Roma students. Organisations need, therefore, to respect individual autonomy with regard self-disclosure, due to the possible negative consequences of 'coming out' as Roma for affirmative action compliance.

In general, the research shows that institutional support is crucial for enabling widening participation and consequent academic achievement for Roma students within Serbia. By supporting tertiary education, the institutions detailed above fulfil most students' aspirations of achieving success and becoming change agents in society. Although access to institutional support is controlled (students are required to meet certain criteria), several initiatives, like *Romaversitas*, or mentorships in have shown the constructive role in promoting and supporting Roma education. Some institutions play multiple roles in providing access to education and social support. However, personal aspirations are still imperative for educational achievement, and wider efforts are needed to focus on preventing dropouts from scholarship programmes and improve completion rates. Though controversial, affirmative action is effective up to a degree. However, a reform of affirmative action policies is needed to mitigate its potentially divisive tendencies.

7.3.2 Support in the Wider Serbian Society

As mentioned above, Roma populations are generally subject to poorer health levels than those of the non-Roma population (Wilkin, et al., 2009). Individuals from low socio-economic status backgrounds are also subject to a number of factors that directly affect health, such as happiness, social support and mental health problems such as depression. Adult Roma are more susceptible to depression and anxiety than children, and are more likely to be affected by a lack of social support (Wilkin, et al., 2009). In this section, I outline the role of social support in preventing distress and

dysfunction and thereby promoting educational achievement of Roma students from low socio-economic status backgrounds.

Social support is officially defined as 'a feeling that an individual is loved, cared for by and has assistance available from other people, and that the individual is part of a supportive social network' (Kolarcik, et al., 2012, p. 905). Culpepper (2014, p.2) further defines it as 'a multidimensional concept for resources (emotional, informative and instrumental), as well as the source of the resources (friends, family, teachers and mentors)'. According to House (1981), social support has a number of dimensions: emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal, which can be used to measure the level of social support available. Within the context of Roma university study, it emerges that friends, colleagues and peers all form important parts of an individual's social circle. Evidence points out that these components of the social environment can affect academic performance and future aspirations (Shulruf, et al., 2008; Reddick, et al., 2011; Hasan and Bagde, 2013). Social support has been found to be imperative in the healthy growth and development of children and young people (Dezoti et al., 2013). However, less literature exists on how social support affects the educational lives of Roma students particularly.

In my interviews with Roma students, I heard accounts that reinforced existing studies in the field of social support, whilst adding to the data with regard Roma minorities in Serbia. In responding to a question about their motivations and inspirations in higher education in the face of the many challenges the Roma face, several respondents gave answers relating to social support. For instance, a 22-year old female pharmacy student stated that a neighbouring pharmacist provided important social support and acted as a role model inspiring her to pursue a nursing career:

> '… our neighbour was a pharmacist. She was very interesting and was always talking about her work. Whenever I went to the pharmacy where she worked, I watched how she talked and what she was doing. I wanted to be like her.'
> (Jela)

Another respondent described how his desire to be a policeman came about from his involvement with a mentor who provided social support as well as educational material throughout his course. Existing literature has identified how mentorship is one of the most common methods utilised in the provision of social support and is defined as a long-term relationship between an adult and a less experienced young adult (Donaldson, et al., 2000). Mentorship has two primary aims: career-related and psychosocial. Career mentoring involves activity-related tasks, such as coaching, whilst psychosocial mentoring revolves around counseling and friendship. The quotation below illustrates how the interviewee is mentored both in relation to his career choice (law enouncement) and psychologically (counselling to change negative attitudes about educational attainment):

> *'I always dreamed of becoming a policeman. At the end of secondary school, I wanted to go on a course for the police and didn't even think about going to university. I had a mentor who was trying to convince me that I could do it. She showed me the Law University's website, internal affairs. She also lent me books. Now I am finishing and I am very happy that I listened to her.'*
> *(Milijan)*

All social groups possess some social leverage; however, the dominant class superiority in this regard over those people who come from low socio-economic status communities in society (González, 2013). Therefore, the social leverage of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds tends not to impact on social development to a significant extent, as it does in individuals from more comfortable backgrounds. In low socio-economic status communities, individuals are not able to achieve as much as their wealthier peers without access to these networks. The presence of an individual from the community or school setting with the ability to act as a role model or mentor helps enable greater transfer of contextual knowledge and thus cultural and social capital (González, 2013). Additionally, studies by Stanton-Salazar (2000) indicate that students who are able to find mentors from within their socio-cultural context have a higher probability of experiencing benefit from these 'institutional agents.' Nevertheless, the structures of educational institutions influence the extent of access to institutional agents, which may affect the performance of young people in the long-run (González, 2013).

Overall, support from the wider society in Serbia (that is, neither familial nor institutional) is important for inspiring and motivating Roma students, as well as for encouraging educational attainment in young Roma students from low socio-economic status backgrounds. Through the primary and secondary research discussed above, it emerges that social support emerges from the acquisition of social leverage. Friends, colleagues and peers may play an important role by becoming role models or mentors, enabling students to raise their standards of educational attainment and promote educational achievement.

7.4. Conclusion

The desire for educational achievement begins at a young age and is heavily influenced by the socio-cultural environment in which a child grows up. In a society where education is a means of escaping poverty, the Roma community in Serbia is under-represented in higher education. For those who succeed in completing tertiary education, aspirations and social support are cited as the main frameworks within which students experience success. The literature to-date recommends the enhancement of cultural and social capital to raise the aspirations of students in higher education institutions, primarily in a familial context and expanding to a wider communal context. However, due to limitations in the available literature, a conclusive verdict about the progress of Roma students in higher education in Serbia is not yet possible.

The Roma Education Fund, the *Romaversitas* Foundation Programme, and the Roma Access Program constitute some of the most significant initiatives providing support for access to higher education for the Roma. Through funding and promoting academic progress and social identities, these organisations have made significant progress in increasing access to education for young Roma. However, the programmes are limited by a relatively low supply of financial, human and material resources, given the very high demand for these services within the Serbian Roma community. The use of affirmative action to reduce discriminative policies has, to a degree, increased the rate of social inclusion of the Roma population into the mainstream. However, their

strategies have both positive and negative effects. Organisations need to align their interventions to maximise the positive benefits through using a more an integrative model. Support structures are built on relationships amongst people in the community. Individuals from the dominant sections of the nation need to continuously engage with the less advantaged to enable a positive gradient in the transfer of social capital, this requires in turn a substantial shift in Serbian social attitudes towards the Roma. Further, educational institutions should promote the accumulation of cultural and social leverage through peer-to-peer interactions and institutional agents.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

The chapters above have provided an overview of the socio-historical and political-economic contexts that form the background to Roma social exclusion in Serbia today, with a particular focus on Roma access to higher education; they have detailed recent and current Serbian transnational initiatives aimed at tackling Roma exclusion from higher education and widening Roma participation; they have explored the intersection between racism and patriarchy in society and institutionally as prime drivers of exclusion, and provided relevant theorisation; presented my methodology and introduced my group of participants, and; presented and analysed qualitative life narrative data derived from Serbian Roma undergraduate students and NGO workers working in the field. Chapter 8, the concluding chapter, will: explain how I have answered my research questions; present findings; present how this study has contributed to knowledge in the field; present possible impacts; discuss limitations to this study; present directions for further research, and; conclude with a personal reflection and my vision for the future of Roma higher education in Serbia.

8.2 Findings in Relation to Research Questions

The main research question underpinning this study was:

'How do Roma students, as an ethnic minority, succeed in accessing higher education in Serbia?'

Qualitative data derived from Serbian Roma undergraduate students studying in Serbian universities has confirmed that despite programmes aimed at affirmative action and widening Roma participation in higher education, these students still face considerable challenges in accessing and successfully completing their course of study. These include a range of factors noted by researchers working in other countries in the region: the extreme marginalization, social exclusion, and economic deprivation of the Roma communities in Serbia (McGarry, 2017; 2012); the persistent effects of

segregation and institutional racism in education (Ilise, 2013); the effects of Roma community patriarchy on Roma women's access to higher education (Ilise, 2013; Oprea 2005; Kyuchukov, 2011), and; that existing initiatives tend mainly to benefit relatively privileged Roma (Garaz, 2014). My data has also shown further factors: racialised sexual violence or the threat of sexual violence as a further factor deterring Roma girls and young women from completing secondary education, thereby preventing them from accessing higher education; Roma students' self-discrimination and the tendency of some lighter-skinned Roma students to 'pass as white'; the toleration and casual use of anti-Roma rhetoric by faculty and peers in Serbian higher education, and managerial ineffectiveness in controlling this; the frequent necessity to combine studies with demanding, menial labour, and; a culture of low expectation within the Roma community itself, and a concomitant negative impact on aspiration and access. Where Roma students do succeed in accessing and successfully completing higher education the following factors emerge from the data: personal resilience in the face of continuing racism and patriarchal oppression; support for study from within the Roma community, particularly within the family; having connections within the higher education system (as in the case of the part-Roma dean who offered support to an engineering student); the existence of role models or mentors, and; perhaps an element of good fortune in that a student's studies are not affected by negative life events. In particular, the aspirational, emotional and psychological negative impacts of institutional and peer racism in Serbian schools, together with segregation, seem to haunt students throughout their time at university, where these negative impacts are further reinforced by the casual Romaphobia of faculty and peers; indeed, it seems likely (further research is needed) that these impacts will persist into career and across the lifespan: even after graduation the challenges do not cease, but continue to in the form of difficulties to find professional employment suitable for graduates, and continuing exclusion from social, civil, political and economic other spaces.

Despite these significant barriers, there *are* young Roma who successfully manage to enter higher education and go on to graduate. Learning from their experiences can usefully inform future widening participation development work. As discussed below, while government affirmative action policies have, to an extent, improved access, the

literature and data suggest they are underperforming. Further, even with affirmative action, participants report encounter serious examples of racism and discrimination from faculty, support staff and peers: unless the cultures of Serbian compulsory sector education and higher education institutions are changed to prevent this, affirmative action for access will remain at best one part of what needs to be done out of many. All participants were beneficiaries of international initiatives such as Roma Education Scholarships Program aimed at improving Roma access to higher education. These seem more effective than the government's affirmative action programme in encouraging increased Roma participation in Serbian higher education. However, there remains considerable scope for expansion of such initiatives if the percentage of Roma accessing higher education is ever to equal that of the majority Serbian population. Further, some participants reported difficulties in accessing such initiatives due to 'ethnic mimicry'. Participants highlighted 'aspiration enablers' that 'raise the aspirations' of Roma individuals to access higher education as one of best ways to increase participation in higher education to eliminate social exclusion (see Burke, 2006).

Through analysing these data, I came to understand how the aspirations and motivations of the Roma students are complex, and requires a deep understanding of Roma culture and society, necessitating Roma participation in the design and implementation of widening participation initiatives (See Hinton-Smith, Danvers and Jovanovic, 2017; McGarry and Agarin, 2014; Opera, 2012 for discussion on the need for Roma participation in policy-making, planning and implementation). During the interviews, it was common for participants to talk about experiencing discrimination that was an integral part of the structure of the educational system, which affected their experience and contributed to their struggle throughout the educational process including accessing higher education. Participants talked about experiences of systematic exclusion since their early education based on their skin colour, ethnicity and the effect on their experience of education and learning process. Many of the interviewees admitted to changing schools, course or altogether dropping out of the course due to experiences of discrimination and racism. The discrimination and racism experienced by my participants were multi-layered. Racism was experienced from the

peers as well as from the teachers. For instance, one participant described an instance where a lecturer stereotyped her identity due to the colour of her skin. Interviews with participants showed how ethnicity and skin colour created prejudicial expectations of the capabilities of Roma students. My research demonstrates how institutional racism exists structurally in the educational institutions in Serbia. Interviews demonstrated how Roma students were exposed to jokes about the Roma community and the feelings of embarrassment that they felt. The jokes were at times made in the classrooms with the professors present, showing how the acts and attitudes of racism are normalised in higher education institutions; not only from the professors but also from the peers.

Interviews also revealed that many of the Roma students accepted much of this racism within the educational system as a part and parcel of their general experiences of racism in the larger society. They talked of how experiences of racism led to a creation of a negative self-image, in which they accepted that their skin colour was problematic and thus lived what they called the guilt of being dark-skinned. Most participants felt that if they had been white, they would have received much more favourable treatment and had easier access to opportunities. Interviews revealed that skin colour seemed to shape the participants' identity and sense of self. Skin colour was usually the predominant theme in participants' quotations. Many participants articulated views on their skin pigmentation having an impact on their experiences and specifically how they were treated in education. Peer harassment was a real and persistent issue for some of the people interviewed. One lighter-skinned Roma participant reported expending considerable effort to 'pass for white' (i.e. Serbian), including denying their ethnicity. All this greatly enhances feelings of exclusion by Roma students already brought about by poverty and social racism, making higher education an unattractive option, leading to self-discrimination.

Related to the main research question there are five further sub-questions:

1. *'How do national and international policies impact on Roma students' access to higher education in Serbia, and what policies, strategies and*

interventions exist to encourage and support Roma access to higher education in Serbia?

While they have their weaknesses and are inadequate to fully address the issue of Roma exclusion from higher education, and despite their tendency to benefit mainly the elite, policies aimed at widening access and affirmative action nonetheless have a limited positive impact on increasing participation (for examples of this in neighbouring countries see Garaz, 2014; Garaz and Torotcoi, 2017): it would simply have been impossible for many of the participants to access higher education were it not for these initiatives.

At the national level, affirmative action is a policy response of the Serbian state to the marginalisation of the Roma in education, providing places in universities with free tuition. A further policy response was Strategy for the Improvement of the Status of the Roma in Serbia (2010), aimed at addressing the inclusion of the Roma in education, health and employment. Also in 2010, the government produced a Strategy for Poverty Reduction, which outlined government strategies to reduce overall poverty, considering education as priority in reducing poverty and marginalisation of the Roma. All participants in my research report having benefited from these initiatives to a greater or lesser degree, although there is room for expansion of such programmes, and significant barriers remain. For example, to access affirmative action one is obliged to officially declare one's self to be 'Roma', something many prospective Roma students are not willing to do for fear of deepening discrimination against them.

At the transnational level, The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) Report on Serbia notes (2011, p.7) the enactment of Serbia's 2009 Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, which prohibits 'direct and indirect discrimination as well as victimisation, racist organisations, hate speech, harassment and humiliating treatment,' and the 2010 appointment of Serbia's Commissioner for the Promotion of Equality. However, most participants reported often shocking levels of institutionalised anti-Roma racism in Serbian secondary and tertiary education, and a culture of impunity among academic faculty and teaching staff, with little or no attempt on the

part of Serbian educational institutions to bring institutional policies and practices in line with what has been the law of the land since 2010.

A further international policy response was the Decade of Roma Inclusion, a World Bank and Open Society Foundation initiative which ran 2005-15 and which aimed to enable the countries in South Eastern Europe to improve the status of the Roma and facilitate the reduction of inequality between Roma and non-Roma citizens, prioritising housing, education, employment and health, with a special focus on overlapping areas such as discrimination, poverty and gender relations. However, despite some successes, this research has shown that even three years after the conclusion of the Decade, Roma exclusion from participation in education in Serbia remains a serious problem, to counter this, Roma students have to fall back on a complex of individual resilience and family and informal community support structures which not all Roma equally enjoy.

2. *'How are Roma students, as an ethnic minority in Serbia, constructed in higher education?'*

Existing policy is aimed mainly at affirmative action, providing limited funding for study, and a numbers-driven approach to widening participation, but data from participants shows that it does not address the effects of segregation, racism and patriarchy in compulsory Serbian education, or the culture of racist impunity that exists in Serbian higher education institutions which negatively impacts Roma students' journey through their studies. A review of the literature showed that Roma students are over-represented in special needs schools. It was found that Roma children, even without learning disabilities are sometimes placed in such schools. Further, despite formal segregation into different schools for Roma and Serbian children now being illegal in Serbia (since 2010), institutional, internal segregation continues within schools, with different classes for the two ethnicities (See O'Nions, 2010; Ryder et al, 2015); further, even if institutional segregations is eventually abolished, all the participants in this study would have attended school during the segregation era, its effects impacting negatively throughout the lifespan. Despite the declaration of the Decade of the Roma Inclusion initiated in 2005, According to the 2011 census in Serbia, showed that there

was less than 1% of Roma with a tertiary education diploma as opposed to national average of 16%, as I have researched (Momcilovic and Jovanovic, 2015).

3. *'What is the role of affirmative action and widening participation programmes in enabling Roma students' access to higher education?'*

The literature review of research undertaken in neighbouring countries and data from participants in this study show a limited positive impact for these initiatives: they are successful in getting more Roma students into higher education, which many of my participants would not otherwise have been able to do, but are numbers-driven and therefore cannot address the totality of challenges facing Roma students (for a critique of this approach to 'inclusion' in other country contexts see Ahmed, 2012). Further factor that emerged from the data is that the assessment system of the Serbian school system functions as a discriminatory system against Roma educational attainment, as the systems used to gauge student performance in Serbia are rooted in linguistic and cultural bias. In Serbian education system, schools rarely recognise the Romani language as an element of multicultural diversity in the country, and the pattern of exclusion outlined above militates against Roma's achieving a high level of ability in written Serbian. Another factor that impedes access to higher education for Roma students is that the assessment system of the Serbian school system functions as a discriminatory system against Roma educational attainment, as the systems used to gauge student performance in Serbia are rooted in linguistic and cultural bias, and this militates against Roma children's achieving a sufficiently high level of ability in written Serbian to enter university.

As mentioned above, the current approaches to improving Roma education and access to higher education in Serbia have focused on initiatives such as funding, affirmative action policies, and social and cultural support. However, there is a pressing need to consider how social factors intersect not only at the point of access to higher education, but along a life course and how this inevitably affect access. The data suggest that widening participation initiatives should be broadened to consider barriers not only at the higher education level in the technical sense, but also how

institutional racism and poverty impede Roma lives from childhood to adulthood. Therefore, policy focus should be at all levels of education and not only higher education. Secondly, in the Serbian context, Roma students' access to higher education should be understood in a broader sense than merely enrolment figures and physical entrance into higher education institutions (affirmative action). Rather, consideration should be given to the intersection of institutional attitudes, policies and practices, and how they act both as enablers and barriers. Consideration should be given to how poverty, racism, discrimination, sexism intersect in influencing the access to higher education. here is a further need to consider the importance of widening participation for Roma students in Serbian education, for their benefit and for the wider benefit of Serbia's and the EU's economic development, social justice and stability. The data revealed the experiences of Roma students in higher education as Serbia prepares to move from 'the margins to the centre' of European politics, revealing that a great deal needs to be done to achieve social justice for the Roma, particularly tackling institutional racism.

4. *'How do Roma socio-economic and socio-cultural practices impact on student access to higher education in Serbia?'*

Life narrative data derived from participants in this study shows that Roma self-discrimination (the internalisation of social and institutional racism) impacts negatively on aspiration to enter higher education, but the effects of this are sometimes countered by students or aspiring students having family or community members who act as role models or mentors, and/or by having connections within the higher education system. Chapter 6 used data from interviews with Roma students in Vojvodina, to demonstrate how poverty intersects with racism a broader socio-political and socio-economic context to impact on access to higher education for the chronically and institutionally disadvantaged Roma community. The data showed that the Roma are systematically exposed to poorer quality education, due to the structural violence of systematic exclusion, with all participants reporting this as a major barrier to their access to university (for further explorations of issues related to Roma poverty and social exclusion in relation to education see Garaz, 2014; Garaz and Torotcoi,

2017; McGarry, 2012, 2017; McGarry and Agarin, 2014; O'Nions, 2010; Oprea 2005). All the participants in this study reported poverty and perpetual discrimination from a young age, which can propagate a culture of low achievement which establishes negative attitudes to participation in all phases of education. This suggests that Serbia's education system has not provided an enabling multicultural environment to foster the intellectual development of Roma children. The average length of schooling for Roma individuals in Serbia is 5.5 years in comparison with an average of 11 years in non-Roma populations in Serbia. All participants experienced difficulties in overcoming this barrier personally, and many cited the parallel experiences of their siblings and friends.

5. *'How does gender influence the life chances experiences of Roma students in accessing to higher education in Serbia?'*

My research was conducted in large part through the theoretical lens of postcolonial feminism as initially articulated in the 1980s and '90s by African-American feminists of colour. My theoretical focus was on intersectionality and the concept of 'voice' (see McGarry, 2012 for an extended discussion of the Roma and political voice) as a matter of power in relations between domination and subordination. Intersectionality as a concept emphasises how different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into isolated and individual strands. This approach allows for a multi-dimensional viewpoint on different aspects of social life. Intersectionality was initially deployed in the Roma context by Oprea (2005), and in the ensuing years a considerable literature has built up articulating a form of intersectionality specific to the Roma context, with Roma feminist-scholars and non-Roma colleagues positioning the Roma as a stateless 'Third World' or 'colonised' group of colour within Europe (see Bitu and Vincze, 2012; Brooks, 2012; Hinton-Smith, Danvers and Jovanovic, 2017; Ilisei, 2012; Kyuchukov, 2013; Oprea, 2005; Schulz, 2012). In relating this approach to my study, consideration was given not only to subjective experiences of exclusion of Roma students and the impact of institutional, socio-cultural and economic aspects on their access to higher education, but also on the role of both national and international initiatives and programmes facilitating access and supporting Roma as minority in Serbian higher

education. The issue of Roma access to higher education involves various social and political contexts such as the relationship between poverty and education, the role of institutional racism in perpetuating marginalisation and limiting access to higher education of marginalized groups, and the role of patriarchy within the Roma community that impacts the female students' ability to access to higher education. Therefore, the issue of Roma access to higher education is multilayered and has several dimensions. Postcolonial feminist approach enabled me to address these dimensions within the issue because the approach is appropriate to studying such multi-layered issues.

The feminism employed in my research focuses on social justice issues through a postcolonial, intersectional lens. The Roma community has always been at the margins and never at the centre of Serbian public life. In keeping with focus on social justice, postcolonial feminism is also concerned with representation and questions about whose voice is heard or not hear and who advocates for what and to whose benefit. Therefore, using the postcolonial feminist theoretical framework, I created a research design that focussed on giving voice to the participants in the research, using qualitative methods in exploring lived experience. Female participants revealed a complex array of gender issues that negatively affect their ability to access and flourish in Serbian higher education. These range from the traditional patriarchal family oppressions and resistance to female participation in higher education to dropping out of higher education and even secondary education out of fear of racialised sexual assault. Female participants also reported gendered prejudice against female students on the part of teachers and lecturers of the sort that they would not necessarily deploy against female Serbian students, and frequently and inability to relate to female Serbian students as peers in the higher educational context. Conversely, several participants noted that powerful female role models or mentors within the Roma context, frequently female family members who had succeeded in higher education against the odds, acted as powerful motivators to their own entry into and successes in higher education. It is to be hoped that this important source of motivation, at present informal and *ad hoc* in nature, could be built upon in a more structured and systematic way through initiatives such as mentoring and outreach schemes, which

would aim both to support female Roma higher educational aspiration, and reach out to the wider Roma community to change hearts and minds regarding the desirability and advantages of female higher education of the Serbian Roma community in the twenty-first century.

Participant data shows that patriarchal assumptions about the role of women in Roma society (see Ilisei, 2012; Kyuchokov, 2011) still exert a powerful negative impact upon the participation of Roma girls and young women in Serbian secondary and tertiary education, and that determination is required on the part of aspiring female Roma students to take their studies to tertiary level in the face of family resistance and conflict; however, several female Roma students reported the positive influence of female family members who had succeeded in higher education in boosting their aspiration and determination to undertake higher study. As mentioned above, racialised rape, sexual assault of the threat thereof is a major driver of drop-out from secondary school on the part of female Roma students. All participants report, to varying degrees that they suffer from institutionalised racial discrimination through their journey through education, and racial abuse and or/assaults by peers outside of the classroom.

This research has shown of the complexity in the challenges facing young Roma not only when accessing higher education, but across the life-course, with a focus on school age education, where low levels of participation, and high rates of low achievement and drop-out seriously undermine the higher educational aspirations of young Roma in Serbia. As outlined in Chapter 4, themes were developed out of the research questions discussed above.

Analysis of the data showed considerable similarity in participants' experiences in facing and dealing with barriers (mentioned in Chapter 5 and 6). However, their experiences were not entirely homogeneous, rather factors such as gender and social class affected how individual participants experienced Serbian higher education, as the data analysis chapters above reveal. For example, many female participants such as Jagoda, Vanja, Ana experienced patriarchy within their families and Roma communities as a significant factor militating against their participation in higher education, but

some did not, and indeed they had mentors and role models within their families and communities; many, but not all, experienced racialised sexism within Serbian compulsory and higher education. Often, ethnically Serbian peers would display conscious and unconscious Romaphobia (McGarry, 2017) in higher education learning environments, but not all did. Most participants experienced poverty and socio-economic exclusion as significant barriers to participation, completion, attainment and progression, but not all did; one, indeed, had the benefit of a senior family connection (a dean) within the institution who was able to intervene to help him. One of the limitations of qualitative research is that it is difficult to generalise from the data, especially if, as in this case, the data sample is small (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). While attempting to make such generalisations, therefore, it is important to stress that the variety of factors mentioned above serve to make each Roma experience in Serbian higher education unique.

My research confirmed the intersectional nature of the life experiences of young Roma (see Bitu and Vincze, 2012; Brooks, 2012; Ilisei, 2012; Oprea, 2005, 2012; Pantea, 2005; Schultz, 2012), where endemic poverty and individual, social and institutional racism intersect with the patriarchal basis of traditional Roma culture to become the main driver of lack of Roma participation in higher education, illustrated forcefully by data from several female participants on how racialised rape or the threat of rape was a major factor in causing female Roma students to drop out of secondary school education, seriously compromising their ability ever to attend higher education.

8.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This research contributes to and extends existing knowledge in the fields of Roma Studies and International Higher Education in several ways. Firstly, existing scholarly research on the Roma and education in Serbia is patchy: most other relevant research has been conducted in neighbouring countries, or covers Serbia only in relation to its broader region (Garaz and Torotcoi's study of Roma higher education students in Eastern and South Eastern Europe, 2017; Ilisei's study of Roma women and education in Romania, 2013; Pantea on affirmative action in higher education in Romania, 2015); this research is the first scholarly study of the Roma and higher education in Serbia,

and contributes more widely to the existing literature on the Roma and education regionally. Secondly, the work of political scientists and sociologists tends either towards theory, or is predicated upon documentary or quantitative data. The danger here is that the voice of Roma social participants becomes obscured or lost. As an educationalist I have endeavoured, while aware of the dangers involved in presuming to 'give voice' to others, used qualitative methods to capture and provide a platform for the voices of Roma students in Serbian higher education, the first study of its kind in the Serbian context. If the Roma voice is to feed into policy-making, planning and implementation (McGarry, 2012; Oprea, 2012), those voices must be heard, and qualitative research of this kind is one way to do that. Thirdly, this research builds on work began by Pantea in 2005, wherein postcolonial, intersectional feminist theory is adapted to the Roma context, and my work extends this by applying it to two new contexts: Serbia and the Roma in higher education, by linking Roma Studies to mainstream feminist theory and practice this in turn has the potential to contribute to coalition building between Roma and Gadzo (non-Roma) feminists (see Schultz, 2012), an essential precondition in ensuring gender equality and social justice in Serbia. Lastly, my qualitative, participant-derived data highlights specific challenges facing the Roma in Serbian education, such as the use of threat of sexual violence as a deterrent to female participation in Serbian education, the lingering and possibly lifelong effects of institutional racism and segregation in education, and the apparent culture of racist impunity that appears to exist in Serbian higher education institutions; each of these topics is deserving of further research in its own right.

8.4 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The main limitation of this study is the smallness of the sample. In part this reflects the small number of Serbian Roma who manage to enter and succeed in higher education; further, denial of heritage and ethnicity (for those who can), and self-marginalisation mean that some are loathe to talk to anyone about their Romaness. However, as affirmative action and widening participation continue, it is to be hoped that a critical mass of Roma higher education will be achieved so that the data pool will be larger and ethnic Roma students more willing to discuss with others their experiences as

Roma. Further, Serbia's hoped-for accession to the EU might make research access to Serbian higher education institutions easier, enabling larger scale qualitative studies.

A further limitation concerns the extent to which I, as a researcher, have been fully successful in capturing the Roma student 'voice' in this study (McGarry, 2012; (Ashby, 2011). As discussed in previous Chapters, Roma students face a complex intersection of diverse and mutually reinforcing marginalisations and oppressions (relating to multiple forms of racism, poverty and sexism and patriarchy). These combine, as mentioned above, to render participants 'hard to reach', 'vulnerable' and 'at-risk' (Kennan, 2016; Wilson & Neville, 2009).

Thus, as also discussed in Chapter 4, ethical considerations relating to participants' confidentiality, well-being, and safety overrode the methodological concern to present here the extended and detailed life-history narrative data gained during the data collection phase of this research: doing so with such a small participant sample (due to Roma exclusion from higher education) would have made is quite easy to identify participants should this dissertation go online, thereby putting them at risk. One consequence of this is that the presentation of the Roma student voice has been somewhat compromised in this dissertation. As discussed above, 'voice' is complex and multidimensional. It involves not only data in the sense of information, but a subtler concept of data ('all is data') that includes: the positionality of the participants; their attitudes, affect and emotions; their choice of words (see my discussion about the participants' peers and faculty use of the word *Cigani*, on pages 124 above – a pejorative Serbian word for 'gypsy' that has similar connotations to the 'n-word'); 'voice' (McGarry, 2012; Ashby, 2011) in the sense of tone and delivery communicating emotion and affect; and the relationship of student voice to institutional, economic, political, and social contexts. While I am aware of this as a limitation, I have sought to select elements of data that at least go some way to capturing student voice for this dissertation, by noting affect and emotional data, the careful selection of data selected, commenting on key words where necessary, and providing context for voice in a way that does not compromise confidentiality.

Directions for future research might include the following: a study not only of undergraduate students, but also secondary are Roma aspiring to enter higher education; focus group and related qualitative research involving communities and family member on their attitudes to participation in higher education, especially female higher education, that takes account of generational difference; a larger scale mixed methods study that includes a quantitative dimension for triangulation; action research on the state-of-the-art of higher education teaching, learning and learning environments for Roma students; a longitudinal study that tracks Roma graduates through postgraduate study and through their careers, including a tracking of the influence of social and institutional racism and educational segregation into the lifespan; research into racialized sexual violence as a factor that, intersected with Roma community patriarchy, militates against female Roma students continuing in Romaphobic impunity in Serbian education; a comparative study of Roma experiences in higher education in Eastern and Western Europe. Such studies would add significant new dimensions to Roma Studies and to International Higher Education Studies, but clearly would require greater resourcing than would be possible with individual, doctoral research.

8.5 Impacts

This research and follow-up research activities have the potential to be highly impactful, contributing significantly to Roma Studies, Serbian Studies, International Higher Education Studies and informing policy and best practice in Serbia and across the region, and more widely in Europe as a whole. These potential impacts might be summarised as follows:

1. Further contributions to academic knowledge as discussed above
2. Public policy-making at the Serbian, regional and transnational levels
3. Higher education development theory and practice in Serbia and beyond
4. Higher education educator initial training in Serbia and the wider region, and educator continuing professional development
5. Roma employability and career development

6. Bringing the Roma voice into policy- and decision-making, implementation and practice

7. The development of tailored access to higher education programmes and in-sessional support for Roma students

8. Providing insight into the Roma higher education experience for the Serbian government, the EU, transnational NGOs, and foreign governments interested in Roma education in the region as overseas aid.

8.5.1 Reflective Coda: My vision for the future

I will conclude this study with a reflective coda and my vision for the future of Roma higher education in Serbia and the wider region.

This came out of a conversation with a friend about why my research was focusing entirely on the undergraduate experience in Serbia, why not postgraduate and Roma students undertaking doctoral research in the West? I replied that the sample would be too small to be meaningful: because so few of us make it that far! As far as I am aware, I am the only female Serbian Roma research student in the West, and one of a very small number of Roma from across the region researching education; I am the only doctoral candidate, as far as I am aware, researching higher education from any country in the region: there would be a very small sample of one – perhaps a handful! She suggested to me autoethnography, a method that combines creative and autobiographic writing with the rigour of academic ethnography (Ellis, 2002). I replied whether I had the 'right' to include myself in my research, and how I could be objective about myself. She mentioned that in autoethnography collapsed epistemology and ontology into onto-epistemology, and that the writer was at once the subject and the object of the research. I objected that this would not fit well into my methodology. She saw my point but suggested I end with a reflective coda, that connected the personal with the political/public sphere in a way that would shed light on my research, and conclude with my vision for Roma higher education in Serbia and beyond. She mentioned that if I left myself entirely out of it I might be self-censoring important data out of the study. Dunne, Pryor and Yates note 'the role of narrative in self-construction and the maintenance of identity' (2005, p. 150), but I objected that it was too late to include new data. She replied 'hence the coda!' So here goes:

I started my primary school in the time of break-up of Yugoslavia. That was a time when Milosevic regime started and all manner of economic, political, social disasters and ultimately military and conflict were inflicted on Serbia, by internal and external actors. I had two brothers, twins; my father only worked, but on a black market to feed five of us. Under the Milosevic dictatorship even basic food items such as bread, milk and oil was not available for everybody. Ten years of age at that that time I needed to help my father to get up for work very early morning at around 05.00 to stand in the queue in front of the market to secure basic foodstuffs for the day, vital because we had two new-born babies in our home.

As a female Roma student in primary school my struggles in primary school to connect and to justify my ethnicity were unrecognised by the education system, family and peers. Defending my ethnicity – who I was – became a normal part of my life. Even feeling uncomfortable became part of this normalisation. I did not understand what was wrong, why it was 'wrong' or whether I was wrong because of who I was. I just understood that my life would be much easier if I was Serbian. I never fully belonged with my Serbian classmates as a friend, and was uncomfortable going to their homes or being part of their birthday parties. I always needed to justify myself as the cleanest, as the dressed the best, as being very clever as the best of the best simply to be perceived as an equal by my Serbian peers. But I never understood why this was the case, only that was a constant pressure. I never had birthday parties because I could not have opportunity where to invite these people home because the house I lived was just two small rooms and five of us, and I would be judged. I never had my room: at home I needed to take care after my brothers and help my mum. All during my primary school years I studied in the bathroom because there I could write my homework without the disturbance of my younger brothers, who liked to damage my books and notebooks.

Teachers expectations of me were that maybe I might finish secondary school as one of the 'successful' ones, then get married regardless my ambitions or grades. They made these feelings very clear to me, to their colleagues, my peers and their parents. Only my mum did not believe that. Her belief was always that I would finish university. She was preparing me for university since I was two years old. I knew how to read and write in Serbian fluently before even preschool. I used to go with her in the library every week because she herself liked to read a lot. During my secondary school my father got cancer and all we had materially my mum needed to sell to save his life. Then after I finished secondary school and needed to enrol to university I could not afford the tuition fee. During the summer, I did a job cleaning mushrooms to be able to pay for my enrolment at university. That was a hard time because my father could not work much then because of his illness. Meanwhile I applied to study in Vienna as I had some cousins and help me to get out of this darkness. While I was waiting for answers from Vienna University I was looking for the job in case I was rejected.

I started to work in Roma radio station 'Tocak' and the NGO the Roma Youth Centre under the mentorship and leadership of Zeljko Jovanovic. At that time, I did not know what an NGO was, and what is the role of Roma civil radio. This

was my first step into the Roma movement, and my life path started into the direction where I am today.

Today, my interest in education is rooted in my personal and professional experiences and arises because my expectations were unfulfilled by the post-Communist education system in Serbia. Critical thinking was not encouraged, a very formal 'iron-fist' authority was imposed by teachers, and their demand for rote-memorisation prevailed over the development of understanding by questioning. Compliance and conformity rather than not critique were demanded in student-teacher interactions. This environment is not a supportive one for students generally, but especially not for Roma students who have additional problems because of their ethnicity. My criticism of this type of education became stronger once I was exposed to the more analytical and reflective teaching methods at the Central European University in Budapest, and later the University of Sussex for my Master's degree and PhD. These pedagogic experiences have had a profound impact on my hopes for and my vision of, what more effective education could be like in Serbia.

My professional experience has confirmed the reality of the negative effects of the underdeveloped educational systems and teaching methods in the Western Balkans. My first work experience in 2003 was conducting research about Roma dropouts in western Serbia. The purpose of the research was to develop a policy that could be adopted by the local government in Valjevo. As a result, the municipality adopted the first local policy on education for Roma in Serbia in 2005. During my work with the Roma Centre for Democracy, an NGO in Valjevo, I provided input for the 2009 European Commission Progress Report on Serbia, which addressed implementation failures of the elementary education law.

Under the mentorship of Tunde Kovach Cerovic, formerly of the Roma Education Fund and ex-State Secretary in the Ministry of Education in Serbia, I worked on a cross-country analysis of preschool policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia. These professional experiences affirmed my interest in and commitment to policy-making on Roma education. Later, I attended a one-year program focusing on public policy at Central European University in Budapest and this experience helped me to advance my knowledge about how policies work, how to analyse policy and how to affect change.

In addition, I successfully completed a module focusing on research design and research methods as part of my MA in International Education and Development at the University of Sussex. This has substantially helped me to improve my research skills. Currently, I am finishing my doctoral research at Sussex on the topic Roma Access in Higher Education, using qualitative research to look deeper in effects of racism, marginalisation and exclusion from the early stage of education until the university. It is the luck of the draw. This has provided me with further insight into the different ways in which research is undertaken, it also enhances my ability to investigate the topic of Roma education in Serbia situated in its social, economic, cultural, historical contexts.

According to Roma Education Fund data, only every fourth Roma student earns a university degree. To help improve this situation, I am interested in gaining academic knowledge, and thus strengthening my personal ability to think

critically. My wider ambition is to link theory with research, policy and practice at an international level.

There are some striking parallels between my experiences and those of many of the participants in this study. This is not projection, but the common lot of many Roma in Serbia aspiring to succeed in secondary and tertiary education. As an insider-outside researcher (outsider because my level of education, against the odds, and my relatively long residency in the West), it has been a key aspect of this research to think through how my almost unique status relates to me position as a researcher working with Roma student-participants, as detailed in the methodology section above.

My vision for Roma higher education in Serbia and the region involves a properly and sustainably funded access to higher education programme for Roma of all socio-economic statuses, supported by appropriate support for Roma students throughout their undergraduate journey, supported by transnational NGOs and in collaboration with faculties of education from leading Western universities; a commitment to proper managerial oversight of Serbian higher education to ensure that institutional racism and Romaphobia are banished from higher education; a zero tolerance for casual faculty and peer racism; initial educator training and continuing professional development to ensure a different approach to Roma students from educators in all phases of education; a systematic approach using Roma graduates and postgraduates to Roma role modelling and mentoring to ensure maximum Roma participation and successful completion in higher education; Roma-led outreach to Roma communities to enable the changing of traditional patriarchal assumptions regarding female Roma education; a total abolition of all forms of segregation at all phases of Serbian education; vigilance from law enforcement to clamp down on peer and social bullying of Roma students. Ultimately, I would like to see a redefinition of civics and how Serbness is taught that is inclusive of all communities living in Serbia, no longer predicated upon the local variant of white supremacy and ethno-confessional exclusivism.

On this note, I end this study.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FORM

University of Sussex

CONSENT FORM FOR PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

PROJECT TITLE: Roma Student Access to Higher Education in Serbia: Challenges and Promises

I agree to take part in the above research conducted by Tanja Jovanovic, for the pursuit of her PhD degree in Education from University of Sussex, UK.

I have had the project explained to me and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I may keep for records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to make myself available for a further interview that is going to be required.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that I disclose will lead to the identification of any individual in the reports on the project, either by the researcher or by any other party. I understand that anonymity will be done to prevent my identity from being made public. I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before being included in the write up of the research.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.
I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (NGO STAFF)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Study of Roma Student Access to Higher Education in Serbia: Challenges and Promises

You are being invited to take part in this research. Before you decide to do this or not, it is important for you to understand its purpose and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

The study aims to explore how minority Roma students succeed in accessing higher education (HE) in Serbia. This is important because it is integral in improving Roma people's life chances and employment opportunities, which subsequently affect their welfare, enabling social mobility.

The main purpose of this research is to empirically investigate the experiences of Roma people in accessing higher education in Serbia through qualitative research. This is important because it is integral in improving Roma people's life chances and employment opportunities, which subsequently affect their welfare, enabling social mobility. This research will conduct life history interviews with the ten Roma students about the impact of institutional, socio-cultural and economic aspects on their access to HE. Additionally, this research will conduct semi structure interviews with staff from local NGOs in Novi Sad.

My name is Tanja Jovanovic and I am a doctoral student doing PhD research in Center for Higher Education and Equity Research, University of Sussex, United Kingdom. I was born in Valjevo, Serbia in a Roma family without having any financial support to study. Therefore, I was working in order to support my own study. Currently, I am working as a Graduate Teaching/Research Assistant at the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research and doing my PhD research at Sussex University. This study has been approved by the University of Sussex.

I am researching how Roma students as an ethnic minority, succeed in accessing HE in Serbia. As a Roma student, I want to look at the ways of improving Roma access to higher education and encouraging other Roma who want to study. By sharing your own experiences in accessing higher education, you will help other Roma who are planning to study but are discouraged or have similar story like you but do not know how to manage it. Therefore, your experience is very important in this process of encouraging other Roma students.

The research visit to your context takes place between September 2014 and June 2015 and involves semi-structured interviews with senior staff from local NGO in Novi Sad. These interviews will be used to gain more in-depth understanding of some of the issues mentioned in the research questions, such as policies and initiatives, Roma culture,

and gender. I would like to explore the opinions of the people who are working in the local level to provide support for Roma community. NGOs are able to shed light on the many issues that Roma community face, and also provide vivid narratives about compatibility and contingency between the policy and the reality.

I have identified you as a key participant in this context. However, you can decide whether or not to take part in the research. If you agree to take part, I would like to invite you to participate in the interview. The interview should take no longer than 1 hour.

All interviews will be analysed in detail in Sussex, and will be safely and anonymously stored in password-protected files on a password-protected system. All information will be destroyed once the research is completed.

 I will write down everything that is said in the interviews and will use this information anonymously for my research. This means that other people will be able to see the information that you give me, but I will change all of the names so that no-one will know that it was you who was speaking. I hope to publish this information and talk about it with other people, but I will only ever do this anonymously. If you want to see anything that I publish about the research then I can send you information in the future so please talk to me about this.

If you decide that you either no longer wish to continue participating, and/or, if you decided that you do not want information that you have already shared to be included in the research, you are free to withdraw consent until such a time that this is no longer practical. If you wish to withdraw, please contact me at tj54@sussex.ac.uk

If you have any problems, concerns or complaints as a result of this research you can contact my supervisor in my University. Here is her name and contact:
Professor Louise Morley
e-mail: L.Morley@sussex.ac.uk
Phone number: +441273876700

You can get in touch with me using the following information:

Email: tj54@sussex.ac.uk
Mobile number (in Serbia): xxxxx
Address: Vojvode Misica 076
14000 Valjevo

Thank you for you for taking part in the meeting.

Tanja Jovanovic
PhD student
Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research
University of Sussex
Brighton,
United Kingdom

APPENDIX 3: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (Roma Students)

US
University of Sussex

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Study of Roma Student Access to Higher Education in Serbia: Challenges and Promises

You are being invited to take part in this research. Before you decide to do this or not, it is important for you to understand its purpose and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

The study aims to explore how minority Roma students succeed in accessing higher education (HE) in Serbia. This is important because it is integral in improving Roma people's life chances and employment opportunities, which subsequently affect their welfare, enabling social mobility.

The main purpose of this research is to empirically investigate the experiences of Roma people in accessing higher education in Serbia through qualitative research. This is important because it is integral in improving Roma people's life chances and employment opportunities, which subsequently affect their welfare, enabling social mobility. This research will conduct life history interviews with the six Roma students about the impact of institutional, socio-cultural and economic aspects on their access to HE. Additionally, this research will conduct semi structure interviews with staff from local NGOs in Novi Sad.

My name is Tanja Jovanovic and I am a doctoral student doing PhD research in Center for Higher Education and Equity Research, University of Sussex, United Kingdom. I was born in Valjevo, Serbia in a Roma family without having any financial support to study. Therefore, I was working in order to support my own study. Currently, I am working as a Graduate Teaching/Research Assistant at the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research and doing my PhD research at Sussex University. This study has been approved by the University of Sussex.

I am researching how Roma students as an ethnic minority, succeed in accessing HE in Serbia. As a Roma student, I want to look at the ways of improving Roma access to higher education and encouraging other Roma who want to study. By sharing your own experiences in accessing higher education, you will help other Roma who are planning to study but are discouraged or have similar story like you but do not know how to manage it. Therefore, your experience is very important in this process of encouraging other Roma students.

The research visit to your context takes place between September 2014 and June 2015 and involves life history interviews with Roma students from University of Novi Sad Vojvodina, Serbia.

The researcher has identified you as a key student in this context. However, you can decide whether or not to take part in the research. If you agree to take part, I would like to invite you to participate in the interview. The interview should take no longer than 1 hour and 30 minutes each time. We should meet 3 times in the time and venue that is the most appropriate for you.

All interviews will be analysed in detail at Sussex, and will be safely and anonymously stored in password-protected files on a password-protected system. All information will be destroyed once the research is completed.

 I will write down everything that is said in the interviews and will use this information anonymously for my research. This means that other people will be able to see the information that you give me, but I will change all of the names so that no-one will know that it was you who was speaking. I hope to publish this information and talk about it with other people, but I will only ever do this anonymously. If you want to see anything that I publish about the research then I can send you information in the future so please talk to me about this.

If you decide that you either no longer wish to continue participating, and/or, if you decided that you do not want information that you have already shared to be included in the research, you are free to withdraw consent until such a time that this is no longer practical. If you wish to withdraw, please contact me at tj54@sussex.ac.uk

If you have any problems, concerns or complaints as a result of this research you can contact my supervisor in my University. Here is her name and contact:
Professor Louise Morley
e-mail: L.Morley@sussex.ac.uk
Phone number: +441273876700

You can get in touch with me using the following information:

Email: tj54@sussex.ac.uk
Mobile number (in Serbia): xxxxx
Address: Vojvode Misica 076
14000 Valjevo

Thank you for you for taking part in the meeting.

Tanja Jovanovic
PhD student
Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research
University of Sussex
Brighton,
United Kingdom

APPENDIX 4: TOPIC GUIDE

Main research question: How do Roma students, as an ethnic minority, succeed in accessing HE in Serbia? Kako Romi student, kao etnicke manjine, su se upisali na univerzitetima?

Sub-questions:
1.   How do national and international policies influence on Roma students' access to HE in Serbia? Kako nacionalni I medjunarodni policy utice na upis Romskih studenata u Srbiji?

Examples of policies: The Law on Higher Education (2005 and amendments in 2008 and 2010); the Law on the Foundations of the Education System (covering all pre-university education, 2003), which was adopted in 2003; the Serbian EU Progress Report (2012); the Poverty Reduction Strategy (where education is seen as a major development and poverty-reduction mechanism); the Roma Education Strategy and Action Plan; the Education Strategy for Children with Special Needs; the National Framework for Education for Democratic Citizenship, and; the Education Development Strategy in Serbia until to 2020).

•   How are Roma, as an ethnic minority in Serbia, constructed in HE national policy? Kako Romi, kao nacionalne manjine su konstruisani u nacionalnom policiju?
•   What policies, strategies and interventions exist to encourage and support the Roma community to access HE in Serbia? Koji policy, strategije I intervencije postoje da podstaknu I podrze upis Rome student?
•   What is the role of affirmative action and widening participation programmes in enabling Roma students' access to HE? Koja je uloga affirmativne akcije pri upisu na fakultete?

2.   How do Roma socio-cultural practices impact on student access to HE in Serbia? Examples: way of dressing, extent to which family prepares boys and girls for Higher Education.
•   How does Roma culture influence Roma students' access to Higher Education?
•   How does gender influence the life chances and experiences of Roma students in accessing to HE in Serbia?

3.   What are the barriers, aspirations and enablers that Roma students report regarding their access to Higher Education in Serbia?'

Examples of Life History Interview Questions with students

I will provide each student with an information sheet which will outline the topics that I intend to cover including:
• early years and family life
• experiences of primary education
• experiences of secondary school
• decision-making about going to university
• experiences of transition to university
• expectations of university

At each stage, I will be investigating enablers and constraints experienced.

1. Biographical information (this information is very useful for the interview process as I will be referring to it in question 6)
Tell me a bit about yourself!
• Where do you come from (region, community or city)? Odakle dolazis?
• how old are you/when were you born? Koliko godina imas?
• How would you describe your economic background? Kako bi opisao tvoju ekonomsku situaciju?

2. Tell me a bit about your course. (help to Answer Research question 3)
• What course are you studying? Sta studiras?
• Why did you choose to study this course? Zasto si to izabrao?
• What do you like/dislike about this course? Sta ti se svidja/nesvidja na tvom fakultetu?
• What are the challenges that you had in joining this course? Koji su izazovi koje si imao da bi upisao taj fakultet?
• How did you find out the course? Kako ti se cini tvoj program?
• In your opinion, how does being a Roma from (name of city, region, community) influence on the enrolment process for this course? Po tvom misljenju, biti Rom iz……… utice na process upisa na tvom fakulettu? Kako?
What particular challenges, if any, do you think Roma women face in accessing HE? Koji su izazovi, ako ih ima, Romkinje se suocavaju pro upisu na fakultetu?
• Tell me how you feel being a man/women impacted your experiences joining this course? Kazi mi kako ti se cini biti muzkarac ili zena ima uticaja pri upisu na fakutetu?

3. What were your expectations before you came to university? kOJA SU TI OCEKIVANJEPRE NEGO STO SI UPISAO FAKULTET?
4. (help to answer research question 3)
(TOPIC: expectations of university)

sub-questions:
• What did you know about this university before you came here? STA SI ZNAO O TOM FAKULTETU PRE NEGO STO SI UPISAO?
• What did you think it would be like, being a student here? STA SI MISLIO, KAKO CE TI BITI KAO STUDENT?

- Where did these expectations come from? ODAKLE SU DOSLA TA OCEKIVANJE?
- Have there been any shocks or surprises? Could you provide specific examples? JESI IMAO NEKA IZNENADJENJA, NESTO STO NISI UOPSTE OCEKIVAO. NAVEDI NEKI PIMER AKO MOZES.

5.   What made you decide that you wanted to go to university? (help to answer research question 3) KAKO SI ODLUCIO DA ZELIS DA STUDIRAS?

(TOPIC: decisions to go to university and influences)
Sub-questions
- When did you first think that you want to go to university? KADA SI PRVI PUT POMISLIO DA IDES NA FAKULTET?
- How old were you then? KOLIKO GODINA SI IMAO?
- What/ who has influenced you and your decision? STA ILI KO TE INSPIRISAO ILI UTICAO NA TVOJU ODLUKU?
- What happened? OBJASNI STA SE DESILI?
- Did anyone give you particular encouragement? How did they encourage you? JESU LI POSTOJALA OHRABRIVANJA? Ko te je ohrabrivao?
- Did anyone try to discourage you? Why? Jeli te neko obeshrabrivao? Zasto?
- To what extent being a boy or girl had an impact on the kind of encouragement(s) you received/ not received? As a girl what were you ecoured inspred to? How have you imagined your future? Do koje mere biti musko ili zensko ima uticaja na podrsku koju dobijas/ili ne dobijas?
- To what extent does being a Roma from (name of the community, region or city) influence on the kind of /discouragement you had? Do koje mere kao Rom iz …….. utice na obeshrabrenje ako si imala?
- What were those who discouraged you concerned about? Oni koji su te obeshrabrivali sta je bila njivova briga?
- Has anyone in your family entered to higher education? Why? Jeli imas nekoga u familiji da je upisan ili bio upisan na fakultet?

6.   What was it like growing up in (name of the region)/ (name of a Roma community)? (help to answere esearch question 2) Kako je odrastati u kraju gde si odrastao?

(TOPIC: early years and family life)
sub-questions:
- How would you generally describe the home you grew up in? mozes li da mi opises kako si odrastao?

7.   What were your early experiences of primary school like? Koja su tvoja rana iskustva u osnovnoj skoli?
(TOPIC early education) (help to answere esearch question 2)

sub-questions
- Do you remember how did you feel in primary school?
- Can you remember any specific incidents from school when you felt good/bad about yourself? What happened?

- Was there anyone who was influential on your early learning?
- Have this/these anyone/incident(s) impacted positively/negatively on your early learning? If yes, how?

What was your experience in secondary school like? (help to answere esearch question 2)

(TOPIC secondary school)

- Do you have any particular positive (negative) memories of secondary school?

Sub-questions
- How would you describe your secondary school? What kind of school would you say it was?
- Can you remember any particular incident(s) from your time at secondary school? What is it about that incident that sticks in your memory?
- Tell me about what/who inspired you during your time at secondary school?
- In what ways has being a girl/boy affected your experiences at secondary school?
- Would you tell me about how being a Serbian Roma student has shaped your experiences of secondary school?
- How would you describe your family in terms of Socio-economic status? (Wealthy, poor etc.)
- Do you think your family's socio-economic background has influenced your experiences of secondary school? If yes, how?
- How do you think coming from … region shaped your experiences at secondary school?

8. What was it like to move from secondary school to university?
(TOPIC: university experiences - transition) (help to answere esearch question 3)

sub-questions
- How did you feel on your first day at university?
- What were your fears and hopes?
- Was there anything in particular that you remember about your first days at university?
- How did you feel the first time you went home? (If student has moved away to go to university)
- Can you remember any particular incidents when you felt particularly good/bad about your move to university?
- In what ways do you believe that university has affected you?
- Are there any really positive/negative changes that you feel good/sad about?
- How did the transition, from secondary to HE, affect your view about yourself (being Roma)?

9.   What are your hopes for the future? (help to answer research question 3)

sub-questions
•   What do you hope to gain from being at university?
•   What would you like to do when you leave university?

Indicative semi- structured Interviews Questions with NGOs

Q1.
What are your initiatives (projects) to support Roma students to access to Higher Education?
•   How do you measure the success or failure of these initiatives?
•   What difference(s) do you think these initiatives have made for Roma students in general to access to HE?
•   What initiative(s) does work well in your opinion? Why? What initiative(s) does not work in your opinion? Why?What change(s) do you think would improve access to HE for Roma?

Q2. What in your opinion are the barriers that Roma students face in accessing higher education?

Q3. Would you tell me more about the implementation of affirmative action?
•   How does it work in practice?
•   How effective is affirmative action in your opinion? What are your views on Affirmative Action?
•   How do you measure the effectiveness/ failures of AA?
•   What do you think are the barriers to applying the affirmative action in practice in Serbia?

Q4. From your experience of working with Roma students, what do you think are the barriers and aspirations that these students experience?
•   How do you think being a Roma boy/girl influence on their experiences in accessing Higher Education?
•   What are your views on Roma girls' aspirations in accessing HE?
•   How does affirmative action take into account the gendered nature of accessing higher education for Roma youths/ How is gender understood in affirmative action programmes?

Q5. If you don't mind me asking will tell me about your sources of support for your programs? (financial and moral or even political support if any)

Appendix 5: INTERVIEW QUESTION- SERBIAN LANGUAGE

1. Biografija
   - Kazi mi odakle dolazis?
   - Koliko godina imas?
   - Kako bi opisao/la tvoju ekonomsku situaciju?

2. Kazi nesto o tvom smeru koji studiras?
   - Sta studiras?
   - Zasto si izabrao/la to da studiras?
   - Sta ti svidja/ne svidja na tvom smeru?
   - Koji su izazovi koje si imao/la da bi upisao/la taj fakultet?
   - Kako ti se cini taj smer ?
   - Po tvom misljenju, biti Rom/kinja iz……… utice na process upisa na tvom fakulettu? Kako?
   - Koji su izazovi, ako si ih imao/la kao Romkinja pri upisu na fakultetu?
   - Kazi mi kako ti se cini da li ima uticaja biti muzkarac ili zena pri upisu na fakutetu?

3. Koja su ti ocekivanja pre nego sto si upisao/la fakultet?
   - Sta si znao/la o tom fakultetu pre nego sto si upisao/la?
   - Sta si mislio/la kako ce ti biti kao student?
   - Odakle su ti ta ocekivanja?
   - Mozes li mi opisati ako si imao/la neka iznenadjenja, nesto sto nisi ocekivao/la na fakultetu? Navedi neki primer.

4. Kako si odlucio/la da zelis da studiras?
   - Kada si prvi put pomislio/la da ides na fakultet?
   - Koliko si godina imao/la?
   - Sta ili ko te je inspirisao ili uticao na tvoju odluku?
   - Mozes li opisati sta se desilo?
   - Ko te je najvise ohrabrivao ili obeshrabrivao da ides na fakultet? Zasto?
   - Do koje mere biti musko ili zensko ima uticaja na podrsku koju dobijas/ili ne dobijas?
   - Do koje mere kao Rom/kinja iz …….. utice na obeshrabrenje ako si imala?
   - Oni koji su te obeshrabrivali sta je bio njihov glavni razlog za to?
   - Jeli imas nekoga u familiji da je upisan ili bio upisan na fakultet?

5. Kako je odrastati u kraju gde si odrastao/la?
   - Mozes li mi vise opisati tvoje odrastanje?

6. Koja su tvoja rana iskustva iz **osnovne skole**?
   - Kako si se osecao/la u osnovnoj skoji. Mozes li mi opisati to?

- Mozes li se setiti nekog specificnog dogadjaja ili incidenta kada si se osecao/la lose ili dobro u osnovnoj skoli?
- Ko te je podrzavao pri ucenju?
- Kako je taj dogadjaj iz skole uticao na tvoje ucenje ili skolovanje uopste?

7. Mozes li mi opisati tvoje iskustvo iz **srednje skole?**
   - Mozes li mi opisati neko specificno pozitivno ili negativno secanje iz srednje skole?
   - Kako bi opisao tvoju srednju skolu? Koja je to skola bila?
   - Mozes li se setiti nekog specificnog dogadjaj iz srednje skole? Sta je to sto te nateralo da ti ostane u secanju u vezi sa tim dogadjjem.?
   - Ko te je najvise inspirisao tokom srednje skole da ucis?
   - Na koji nacin biti zensko/musko je uticalo na tvoje iskustvo u srednjoj skoli?
   - Mozes li mi reci kako je iskustvo kao rom/romkinja biti u srednjoj skoli?
   - Kako bi opisao/la ekonomsku I socijlnu situciju tvoje porodice?
   - Mislis li da je tvoja ekonomska I socijalna situacija uticala na tvoje iskustvo u srednjoj skoli?

8. Kako je bio taj prelazak iz srednje skole na fakultet?
   - Kako si se osecao/la prvog dana na fakultetu?
   - Mozes li mi opisati ako se secas necega specificnog od prvog dana na fakultetu?
   - Kako ti je bilo odvajanje od porodice?
   - Mozes li setiti necega specificnog da si se osecao/la dobro ili lose pri odvajanju od porodice?
   - Na koji nacin mislis da fakultet je imao/la uticaja na tebe? Na koji nacin?
   - Potoji li pozitivna ili negativna promena da osecas pri dolazku na fakultetu?
   - Kako je ta tranzicija is srednje skole na fakultet uticalo na tvoje vidjenje sebe?

9. Koja su ti ocekivanja u buducnosti?
   - Sta ocekujes da dobijes dolaskom na fakultet?
   - Sta bi voleo/la da radis kad zavrsis?

APPENDIX 6: LETTER FROM THE HOST ORGANISATION

VRCD

Vojvođanski romski
centar za demokratiju

Date: 30.05.2014

University of Sussex Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER)

Dear Sir/Madam

This letter serves to confirm that Vojvodina Roma Centre for Democracy, **Novi** Sad will be supporting Ms. Tanja Jovanovic's doctoral research in Novi Sad, **Serbia** for the duration of September 2014 to July 2015. As part of the agreement Vojvodina Roma Centre for Democracy, agrees to provide the office space and facilities, facilitate access and transportation to research sites and support collection of data. In return, Ms. Jovanovic agrees to support Vojvodina Roma Centre for Democracy, **by** providing professional educational consultation and translation of different reports in English.

Since Novi Sad is safe environment and familiar to Ms. Jovanovic, no security training or briefing is necessary.

Please contact me if further information is needed.

Thank you,

Aleksandar Jovanovic

President Vojvodina Roma Centre for Democracy