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# **Gebildete non-Roma: partnering with Roma in the struggle against structural antigypsyism**

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Work not submitted elsewhere for examination

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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## Abstract

My thesis investigates non-Romani identities with the aim of forging new allies for Roma in the struggle against structural antigypsyism. The ultimate goal of the inquiry is to contribute to the emergence of a body of non-Romani activists and researchers willing and able to reflect upon and develop the concept and practice of a *gebildete* non-Romani identity. This is defined as an identity that is engaged with and questions its own historical roots and prejudices and seeks to actively overcome these through thoughtful and deliberate action, based on insights from hermeneutics and critical whiteness. I argue that by going back to the genealogies of this form of racism and understanding the shadow it casts upon Roma and non-Roma alike; by consciously cultivating an attitude of openness and transgressively reclaiming non-Romani identities, whether individually or collectively; and by learning how to live with and operate with an attitude of continuous openness (*Bildung*), non-Roma can reach a deeper understanding of antigypsyism and their role in perpetuating or indeed addressing it.

To grapple with the role of non-Roma in the constellation of antigypsyism, I turn to philosophical hermeneutics, critical race theories, feminism and queer approaches to widen the lens of understanding regarding how Romani but also non-Romani identities were constructed historically and why that history matters. I exemplify how these identities play out in individual human relationships but also as part of societal structures through encounters and dialogue and how it is possible to set up a process of reimagining them in ways that are meaningful and intentional and contribute to resolving the oppression levelled at Roma.

## Chapter 1 Antigypsyism

The core aim of this research is to describe a possible journey for non-Romani people wishing to engage with and dismantle antigypsyism. As it is such a central element of my inquiry, I open with this chapter entirely dedicated to antigypsyism and its importance to understanding not only Romani but also non-Romani identity formation. I show how in the past 10 years the struggle against anti-Roma racism emerged as one of the drivers of understanding Roma discrimination, in a marked shift away from Roma integration and Roma inclusion. I conclude this chapter with a description of how I have structured my research to answer the main question of the role for non-Roma in this struggle.

Defined as a specific form or subcategory of racism affecting Roma, Gypsy and Traveller people and communities worldwide (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017, p. 3), antigypsyism is a form of racism. Because of its origins in and close links with European nation-building and the emergence of modern Europe, antigypsyism reaches well beyond Romani communities and the small group of non-Roma activists and academics who have thus far engaged with it. Its manifestations are at the heart of any critical enquiry regarding 'Europe' (Yildiz & De Genova, 2017). I agree with my research participant Werner, a Roma activist who works across Europe. He maintains that antigypsyism is

foundational to modern nation states [and the] key to this other Europe, this dark Europe, so that whenever any politicians want to start any generalisations about any community, they start with Romani people because they know there are no defences against [antigypsyism]. (Werner, field interview, 2019)

This quote highlights the hidden yet inescapable effects that antigypsyism has had on our history and the way it permeates the consciousness of Europeans, making it vulnerable to divisions and conflict. Even though largely unaware of this, non-Roma across the world, but especially in Europe, are deeply affected by antigypsyism. While Roma are most directly targeted by its effects and have thus far been at the forefront of calling out antigypsyism, it is in everyone's interest to engage with it and start to unravel the hold it has on our societies. To make my argument, I turn first to why it is important to move away from seeing Romani and non-Romani identities as a cultural and ethnic

phenomena and instead thinking of them as racialised constructs beholden to structural antigypsyism.

As I explain in chapter 2, ethnic identity is not something we are born into. In fact, ethnic identities are subjective categories that have much to do with the social intercourse that produces them (Barth, 1998). As such, ethnicity is ‘articulated in particular situational contexts’ (Back & Solomos, 1996, p. 125). Those historical, social and political contexts can and do result in ethnic identities becoming politically charged. In this way, identities that start life, as it were, as ethnic and cultural constructs can end up becoming imbued with different content depending on the interests and actions of the people espousing them (Barth, 1998, p. 14). Thus, ethnic identities that have morphed into consciously assumed political identities take on a life of their own and are just as legitimate as the cultural identities they spring from. In some ways, they are perhaps even more legitimate in the sense of being more appropriate to their context.

There are no exceptions to this when it comes to Romani and non-Romani identities. As Lucie Fremlova (2017, pp. 31-69) observes, the short period from the beginning of this millennium has seen a number of big shifts and changes in how Roma see themselves and articulate ways in which various movements (for example the LGBTIQ community) have contributed to a ‘fundamental challenge to stereotypical, one-dimensional, homogenising and essentialising representations of Roma’ (Fremlova, 2017, p. 3). As I show throughout my thesis, non-Roma have seen their identities similarly challenged. Without attempting an exhaustive account of recent developments in this respect, I will nevertheless set out a few pointers that may be important to understand the changes involved in our understandings of Romani and non-Romani identities during the past decades.

### **Romani identities**

The signifier ‘Roma’ is used by the EU

as well as by a number of international organisations and representatives of Romani groups in Europe, to refer to a number of different groups (such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom) and also includes Travellers,

without denying the specificities and varieties of lifestyles and situations of these groups. (European Commission, 2012, p. 2)

But who are the Roma and how have they related to their changing identities over the course of time? It is a difficult question for a group of people whose very self-identification is problematic and can be imposed by outsiders (Durst, 2010). Scholars such as Michael Stewart (Stewart & Rövid, 2010, p. 12) argue that for many reasons Romani identity does not fit neatly into patterns of ethnicity as devised by nation states and that contemporary responses by outsiders have been polarised between the emotionally charged position of asking for Romani human rights on an international stage and attempts to understand Roma within the confines of nationalist discourse.

One aspect of Romani identity in particular has been the topic of hotly debates, namely the appropriate terminology to use for both people who identify and who do not identify as Roma. In my inquiry, I have taken Roma to mean a political term used by people who have been called many names – Gypsy, Tzigani, etc. – that they felt were discriminatory. The term Roma has a particular history attached to it, being first used by the ‘Komiteto Lumniako Romano’ (in French ‘Comité International Rom’ (CIR)), the organisers in 1971 of the First World Romani Congress (Council of Europe, n.d.).

‘Gypsies’ were, and unfortunately remain, a category of people wrested of the human dimension of their identity, stripped of any social attributions. [...] I used the word ‘Gypsy’ when referring to the way I was named, portrayed and perceived. In contrast, I used the word ‘Roma’ when referring to myself and to Roma as a group of people in the way I and other Roma describe ourselves. (Mihalache, 2013)

In this way, rather than being mainly defined by the ethnicity of its members, the concept of ‘Roma people’ is similar to the ‘public voice [...] used by artists to blend the contradictory elements of the Black Power Movement into an uneasy unity and to create an anti-racist current among whites’ in a British context (Gilroy, 2013, p. 236). Unlike previous approaches to anti-racism, the Black Power Movement, while concerned with racial pride and equality, also called for the ‘deconstruction of white power structures’ (Odlum, 2015). Just like the moves towards confronting antigypsyism as the core struggle for Roma, organisations calling for Black Power maintained that simple desegregation

did not go far enough in restoring the racial balance. In Eastern Europe, using Roma as a political term (Matache & Oprea, 2019) is similarly charged with political connotations – the same connotations as the ‘term black coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalisation in Britain’ (Hall, 1996, p. 442).

This usage of Roma echoes the strategic essentialism embraced by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990). As Spivak herself insists, the essentialism she talks about is based upon choosing a viewpoint for a particular purpose and for a particular time. According to Fremlova (2017), Roma employ the same strategy of temporarily putting ‘aside group differences, in order to forge a sense of collective identity’ (p. 44). One manifestation of that essentialism is to use the name Roma as a signifier of political emancipation. Accordingly, throughout this research, when speaking about historical contexts, in direct quotes I use the exonym Gypsy to denote populations that now choose to call themselves by the endonym Roma. However, I also choose to use Roma when describing people who lived in past historical periods.

Regarding the term non-Roma, I had several discussions with my participants about whether to use Gadjo (singular) or Gadge (plural) when referring to mainly white people of non-Romani descent. Finally, I decided to go with non-Roma, following usage described by Romani academic Margareta Matache:

Gadge is the generic term used by Romani people to refer to non-Roma; in the text, I use gadjo/gadge interchangeably with non-Roma. Gadjo-ness is used here to underline a Euro-specific form of whiteness that grants social, economic, cultural, and institutional privileges and entitlements to non-Roma, or more precisely, to dominant majority groups. (Matache, 2016)

There is an important distinction between Gadge – a way of being white non-Roma that is under the influence of unreconstructed racial thinking – and non-Roma, which implies a certain measure of reflexivity and a deeper understanding of antigypsyism. This follows the distinction between Gypsy and Roma on the one hand, and understandings of critical whiteness and the differentiation in terms that other scholars such as Clare Land (2015), Ghassan Hage (2000) and Robin DiAngelo (2018) employ when speaking about whiteness on the other. However, once or twice, when my

participants described non-Roma as Gadjé or Gadjo, I have used this term, with the obvious negative implications involved.

One additional important distinction is that being non-Roma does not automatically mean identifying as politically and racially white. Yet while I am aware of the complexities experienced by non-Roma who are also targeted by racism because of the colour of their skin or that of their ancestors, I do not feel able or entitled to speak about their experience. Hence, for the purposes of this thesis, I am only concerned with the experience of non-Roma whose heritage is historically constructed as white. In the present research, then, I use non-Roma to mean white non-Roma. I will return to fully explain these differences in the section about critical whiteness in chapter 2.

Another fierce debate has concerned the designation of anti-Roma racism as antigypsyism. The scholarship of Matache and Oprea (2019) is but one example of the challenge that can be levelled at a description of racism that includes the racist exonym 'Gypsy'. They propose to talk about anti-Romani racism to de-emphasise the racist connotations of the terminology and 'to place anti-Romani racism in the broader global conversation' (Matache & Oprea, 2019, p. 292). Meanwhile, McGarry (2017) chooses to use the term Romaphobia for a similar reason. I see these debates as part of the historical development of our knowledge about this phenomenon. In this thesis, I choose to use antigypsyism to signify a socially constructed category that has less to do with Roma than it has to do with non-Roma whiteness, and thus is not a reflection on Romani people or their identities. I hope that the section regarding antigypsyism below will explain the choices I have made in this respect.

All these questions have been debated within a contested field populated by academics and more recently activists that has come to be known as Romani Studies. Below I offer a short description of these arguments and their protagonists that first emerged during the latter part of the 20th century as concerned primarily with Romani people and their communities.

### **The changing field of Romani Studies**

Much of the seminal work that led to the establishment of this field of study was undertaken by scholars working mainly as anthropologists (Gay y Blasco, 1999; Okely, 1983; or Stewart, 1997). Most of these ethnographies were concerned with finding the 'true' Roma, investigating what makes someone a Roma and what allows the community to continue to preserve its specificity? The responses differed, especially as the various anthropologists focused their attention on geographically and culturally quite different groups of Roma. In response to this rich ethnography and taking issue with what is sometimes seen as its romanticising tradition that reifies a certain view of the 'true Gypsy', a growing number of academics and activists (many of them Roma) have been increasingly calling for the field to move beyond essentialising understandings of Romani identity.

Peter Vermeersch (2008) accuses representations of Roma by outsiders of reducing 'complex histories of cultural and ethnic identification processes to simplified black-and-white narratives' (p. 361). He takes particular issue with 'the representation of categories like "Roma" and "Gypsies" when they are constructed with a view to conveying a political message to a broad audience' (Vermeersch, 2008, p. 361). Others have asked who speaks for the Roma (Matache and Oprea, 2019; McGarry, 2010) and have investigated how not only the term Roma but also their political representation have been hijacked by outsiders. In response to these critiques, a range of reinterpretations such as the ones listed below have over the past approximately 10 years led to Romani Studies gradually engaging more widely with other academic and non-academic disciplines and debates.

A movement of academics and activists that has been growing in strength in recent years and is centred around the Central European University (see Rostas, Rövid, & Szilvási, 2015) maintains that even well-intentioned ways of portraying the Roma by non-Roma can become stereotypical and, instead of combating difference and discrimination, they end up entrenching it, setting up a so-called Roma ghetto both in academia and in activism. Instead, academics and activists are

increasingly suggesting a double opening up of the horizons of Romani Studies – towards embracing more contributions from Romani activists and academics (Rostas et al., 2015), but also towards a wider range of alliances and cross-fertilisation with other disciplines (Tremlett, 2014). These moves are important as they point the way towards overcoming the entrenched divisions and even segregation between Roma and non-Roma.

There are many academics and activists who are deconstructing the received notion of Romani identity by pointing out that it is more heterogeneous than it seems and that its oversimplification has been used to entrench antigypsyism (Cortés Gómez & End, 2019, pp. 19-28). At the same time, others point out that identifying as Roma can become a unifier for the community (Matache and Oprea, 2019). In this respect, as we will see, some ways of reinterpreting the identity are particularly important for the purposes of the current research. From a feminist perspective, it is significant to note the way Romani women activists see their own role within patriarchal and neo-liberal contexts (Daróczy et al., 2017) as one that seeks to build wider alliances with non-Roma but also question long-held structures of oppression within the Romani community. Meanwhile, queer approaches to identity (Fremlova, 2017) have shed light on how LGBTIQ Roma lived experience not only successfully deconstructs the essentialist view of Roma but also asks questions about other all-encompassing normalised dominant identities and the role of white heteronormativity.

Thus, in the space of a short few years, a multitude of new ways of thinking have been pushing at the seams of a field (Romani Studies) that for a long time has been rather isolated and inward-looking (Tremlett & McGarry, 2013). One of these, as already mentioned, is the debate around antigypsyism as a term covering a multitude of understandings of anti-Roma racism.

### **Conceptualising antigypsyism**

One of the key arguments within Romani Studies maintains that the field has been colonised by ways of looking at the world that are beholden to those who currently hold power: non-Roma, elites, the scientific community and males, etc. (Kóczé, 2014) and that ways of knowing and understanding in Romani Studies have not been updated by embracing enough of the knowledge



that is ‘out there’ in the academic and activist field and could influence it. This debate over ‘objectivity, the roles of insider and outsider and the relationship between research, activism and transformative change’ (Bogdan, Ryder, & Taba, 2015, p. 33) has become even more lively in the past few years and is nowhere near resolved. In this context, ‘a new cadre of Roma activist-researchers’ (Bogdan et al., 2015, p. 33) is asking for the right to speak and to define antigypsyism as a specific form of racism that affects Roma (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017). This process is inscribed into a larger project by Romani people, groups and communities to reclaim and reimagine Romani and non-Romani history, relationships and identities as racially determined.

The Romani and non-Romani academics and activists who are working to establish this understanding of antigypsyism include several of the participants in my research. As well as defining and describing structural antigypsyism, their aim is to bring it to the attention of European policymakers and academics. While doing so, they are creating a new understanding of anti-Roma racism based on the agreement that it is not a result of the ways Roma live or think or behave, but rather an historical and structural construct that originated in non-Roma minds.

The term antigypsyism ‘started entering the institutional lexicon in the early 2000s’ (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017, p. 4), although its origins go back in time. It was ‘first used by Romani activists in the 1920s and 1930s in the early Soviet Union’ (Cortés Gómez & End, 2019, p. 21). However, according to Werner, a European Romani activist whom I interviewed during my research:

Antigypsyism is a term that is much older, in Germany you have it even before World War II, you have antiziganism, and in Spain you have antigitanismo in the 19th century. (Werner, field interview, 2019)

Werner speaks as a member of a group that became known as the Alliance against Antigypsyism. They first gathered informally during a study session held in 2012 to discuss the concept of antigypsyism and its manifestations (Council of Europe & Phiren Amenca, 2012). Werner remembers the occasion:

At the study session [...], antigypsyism was one of the topics we were discussing and there were different people that were pushing for the concept. One of them was Markus End, he is an academic and researcher from Germany, he was writing the first ever manual against antitziganismus in Germany. (Werner, field interview, 2019)

Some big names in the field of Romani activism were also present at this meeting, such as Valeriu Nicolae, who used to work for the European Commission and other important Roma-led organisations and who penned the first description of modern antigypsyism (Nicolae, 2007).

While antigypsyism was formally redefined and described at this study session by Markus End (Council of Europe & Phiren Amenca, 2012, p. 23), its use as a new explicatory framework and advocacy tool was something that according to other Roma activists I interviewed was already in the air at the time. According to Karina, a prominent Romani advocacy specialist, after 2010 the struggle to understand the limiting factor for many of the European Roma Integration programmes had resulted in both the 'Council of Europe, and also this Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) [at the Central European University] starting research into what [antigypsyism] meant and how it affected policies aimed at Roma communities' (Karina, field interview, 2019).

The CEPS research was finally published as a report in 2017 and its recommendation was

to expand the scope of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies to become the EU Framework for National Roma Inclusion and Combating Anti-Gypsyism and to equip it with the necessary authority and means to tackle systematic and institutional manifestations of anti-Gypsyism. (Carrera, Rostas, & Vosyliūtė, 2017)

The Alliance against Antigypsyism continued to meet regularly between 2012 and 2016 and in 2017 published a reference paper that has since been used as the basis of much subsequent research and advocacy (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017). The people behind both these projects (the 'Reference Paper against Antigypsyism' and the CEPS report) contributed to a profound change in the understanding of how anti-Romani racism operates. Although some of their original aim was to find out why programmes focused on Roma integration and Roma inclusion failed to produce the desired results during the European Decade of Roma Inclusion, their influence has been much bigger.

The Decade was a first yet unsuccessful effort by 12 European countries to improve conditions for Roma people across the region (Jovanovic, 2015). Indeed, looking back in 2017, the European Parliament noted with

concern that the efforts and financial means which have been invested, and the numerous European and national programmes and funds which have addressed the Roma community have not contributed significantly to the improvement of their living conditions and have not advanced Roma integration. (European Parliament, 2017)

At this time, Parliament concluded that this failure was first and foremost a failure to recognise the corrosive effects of antigypsyism. Their insight was due to years of work by a group of Roma and non-Roma activists including those mentioned above, who fought hard to change the discourse from one of 'niceness' to one of anti-racism. The difference between the two is explained by Robin DiAngelo as follows: 'Niceness does not break with white solidarity and white silence. In fact, naming racism is often seen as not nice [...] niceness without strategic and intentional anti-racist action is not courageous' (DiAngelo, 2019).

Between 2012 and 2017, the proponents of antigypsyism as a key limiting factor for European policy making argued against blaming Roma for their problems, instead recognising the role of historically perpetuated antigypsyism in creating and maintaining the exclusion of Romani communities and people across Europe. As I will show below, their efforts were focused on naming anti-Roma discrimination as racism and thus moving towards intentionally anti-racist policies.

The formal definition of antigypsyism articulated by End (2012) included two elements. First, a resentment against Roma born of 'majority society sharing images and beliefs and projecting them onto specific social groups', such as those stigmatised as Gypsies (End, 2012, p. 7). The second element was structural and included actions that based in violence (End, 2012, p. 7).

### **Antigypsyism, antisemitism and Islamophobia**

The inspiration for starting to talk about antigypsyism as a separate and key phenomenon underlying anti-Roma discrimination came from observing how effective the concept of antisemitism had been in the post-World War II European discourse.

In the way we use antigypsyism today as a word, definitely it's linked to the way we use antisemitism. Because antisemitism does not refer just [to the] hate against Jews, even if most of people understand it like this. But [antisemitism is about] the hate of the idea of Jews that is imaginary. (Werner, field interview, 2019, p. 2)

Similarly to antigypsyism, antisemitism is also not about a Semitic people, but instead is defined by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance as 'a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews' (IHRA, 2016). Regarding its own work, IHRA is concerned

that the hyphenated spelling allows for the possibility of something called 'Semitism', which not only legitimizes a form of pseudo-scientific racial classification that was thoroughly discredited by association with Nazi ideology, but also divides the term, stripping it from its meaning of opposition and hatred toward Jews. (IHRA, 2016a)

There was even a fruitful collaboration between some of the people involved in defining and advocating for antigypsyism and Jewish groups that were already engaged in similar efforts on behalf of their own community, using antisemitism as a tool for advocacy. These groups (Romani, Jewish and Armenian) that came together under the European project 'A Europe of Diasporas' talked about the role of historical trauma in giving birth to both antigypsyism and antisemitism. They concluded that 'even if slavery, oppression and genocide are long past, their legacy of domination and trauma remains unless it is addressed' (Charter for A Europe of Diasporas, 2016). Significantly, they also stated that is 'the common responsibility of all Europeans' to deal with the effects of these legacies.

In the same way, those promoting the terminology of antigypsyism were not only worried about semantics; they made the point that the hyphenated spelling 'would inadvertently give the impression that something like "gypsyism" exists' (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017, p. 6). The Alliance contrasts Romanipen, 'a shared frame of affiliation among Roma' (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017, p. 6) with the non-existent concept of 'gypsyism' to explain how antigypsyism arose out of an erroneous discourse espoused by the majority (or non-Roma) populations that include non-Romani projections and beliefs regarding Roma. Thus, it suggests that Romanipen (which is endogenous to Romani communities) is a more useful term for understanding Romani identity.

Antigypsyism was defined from the outset as ‘a cultural tradition, an image, and a form of communication that is reproduced independently of the real life of people stigmatized as “Gypsies”’ (End, 2012, p. 14). This description, taken up later by the Alliance against Antigypsyism (2017), clearly articulated a ‘change of focus from the object of discrimination – the Roma – to the majority society’ (End, 2012, p. 8). Both perspectives amount to the same basic understanding that antigypsyism is a problem belonging to white society. They underline why understanding the historical development of antigypsyism is critical, as is the project of shifting our attention to mainstream societies’ role in its genesis and perpetuation (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017, p. 3).

Defining antigypsyism as separate from the lives and lived realities of Roma and describing it as a problem of non-Roma was a relatively new idea. As I have shown above, previous policy and research had always focused on Roma themselves and policy measures had tried to deal with how Roma ways of life should be integrated or assimilated into those of the majority population. In this way, Roma integration or Roma inclusion was perpetuating a discourse of tolerance. Yildiz and De Genova (2018, p. 427) have argued that this obsession with Roma inclusion covers ‘violent histories of racist discrimination and “exclusion” [...] interwoven with various formations of (subordinate) “inclusion”’. The same ostensibly lukewarm but in effect racially charged approach towards populations who have darker skin is something that is described in other geographical locations such as Australia as insufficient to deal with the challenges of historically constituted racism, as it does not address or transform the deeper issues involved while allowing white people to feel they are addressing them (Hage, 2000, pp. 78-79).

I asked one of my participants, Karina, to explain the difference between tolerance (Roma integration or inclusion) and combating antigypsyism. Karina is an Eastern European academic and activist who has been involved for years in the EU-level debates around antigypsyism. She said:

With the Social Inclusion approach, most of the measures, most of the initiatives were not targeting majority population, but were targeting Roma, and this is the major difference.

it's all coming from the idea that Roma have to integrate, it does not touch upon the problem of exclusion, like who is the actor and how this process of exclusion work, it's all just about inclusion, you know. (Karina, field interview, 2019)

Thus, naming and taking aim at antigypsyism makes manifest two things: first, the role of non-Roma in agreeing with and perpetuating systemic discrimination against Roma; and second, the structures in non-Romani minds that, according to the activists I spoke to, should be the real target of measures to end this discrimination. In this way, they lift the burden of proving themselves away from Roma and place it upon non-Roma.

This leads us to the profoundness of antigypsyism and its implications. I will argue in subsequent chapters that antigypsyism arose historically from disparate elements and in different geographical settings into a political tool that, like racism or antisemitism, is used unthinkingly and in banal ways to inflict untold harm upon those that are its targets. Hannah Arendt (2017) has shown that antisemitism similarly morphed over the centuries from a purely social phenomenon that affected relatively disparate groups of Jewish people into a political tool, that has been and continues to be used as an oppressive wedge manipulated by totalitarian governments to play a sinister and little-understood functional political role. Yet preceding it, in Central and Western Europe, there was a 'long period of mere social antisemitism which introduced and prepared the discovery of Jew-hating as a political weapon' (Arendt, 2017, p. 269). In the same way, I will argue that antigypsyism, which, just as antisemitism, culminated in and is still linked to genocide (Hancock, 2002; Stewart, 2004), cannot be understood simply as a social phenomenon embraced by some but not others in society and limited to those who openly espouse and propagate it. Instead, like antisemitism, antigypsyism has had and continues to play a political function in Europe. Recent research (Political Capital, 2018) concerned with political but also psychological aspects of the two types of discrimination concludes that there are strong links between antigypsyism and antisemitism in Hungary. It holds that 'the psychological antecedents of these two forms of prejudice are highly similar' (Political Capital, 2018, p. 4) and suggests that both stem from an ethnocentric perspective concerned with

stability and conservatism than punishes 'all non-conventional out-groups' (Political Capital, 2018, p. 4).

Aidan McGarry (2017) also states that the discrimination against Roma, which he calls Romaphobia, 'is no different in form and content from Islamophobia or anti-Semitism [sic]' (p. 1) but it has specificities that set it apart. Yildiz and De Genova take this theme further. They speak about 'an ideological nexus of "non-European"-ness that increasingly conjoins the figures of "Roma" with "migrant" with "Muslim" with "terrorist" with "criminal"' (Yildiz & De Genova, 2018, p. 430). They inscribe this equation of Roma with other undesirables into a wider historical trend of casting Roma as racially black. In this way, Roma are subordinated to other European nationals who are by extension superior in the context of a postcolonial reading of true European identity as white (Yildiz & De Genova, 2018, p. 428).

As we will see in chapter 4, the strong antigypsyist propaganda in Central Europe has its origins in beliefs that Roma came from the Ottoman Empire and threatened the Christian culture of the region (Steiner, 2019). To this day, migration in the region is portrayed 'as a struggle between Christian Europe and Muslim intruders' (Barna & Hunyadi, 2016, p. 20). In this perpetual obsession with the Christian national subject, we can see the roots of the strong prejudices that can be noted today against all groups who because of skin colour or ethnicity/racial characteristics differ from this ideal citizen.

### **A major shift in perspective**

The period from 2010 to the present has been particularly rich regarding academics and activists writing and speaking about the specific racism directed at Roma. As mentioned above, they use the similar yet not identical terms of antigypsyism (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017) and Romaphobia (McGarry, 2017) or anti-Romani racism (Matache & Oprea, 2019). The differences are useful as they explicate slightly different aspects of the same phenomenon. All agree on the historical development of a systemic oppression that they call by different names as the key factor that has influenced not only the development of Romani identity but has also hampered the

emancipation of Roma. Yet there is a qualitative difference between these concepts: for example, while Romaphobia is explained as the way in which Roma, Gypsies and Travellers have been excluded from societies throughout history to exalt the role and identity of the national subject, thus laying the ground for the project of (non-Roma) national identity-building (McGarry, 2017), using the term antigypsyism (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017) places the focus on the role of individual non-Roma in the process of oppression. The former (Romaphobia) focuses on the political aspects of the oppression while the latter (antigypsyism) highlights its psychological/normative aspects. At the same time, both approaches also attend to the structural nature of this form of racism. Meanwhile, Matache & Oprea (2019) take issue with any reminders of a terminology that has been used to oppress and exploit Roma for centuries.

Although I agree with all these points of view, I will continue to use the term antigypsyism, because it engages more closely with the kinds of solutions that I envisage. As I will argue in chapter 4, the history of the oppression of Roma is intrinsically bound to its origins. In my view, to better understand this history at this point in time is to become more able to undo it, and we cannot yet overcome that history by changing nomenclatures. However, I argue that the political and ownership aspects of terminology are equally important and cannot be underestimated. Because of its historical, social and even postcolonial implications, to which I will return in subsequent chapters, antigypsyism is a complex and all-encompassing personal, social and political reality all at once, and we may eventually arrive at a term that more accurately describes it. As I will show in chapter 7, the lack of understanding of this complexity and the ensuing obtuseness and disengagement exhibited by non-Roma when faced with antigypsyism is the key element that keeps it in place. By choosing one of the available terms and the perspectives it offers, I do not claim to know the answer to it, but inscribe my inquiry into a wider journey of understanding.

That journey includes first and foremost a change of viewpoint. Using the metaphor of someone looking through a telescope at an object far away, we can say that the previous approaches in Romani Studies scholarship that led to the policies of Roma inclusion and Roma integration were



concerned with observing and cataloguing phenomena far away from the experience of the observers. With the advent of the modern definition of antigypsyism, these observers, mainly non-Roma, found themselves observed through the same telescope. They were called on to expand their collective horizons – the concepts of antigypsyism, Romaphobia and anti-Roma racism mentioned above in effect challenged everyone to embrace a wider point of view than previous approaches to Roma inclusion and integration had adopted, taking into account the historic, political and structural dimensions that led to Roma discrimination. Rather than trying to deal with isolated symptoms such as unsatisfactory ‘access to quality education, employment, healthcare and housing’ for Roma (Council of the European Union, 2013), the Alliance against Antigypsyism (2017) talked about structures and phenomena that were historically created and affected all of society. Crucially, its definition of antigypsyism called attention not just to Roma as the victims but also to non-Roma as the perpetrators of antigypsyism, and in this way laid the groundwork for research into non-Romani identity.

Like all challenges to prejudice, the idea of antigypsyism was not easy to convey and brought with it a backlash. Romani activists found that

for non-Roma it's very difficult to accept because it's too harsh [...] Because I think it points out you know that you [non-Roma] are part of this, you know, you might not be racist, but you are part of this. Because it's mostly talking about structural inequality. (Karina, field interview, 2019)

Being part of the problem is proving a difficult pill for many non-Roma to swallow, especially under the circumstances in which for centuries Roma had been seen as unwanted ‘outsiders, untrustworthy, parasitic’ (McGarry, 2017, p. 15). In Karina's experience, even non-Roma academics and policymakers who had previously worked hard on Roma inclusion felt that antigypsyism was here to supplant their work, instead of understanding that it represented a wider frame of reference (Karina, field interview, 2019). Part of the difficulty that many non-Roma have is that their professional positions rely on white privileges and confronting the realities of antigypsyism would mean giving up these privileges and thereby addressing the structural aspect of racism. Kóczé and

Trehan (2009, pp. 60-61) describe the case of Melinda, a highly respected NGO worker who had suffered persistent antigypsyism in her workplace over a number of years. They come to the conclusion that the oppression is structural and can be understood through the lenses of postcolonialism and neoliberalism. The fact that similar instances of antigypsyism are recounted by Karina 10 years later (and by my other research participants in chapter 7) indicates that these experiences are widespread and deeply rooted in structural racism.

Other difficulties come from some people adopting the concept of antigypsyism as well as that of white non-Roma privilege without thinking through the implications. 'When I say very superficial I mean that people will start to use white privilege, but they have not read a single book in their lives about what white privilege is' (Werner, field interview, 2019). While of course not reading books is not an obstacle to acquiring knowledge, what Werner meant here is that in Central and Eastern Europe, there is a lack of discussion and practical know-how regarding white privilege. This has been pointed out by other authors, such as McCombs (2019), who argues that unless we understand antigypsyism as rooted in societal structures, we will not be able to dismantle its effects.

But the main obstacles to discussing and better understanding antigypsyism arise from white fragility, a notion described in the seminal work of DiAngelo (2011, 2018). White fragility results in non-Roma starting to feel guilty or defensive as soon as they are confronted with the idea that they share with Roma the responsibility of dealing with antigypsyism. I will return to this phenomenon at length in chapters 2 and 7, but suffice it to say that antigypsyism has a long way to go to be well understood. This understanding may for now be confined to what Werner called the 'European bubble': 'My question regarding the concept is if it is really useful out of the bubble? This I don't know, this I have no idea' (Werner, field interview, 2019). By the European bubble, Werner meant the closed elite group of approximately '50 Roma activists in Europe, 50 maximum but probably much less' (Werner, field interview, 2019) who currently engage in debates about antigypsyism. He recognised it as a particular problem that Roma at the grassroots are excluded from these discussions by virtue of the barriers that still exist, on the one hand, between educated and non-

educated (in academic terms) Roma and, on the other hand, the more permanent Roma/non-Roma divide.

Yet in spite of the initial resistance and the lack of support in wider circles, antigypsyism is here to stay and it has generated a new discourse. Collectively, the community of academics and activists who conceptualised antigypsyism have articulated this understanding to non-Roma, especially those in positions of power in Europe. Thereby, they have opened up new horizons of understanding that can be contested but have nevertheless been acknowledged and enshrined not only in academic and activist circles but also in EU policy (Council of Europe, 2016; European Parliament, 2017).

As a result, recent EU directives place antigypsyism firmly in the limelight as the main obstacle preventing human rights for Roma from being upheld in Europe. They mark a sharp shift away from blaming Roma for their troubles, declaring that 'Roma are part of Europe's culture and values and they have contributed to the cultural richness, diversity, economy and common history of the EU' (European Parliament, 2017) and that 'persistent and structural anti-Gypsyism can be detected at all levels of European society throughout all of Europe on a daily basis' (European Parliament, 2017). The same document acknowledges that mistakes had been made when developing National Roma Integration Strategies and that antigypsyism, as a now much better understood prejudice, had much to do with the failure of these strategies.

By institutionalising the narrative of antigypsyism, the groups involved in its promotion have clarified that any efforts to achieve Romani emancipation must start by addressing antigypsyism. The Alliance's definition of antigypsyism encompasses majority society's resentment towards and prejudices projected against Roma as well as 'discriminatory and often violent social structures and actions' (End, 2012, p. 7) that negatively affect Roma lives. As can be seen from the examples above, however, while the Alliance has had some success with changing the institutional framework, its

members are rather pessimistic about the prospect of addressing prejudices lodged in non-Roma minds.

The Romani activists I spoke to admitted that their efforts directed towards non-Roma had been only partially successful. As Werner explained while the inner circle of activists and academics involved in the 'European bubble' and a small number of allies they have attracted are aware of antigypsyism, he did not believe that the majority of non-Roma could change their minds when it came to the deep-rooted antigypsyism they carried. He had seen some changes at the personal level, but in general, he believed that

people who are actually prejudiced against Romani people actually have no interest in listening to how privileged they are, they will not change and become confrontational when you talk about white privilege. (Werner, field interview, January 2019)

Just as the word lodged that I use advisedly above suggests, Werner sees non-Roma privilege as fixed in people's minds. However, as will become apparent in chapter 2, I regard prejudice as a starting point for growth and development of human understanding. In this sense, I disagree with Werner and others who see non-Roma prejudice as immovable, at least in the short term. Indeed, one of the main goals of my inquiry is how and under what conditions that prejudice can be shifted.

### **Non-Romani identities**

I start to answer that question by asking another: who are those prejudiced people who hold the power when it comes to antigypsyism and who perpetrate it? Bogdan et al. (2015, p. 34) allude to the power elites who 'permeate discourse, knowledge and "regimes of truth"', yet do not elaborate on their identity or role. I suggest in the section below that power rests with all non-Roma by virtue of their white privilege, whether they are aware of it or not.

As already mentioned, much has been written about Romani identities and about the overall phenomenon of anti-Roma racism. However, non-Romani identities are so normalised that they are virtually invisible in the field of Romani Studies. Fremlova alludes to this by talking about antigypsyism as a 'direct manifestation of white-normativity' (2017, p. 4). Carol Silverman discusses

her own dilemmas regarding the positionality of being a non-Roma supporting and doing anthropological research with Romani musicians, concluding, 'I believe I have an important role among non-Roma in education and advocacy' (Silverman, 2000, p. 197). While both recognise the importance of focusing on non-Romani identity and suggest that it should be explored further, scholarship focused specifically on the details of how this identity came to develop and how to address its hidden hegemony is still lacking. This is the gap which I propose to fill through the present research, in particular regarding the practical applications of developing a critically white non-Romani identity.

I argue that understanding, describing and processing non-Romani identities is important in understanding antigypsyism and that the identities of non-Romani people, while heterogenous, can be best understood as beholden to an overarching white, racialised identity – a structural construct of domination. This logic follows the definition of antigypsyism as a structural discrimination, arising from attitudes and behaviours as well as structures and policies that, through complex interaction, perpetuate Roma subservience and non-Roma privilege (Keen, 2015, p. 33).

In other contexts, understanding and reclaiming dominant normative, privileged white identity in the context of racist structural discrimination is not a novelty. White identity started to be discussed as early as 1920 by W. E. B. du Bois, who at the time said that 'the discovery of personal whiteness among the world's peoples is a very modern thing' (du Bois, 1920, p. 497), meaning it is a phenomenon of the 19th and 20th centuries. Others have argued that white identity is historically constructed for the purposes of domination and economic advantage (Bhabha, 2000; Gilroy, 2013), that it is imbued with structural privileges (Leonardo, 2002) and that it creates not only self-perpetuating myths (Hage, 2000) but also dangerous situations of dependency that are difficult to break (DiAngelo, 2011). A focus on non-Indigenous and/or white Australian identities has generated complex discussion and suggestions of how to best understand and deal with its

dominance (Hage, 2000; Land, 2015). By contrast, as I have shown in this chapter and in previous articles, the discussion around non-Romani identity has barely begun (Vajda, 2015).

The core of my thesis is based on the argument that that non-Romani identities originate in a form of whiteness born out of the imagined racist slights and delusions of grandeur that are similar to those that other white identities experience. As a collection of unreconstructed beliefs in superiority that result in structures of power and economic might, non-Romani white identity covers, muffles and suffocates debate about antigypsyism. Like a blanket, it both gives false comfort and smothers those who wear it. I will argue in subsequent chapters that non-Romani whiteness originates in a series of myths and fantasies similar to those described by Hage in his account of the Australian 'white nation' fantasy that sees:

the nation as a space structured around a White culture, where Aboriginal people and non-white 'ethnics' are merely national objects to be moved or removed according to White national will. (Hage, 2000, p. 18)

How can we turn such a mythicised and asphyxiating non-Romani identity into one that allows both Roma and non-Roma to breathe and act to end antigypsyism? A clue is provided by Fremlova, albeit in another context. She speaks about 'strategic sameness' as a 'relational use of identities and identifications whereby links and connections are created for strategic purposes' (Fremlova, 2017, p. 238). She links this to the already discussed notion of strategic essentialism, deployed temporarily by groups such as Roma to reach for common ground within a group that has been essentialised by outsiders (Fremlova, 2017, p. 229). By contrast, strategic sameness reaches across traditional divides to subvert old relationships of oppression, such as in Fremlova's example, when LGBTIQ people construct a new community across difference by subverting received normativities (Fremlova, 2017, pp. 238-239).

In my interpretation, strategic sameness can arise between any two or more groups of people, such as Roma and non-Roma, that are separated by ethnic, racial, gender or class divisions. This sameness, while assumed in response to the oppression (in this case antigypsyism), is directed

towards a positive political project of emancipation. The main focus of my inquiry is to show how non-Roma can reach for strategic sameness with Roma as a way of reinterpreting and subverting a long history of antigypsyism. I intend to show that this subversion of non-Romani identity is already under way and that it is possible and valuable to achieve but also that it requires thoughtful and lengthy preparation to go beyond mere tokenism and to make a dent in antigypsyism.

The structure of my research, as outlined below, builds up layer by layer the story of non-Romani identities and explains how they were constructed within a given context of historical racism and colonialism. Yet this explanation is aimed at an understanding which goes beyond mere description. For this reason, the later chapters grapple with how it is possible to unpick and reclaim a certain kind of non-Romani identity that has a deeper grasp of itself and can think critically about antigypsyism for the purposes of opposing and ending it.

### **Chapter structure**

To arrive at these conclusions and to make my case, I follow a logical thread that starts in the current chapter, 1, from the key concept of antigypsyism. This overshadows and inscribes the whole of my inquiry. My core argument describes how non-Roma can become aware of the operation of antigypsyism and their role in dismantling it. It starts from the idea that, as I have shown above, antigypsyism is a historically constituted reality that has created social structures and other effects that have an impact on all who live in its shadow. The way this shadow is cast over and affects non-Roma is thus the main focus of the present research. I explain that to become aware of and to understand this reality both theoretically and practically, as well as in dialogue with others, is key to non-Roma reclaiming an identity that I call critically white or *gebildet* (Gadamer, 2013, p. 16).

To ground my inquiry theoretically, in chapter 2 I widen the lens of understanding regarding Romani and also non-Romani identity in an attempt to make visible white (non-Roma) normativity. On the premise that ‘a person who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence

over-values what is nearest to him' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 313), I turn to philosophical hermeneutics for that broader understanding. I then cross-reference hermeneutics with critical race theory and feminist thinking to anchor my research in social realities and to engage with the concepts of oppression and power. I take a look at what both feminism and queer theories can teach in terms of an understanding that is at the same time personal and disruptive and has the potential to shift current understandings of Romani and non-Romani identities.

In chapter 3 I explain my methodology. I describe how I use a blend of anthropological field inquiry, including a series of interviews with Roma and non-Roma, and a process of participatory action to investigate the progress of non-Roma from perpetuating to understanding and taking action against antigypsyism. I start from the theoretical and ethical premises that underpinned my chosen methods, explain how I used them over the past four years of field research and how I plan to continue to apply them beyond the scope of the current inquiry.

In chapter 4 I turn to the first element that I regard as crucial for non-Roma to understand if they wish to engage critically with antigypsyism: historically effected consciousness (Gadamer, 2013, p. 350). I employ the closely linked hermeneutic concept of effective history (Gadamer, 2013, p. 312) to explain how events that happened decades or even centuries ago can still have an echo in our minds today. I argue that it is possible to establish links between disparate historical events and present-day political and social events as well as the behaviours of individuals. I trace the emergence of non-Romani white identities through two case studies, dealing with two separate yet connected historical and geographical settings. The first looks critically at the emergence of non-Romani identities at the moment of nation-building in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 18th century. The second grapples with the antigypsyist legacy of the emancipation of Romani slaves in the Romanian Principalities, explaining how the historical shadow of Romani enslavement in the Romanian territories is still fully relevant for today's Roma and non-Roma.



Borrowing another key concept from hermeneutics, in chapter 5 I describe how *Bildung* (Gadamer, 2013, pp. 9-11), both individual and collective, is the second necessary element of understanding that allows non-Roma to become critically white. I define *Bildung* as a form of wisdom that includes the capacity of continually opening up ourselves and others to new horizons. Based on the honest and personal accounts of several of the interviewees with whom I worked on furthering the fight against antigypsyism through activism and academic enquiry, I describe what goes into *Bildung*, how it arises and develops and where it can lead us, not only individually but collectively as a group of people headed in roughly the same direction.

In chapter 6 I turn to the last element that allows non-Roma to engage awarely and usefully with antigypsyism. This is concerned with the work that goes into developing non-Roma identities that are well grounded and thought through, connected to others and aware of the privilege and power that comes with whiteness. I ask, together with some of my Roma participants in this research, how non-Roma can become credible and trustworthy partners with Roma in dismantling antigypsyism. I argue that being critically white means living day by day in ways that acknowledge white prejudice but constantly seeking to look beyond it.

As a specific point of study, chapter 7 looks at how non-Roma can become aware of and deal with the corrosive phenomenon of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018). This highlights that throughout history, Roma have been forced to accommodate and have been persecuted by non-Romani societies, with the result that non-Roma have become unaware of and numb to antigypsyism. The resulting investment of non-Roma in maintaining their privileged positions leads them to react unthinkingly and/or retaliate against any attempts to start discussions around antigypsyism. I explain that to live out a critically white or *gebildete* non-Romani identity, it is necessary for non-Roma to acquire a certain robustness in cross-racial discussions. This not only includes a deep understanding of antigypsyism and the ubiquity of racial prejudice but also the daily exercise of meeting it and addressing it when it arises.

In chapter 8 I talk about how such a reclaimed and well-exercised (*gebildete*) non-Romani identity can pave the way for dialogue between Roma and non-Roma. I explain how such well-prepared dialogue can bring non-Roma to understand how they can contribute to ending antigypsyism. I illustrate these dialogical processes through three action research projects that I initiated, two focused on international development professionals and academics and one involving my long-term relationships with a group of grassroots Romani women activists.

I conclude in chapter 9 by outlining how it is possible to live with and develop a non-Romani identity that is *gebildet*, progressive, ever-expanding and supportive of Roma emancipation. I argue that it takes a lot more work and dedication than most of us non-Roma have so far been able to comprehend and apply themselves to; and that sustained solidarity and honest communication between, and increasing action initiated by, non-Roma individually and collectively is key to developing and owning such an identity. Finally, I suggest that it is time for critically white non-Roma to take themselves and each other seriously enough to become more visible and united as a group, and suggest ways of doing so.

I started this chapter with an extensive look at antigypsyism and how it arose as a socially and politically meaningful concept sharply set apart from the school of thought that sees Roma/Gypsy/Travellers as an ethnic group primarily defined by their culture and traditions. I foregrounded my thesis with this chapter because of the crucial importance of antigypsyism to all the arguments I will subsequently make. I will now circle back to define and explain the terms I use and the theoretical background to the thinking that I employ in this inquiry.

## **Chapter 2 ‘Understanding occurs to us as superior experience’<sup>1</sup> - from hermeneutics to critical whiteness**

In this chapter, I systematically go through the main theories and schools of thought that led me to consider antigypsyism as the key framework for understanding Romani and non-Romani identities. I first turn to philosophical hermeneutics to widen the lens of understanding regarding how Romani, but also non-Romani identity, are and were constructed historically and why that history matters. I explain how this framework connects with scholarship related to history, tradition, race and ethnicity. I then move on to critical race theories, in particular critical whiteness, and their link with hermeneutics as the main focus of my theoretical understanding about Roma and non-Roma. Finally, I explain how feminism, intersectionality and queer theories provide additional analytical and methodological frameworks that link my theory to praxis.

### **Philosophical hermeneutics**

Philosophical hermeneutics as an ontological discipline was developed by Gadamer under the influence of thinkers such as Husserl, Dilthey and Heidegger (Gadamer, 2013, p. xxiv). Through Heidegger’s and later Gadamer’s work, hermeneutics transcended its early roots in theological exegesis to engage with the nature of human understanding, where understanding is fundamental to human existence. The general concern of hermeneutics was that the methods used by physical sciences are inadequate when it comes to social sciences, partly because ‘the methods of the physical sciences have colonised and partially obscured the territories of experiential’ (Scott-Villiers, 2009, p. 30). The major contribution of hermeneutics was to rescue social sciences from an insistence on understanding people and historical events involving people in the same way that we understand objects in physics or the natural sciences (Taylor, 2002, pp. 126-142). Because disciplines such as anthropology are concerned with studying the Other, ‘where student and studied often belong to quite different civilisations’ (Taylor, 2002, p. 126), hermeneutics argues that they are better served by employing a model of understanding that relies on conversation with

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<sup>1</sup> Gadamer (2013, p. xxi)

that Other rather than on unilateral study of it as an object. Hermeneutics sees people, historical events and social phenomena as ‘speech-partners who come to an understanding (*Verständigung*)’ (Taylor, 2002, p. 126). These partners have views of their own, are likely to respond in surprising ways and may change over time. This type of understanding covers a multitude of nuances: making oneself understood, coming to an understanding with others, and reaching towards (but not always achieving) agreement (Gadamer, 2013, p. 186).

This complexity means that from the vantage point of hermeneutics, in social sciences it matters less who is right and what is the absolute truth of a thing (any thing) at hand; rather, what matters more is what possibilities a certain body of knowledge opens up for further understanding, or even self-understanding. In this way, Gadamer’s hermeneutics points the way to a mode of interacting with others that is a challenge to scientific certainty and posits understanding as a product of encountering the unexpected (Scott-Villiers, 2009, p. 29). It opens up avenues for understanding which echo some of the ways of seeing the world through queer theory (Fremlova, 2017). Hermeneutics complicates and undermines ‘what we thought we already knew’ about both our traditions and ourselves (Warnke, 2002, p. 93).

At the same time, hermeneutics is a highly practical discipline (Gadamer, 2013, p. 278) pointing the way to how humans use understanding to make better sense of the world, operate with practical skills to change it and learn in the process of doing so, all the while remaining in dialogue with one another. Theoretically and practically, hermeneutics operates with a number of important concepts, some of which are pertinent to the current research and that I briefly outline below.

### ***Bildung***

Chief among these is the idea of *Bildung* and *gebildete* people, and I will use these terms extensively throughout my thesis. Gadamer (2013, pp. 9-13) starts by elucidating *Bildung*, sometimes translated from the original German as ‘culture’ or ‘cultivation’ or ‘formation’ but encompassing the notion of a mind-body open to others (or the Other). It is important to note that *Bildung* is not a frivolous

option (Gadamer, 2013, pp. 11-12) in that one can choose to acquire it or not, with no consequences. Rather, Gadamer distinguishes the *ungebildete* individual as someone who is not able to leave behind his particular condition to access a more universal consciousness ('a rising to the universal', Gadamer, 2013, p. 11), a vantage point from which to see the world more akin to the way God intended. There is a clear hierarchy here between humans who are limited by their *ungebildet* natural state and in some senses lost to primal impulses and another form of human rationality that is closely connected to the process of acquiring *Bildung*, which 'as rising to the universal, is a task of man' (Gadamer, 2013,). Gadamer even goes as far as to give a particular example of what it means to be *ungebildet*: 'If someone gives way to blind anger without measure or sense of proportion' and in this way shows him or herself incapable of transcending their particular viewpoint, that is, 'cannot turn his gaze from himself' to embrace the reality of others (Gadamer, 2013, p.11), then he or she is *ungebildet*. As we will see in the following chapters, this specific way of understanding *Bildung* and the need for it is highly significant when it comes to Roma and non-Roma. Yet there is always an acknowledgement in hermeneutics that tradition and history limit and circumscribe the effort to rise towards the universal, so that this is never quite finished, it is always a work in progress. In fact, to be *ungebildet* is not a deliberate choice, whereas acquiring a certain kind of *Bildung* implies intentionality and effort. Thus, *Bildung* is a precondition for correct understanding, the second hermeneutic concept to which I now turn.

### **Understanding**

Hermeneutic understanding is a threefold process: in order to understand a thing (*Sache*), including people and their identity, one must be able to intellectually 'grasp' that thing (Grondin, 2002, pp. 36-45); one must be able to operate with it in the same way that an artisan operates with or wields the tools of her trade; and one must find a way to articulate it so that the thing becomes illuminated by language, a fundamental dimension of hermeneutics (Grondin, 2002, pp. 36-45).

This process has the potential to bring people to a special kind of understanding, in particular an understanding that arises through experience, which has been translated from the German word

*Erfahrung* (Gadamer, 2013, p. xii, Translator's Preface, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G Marshall). In this context, *Erfahrung* is a noun without a plural; it is, rather, acquired experience and has generally positive connotations. *Erfahrung* goes well beyond *Erlebnis*, another concept also translated as experience. However, this latter word is endowed with plural forms and signifies isolated happenings, life experiences that are not sifted through the lens of understanding and thus ethically are inferior to *Erfahrung*. I link these different interpretations of experience with feminist thinking in the latter part of the current chapter to illustrate how feminism and in particular intersectional feminism can provide practical applications of hermeneutics.

*Erfahrung* is something that arises from the process of *Bildung*, and while it has a theoretical aspect, it also presupposes action and dialogue. Georgia Warnke (2003, p. 110-111) talks about Gadamer's understanding of two aspects of *Bildung*, one theoretical and the other practical. Theoretically, hermeneutic experience and the exercise that leads to it (*Bildung*) are to do with grasping the intrinsic difference of another object, being and entity and allowing that entity to exist in all its freedom while at the same time understanding that there are viewpoints that connect us to it. Practically, the experience acquired through *Bildung* entails the capacity of transposing oneself and recognising oneself in another being. Both theoretical and practical aspects of hermeneutic understanding are intensely relational and constantly evolving: 'if one is to become *gebildet* (cultivated or edified), one must get out of oneself as far as possible' (Warnke, 2003, p. 110). Another concept that appears in hermeneutics is that of common sense (Gadamer, 2013, p. 16). Common sense is the ethical counterbalance to fruitless speculation, a reality check of sorts based on *Erfahrung*. It states that if we can integrate into our view of the world, into our horizon of understanding (defined as 'the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 313)) all the elements that are meaningful to a particular situation, if we can move closer to a universal viewpoint that allows us to act beyond our own particular situation, then we are able to see further, know better and act more accurately. However, one question that arises again and again is whether we can trust understanding once it

is acquired, which understanding is 'valid' and which is so particular as to be ineffectual or useless or plain incorrect. To elucidate this point, hermeneutics uses the concepts of effective history and the hermeneutic circle.

### **Effective history**

A third element that underpins hermeneutics is that of understanding being historically situated. This means that the history of that which is to be understood affects both the object of understanding and the person seeking to understand it (Gadamer, 2013, p. 311). One of Gadamer's most important theses proposes that social sciences should not be limited by the way natural sciences see the world, which is to strip objects of an understanding of their context and isolate them in order to grasp them in more objective ways. By contrast, social sciences need to be allowed a different way of learning than the scientific method, one in which we need to take account of the 'hermeneutic situation, i.e. the situation in which we find ourselves with regard to the tradition we are trying to understand' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 312). In this context, 'situation' means both context and historical horizon or placement, and is deeply influenced by, and in one sense predetermined but not entirely limited by, that situation's effective history. Our own selves and the situations in which we find ourselves are affected by history, by what has gone. Effective history is the history that works in and on every situation whether we are aware of it or not – 'whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 312).

The notion that history and its effects are highly significant for our worldview is one of the cornerstones of my inquiry. For this reason, I will return to and expand upon effective history and its practical implications in chapter 4.

### **The hermeneutic circle**

Hermeneutic principles demand that in our understanding of a text or a person, the meanings given to parts of that text or person are intelligibly integrated into the whole of the effective history in which that text or person has come to exist – this has been called the 'hermeneutic circle' of the whole and its parts (Warnke, 2007, p. 101). Hermeneutics allows for any number of alternative

readings of a situation where each of these readings enhances our understanding. However, where a certain reading fails to integrate all the parts of that interpretation into an interpretive whole, it is not a true reading. In other words, if a certain understanding jars with the context in which it is applied, then that understanding needs to be revised. Thus, we can speak about a 'circular movement of understanding' that allows us to integrate more and more elements into the picture of reality that we construct about a given phenomenon (Gadamer, 2013, p. 292).

'Coming to understand the text is a circular process of projecting and revising in which we try to fit our readings of part and whole together so that the text emerges for us as a self-consistent unity of meaning' (Warnke, 2009, p. 87). In the process of creating this consistent yet expanding meaning, our very enhanced understanding becomes part of 'a history that goes beyond' our intentions and interpretations of a text, situation, phenomenon (Warnke, 2009, p. 94). Our critiques, interpretations and new meanings, states Warnke, are not without effect in the history of a phenomenon, they influence others' views and sediment new ways of seeing. For example, 'the meaning Hamlet has for us contains its afterlife' (2009, p. 94) and all the interpretation that the play has acquired in the centuries since it has been written and first performed.

### **Standpoint, situation, horizon**

From the hermeneutic point of view, we are all, individually and collectively, situated, that is, limited and grounded, by effective history and our own understanding of the particular matter (thing) that is the object of knowledge. That *situation* is defined as representing 'a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 313). We literally see as far as our horizon extends, as far as the meanings that we can integrate within our hermeneutic circle. But the very possibility of a horizon means that we have the potential to see further. 'Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 313). It is possible to acquire an 'appropriate historical horizon' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 313), meaning that we seek to ground what we know in that which is



known to us and to others with whom we come into dialogue, whether these are current-day interlocutors, historical texts or knowledge that has been passed down to us in other ways.

### **Prejudice**

Key to this historical situation is the concept of prejudice, and here being aware of one's own fore-meanings becomes a really important factor. Philosophical hermeneutics is very clear on the fact that prejudices are simply prejudgements, again neither good nor bad, simply existing ways in which we see the world according to our own pre-understanding of a matter at hand (Gadamer, 2013, pp. 282-283). This is why, seen from the hermeneutic point of view, someone saying that they are not prejudiced does not make sense. In fact, 'it is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 282). This chimes well with the concept of prejudice as unavoidable and a barrier to understanding white racism (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 27). In other words 'our misunderstanding about what prejudice is protects it' (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 20), and by obscuring or denying our prejudices we miss out precisely on the opportunity to work through and overcome them. Once we accept that prejudices are always at work in human situations and can render them visible, we can start to expand our horizons beyond those temporary limits on our understanding and integrated them in a widening hermeneutic circle that can lead to further understanding. Denying our prejudices leaves us limited while accepting them allows us to see further. As Gadamer (2013) contends, we have the Enlightenment to thank for 'the prejudice against prejudice itself which denies tradition its power' (p. 283). Gadamer shows how the tradition of natural sciences, having hijacked all avenues towards understanding for a number of centuries, led to an insistence that social and human realities can be known objectively, without prejudice. I will return in subsequent chapters to show how recognising antigypsyism as an unavoidable prejudice or bias can help to overcome it in the long term.

### **The hermeneutic dialogue**

Hermeneutics is a philosophy of mediation and dialogue, and language is at its core (Dostal, 2002, p.102) and comes into its own by offering possibilities and opportunities to bring people

together in dialogue to share and ultimately co-create knowledge. Hermeneutic dialogue is not primarily concerned with who is right and who is wrong about a particular subject, but rather about an effort to truly understand each other. As will become apparent later, it may just be the vehicle to bring Romani Studies out of the impasse of entrenched positions in which it finds itself.

In an excellent illustration of how philosophy is not only theory but at the same time practice and vice versa, hermeneutics points the way to a simple yet powerful model of how understanding is linked to dialogue. As Grondin (2002) remarks, the original German interpretations of understanding that Gadamer's writings include expressions such as '*sich verstehen* (to understand one another)' (p. 39) and '*Verständigung*, or agreement' (p. 39). Thus, every act of understanding becomes one of dialogue, whether with a text, an interlocutor or with Others' interpretations.

Hermeneutics conceives the journey of understanding as an activity that becomes manifest and evolves through language through articulating what we understand about a thing to ourselves and one another (Figal, 2002, p. 104). In other words, the process of *Bildung* is suffused with attempts to make ourselves understood. While private thought is of course a form of language, nevertheless it is only fully realised through a form of dialogue: 'there is no linguistic experience that is not dialogical' (Figal, 2002, p. 106). However, Gadamer (2013, p. 371) makes a sharp distinction between dialogue that is authentic and inauthentic. But what gives dialogue its authenticity?

Hermeneutics describes the elements of authentic dialogue as follows (Figal, 2002, p. 106-107). First, it cannot be wilfully controlled by one or another party to the conversation – and hence it cannot be a monologue or a power struggle. Second, it is a conversation about something substantial, a matter that is of import to both sides of the dialogue. Third, the partners in the dialogue must be willing to assist the communication by demonstrating 'a readiness to place one's own convictions in question' (Figal, 2002, p. 107) and an openness to the truth of the other. Fourth,

hermeneutic authenticity requires that the partners in the dialogue should strive to put aside their feelings, hidden motives and interests and seek to advance the subject of the conversation. In summary, hermeneutic dialogue requires certain skills: it is well prepared and preceded by an effort of those taking part to examine their motives, prejudices and readiness for dialogue. There is a readiness and willingness to engage with someone else's truth in this kind of dialogue. I will return to hermeneutic dialogue in more detail in chapter 8, to illustrate ways in which it can be put into practice.

Gadamer argues that one needs 'a hermeneutically trained mind' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 309) to conduct this sort of dialogue. Such a mind is capable of sifting through the prejudices placed upon it by history and traditions to reach the truth of the interlocutor so that 'another's meaning can be isolated and valued on its own' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 309), and it can deal with the provocation of encountering points of view radically different from its own.

### **Provocation expanding our horizons of understanding**

Understanding and foregrounding our prejudices is important, but it is 'impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice when it is constantly operating unnoticed' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 310). Noticing our prejudices cannot happen in isolation; it necessitates another's truth to address us. Through encountering a truth that differs from our own, we are provoked to allow something outside of our historical and personal horizon of understanding to touch us and influence our views. When we engage with something or someone who holds a different version of the truth, we are provoked to widen our range of understanding. As a consequence of people or groups or even races entering into dialogue with each other, they can see further than before and expand their horizons, leading to a (partial) fusion of horizons. This is not a mechanical overlap of meanings, but rather a newly created meaning, where 'both have a share in it' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 406).

The alternative, of course, is that meanings slide misunderstood away from or beside each other – as in the saying 'beside the point'. Misunderstanding and alienation are also possibilities of

any encounter; in other words, nothing is guaranteed, especially when parties are ill-prepared for the act of dialogue.

Hermeneutic dialogue, then, can be a way of exploring how 'unities, continuities, resemblance, groupness' survive in ethnically defined communities at the same time as continually changing and acquiring new meanings and facets in a world that moves towards hybridity and self-identification vis-a-vis a dominant majority culture (Modood, 1998, p. 397).

This concept of the hermeneutic dialogue is questioned by Habermas from a critical theorist's point of view. Habermas argues that this type of dialogue cannot avoid being influenced and distorted by the social forces and relationships of political power within which the dialogical partners live (Bernstein, 2002, p. 274). Habermas highlights the need for a particular approach to dialogue that engages with and addresses 'ideologically frozen relations of dependence' (Habermas, 1987, p. 306). This is the exercise of self-reflection, awarely undertaken in the knowledge that those relationships of power are at work within us. In this way, the act of reflection is not politically neutral, but 'knows itself as a movement of emancipation' (Habermas, 1987, p. 194).

Meanwhile, Derrida (1991) takes issue with Gadamer's hermeneutics from a deconstructivist standpoint. Derrida shows that 'undoing, decomposing, and desedimenting of structures, [...] was not a negative operation' (p. 3). Far from advocating destruction, deconstruction seeks to understand how a whole is constituted and, by necessity, alters it through that understanding, offering it new patterns of meaning. At the same time, just like hermeneutics, deconstruction is not a method or methodology, but is something that surrounds us; it is a phenomenon we can choose to be aware of and join in with. Derrida says that 'deconstruction takes place everywhere' (Derrida, 1988, p. 4). By stressing difference, gaps and problems, Derrida also points our attention to that which cannot be understood – 'to difference, to differences, to heterogeneities and abyssal ruptures' (Derrida, 2008, p. 30). This can be understood as the opposite of and negating any chance

of the hermeneutic fusion of horizons, which is apt to gloss over these impossible chasms (Bernstein, 2002, p. 280). Bernstein, however, is of the opinion that the thinking of Gadamer and Derrida are more closely related to each other than immediately apparent. In this interpretation, Gadamer understands the apparently unsurmountable distance between separate understandings yet sees these gulfs as challenges rather than impossibilities (Bernstein, 2002, p. 276).

Both of these views, espoused by Habermas and Derrida respectively, are crucial critiques of hermeneutics and highly relevant to the current research. Both the insistence on cross-referencing hermeneutics with concepts of power (Habermas) and on not glossing over where it cannot paper over the differences (Derrida) offer important insights into the fault lines along which hermeneutic dialogue can succeed or falter. In order to respond to and try to overcome those apparent contradictions to hermeneutic theory, I will turn below to how critical race theory (and particularly critical whiteness), as well as feminist theory, can account for and deal with power differentials and insurmountable distances between people and groups seeking common understanding. I will show in this way how encounters between groups and people who are traditionally in a relationship of oppression can be mindful of and engage on the uneven playing field created by long histories of exploitation without becoming an irreducible struggle with sides and opponents who never meet.

### **History and traditions**

History has always been a highly contested field, and never more so than when it deals with the fate of people who have suffered great injustice. History is often written at the expense of these people and highlights the supposed heroism of the victors (Zinn, 2013, p. 7). This type of history that is written and retold by those holding political power tends to interpret reality in its own image. As we will see in the next section on race and ethnicity, it can also result in hijacking concepts that originally are simply descriptive and conferring on them an ideological value that can only be understood in the context of how they were arrived at historically.

As Arendt writes with reference to the history of antisemitism, it happens frequently that opinions strongly held by particular groups with vested interests in society are presented as and believed to be historical truths, when in fact they are themselves part and parcel of the history of ideologies (Arendt, 2017, p. 23). This means that some historical facts are highlighted or distorted while others are ignored. In this way, those in power write history and can lend their own interpretation to the truth. This can leave those of us reading that history with confusions and dilemmas over whose interpretation is accurate or correct. Is consensus even possible when it comes to historical accuracy, and if so, what criteria should we use to reach that consensus?

Veronica Vasterling argues that it is precisely the kind of political hermeneutics embraced by Arendt that rescues Gadamerian philosophy from 'blatant political insensitivity' (2011, p. 505) and answers the questions above. For Arendt, carefully researching a large array of viewpoints and integrating as many aspects of history as possible over as many centuries as it takes to tell the history of a particular phenomenon (such as antisemitism) amounts to a credibility that would not be plausible were it not so thoroughly anchored in historical data.

At the same time, Arendt makes space for a multiplicity or plurality of histories 'such that one reaches a genuinely pluralist and, therefore, more representative and less partial understanding' (Vasterling, 2011, p. 506). In this way, whole swathes of human endeavour can be interpreted and reinterpreted by successive generations of historians, often in light of new information and data that becomes available to them, as long as they are still meaningful and imbued with integrity as in the meaning conferred by the hermeneutic circle. Arendt's work is a prime example of this scholarship that is anchored in practical research, as the lengthy prefaces to successive editions of her work attest to (Arendt, 2017, p. xxxiv). In one of these, she admits that she was only able to understand some elements of Soviet totalitarianism in 1958 when the Smolensk archives became available (Arendt, 2017, p. xxxviii). Paradoxically, this discovery highlighted 'the dearth of the most elementary documentary and statistical material' (Arendt, 2017, p. xxxviii) by which to understand that era – and through this revision of her work, Arendt leaves open the door for future historians

to work with the same facts and give another, more complete interpretation of the text at hand without rendering it obsolete or nonsensical.

Arendt's work on totalitarianism is a beautifully crafted argument. By operating with history and acknowledging the crucial importance of effective history – that history which works on each of us and on phenomena surrounding us – it also allows for the primacy of facts and history as a stand-alone fact in itself. Arendt insists on not distorting facts but instead taking these into account and building her interpretation of history in successive layers. In this way, her writing has poignancy and credibility as it inexorably moves towards the conclusion that antisemitism and the road that was opened towards the unthinkable 'final solution' (Arendt, 2017, p. xxvi) rested on centuries of antisemitism that had gone unchallenged and was compounded until it could be used as a political weapon completely divorced from the facts it had arisen from.

While scrupulously following historical records, this kind of history nevertheless constructs an alternative view of the historical timeline and sheds light in particular on elements and groups that history has not focused on or who have been only written about on the sidelines or as afterthoughts. The works of Ian Hancock (2002) or Viorel Achim (2004), both attempt to piece together the history of the Roma from scant historical records, and have enriched and questioned our understanding of that history. Recently, more and more historians have focused on this subject and the record is growing. One of these is Stephan Steiner (2019), to whose work I return in detail in chapter 4.

For the purposes of the present inquiry, more interesting even than alternative histories are connections that can be made between historical occurrences and the present. Sometimes those connections are part of a project of reclaiming the past to better understand the present. This is of 'crucial importance for subordinated people, [part of] of asserting their cultural traditions and retrieving their repressed histories' (Bhabha, 2012, p. 9). I return to this point in chapter 4.

Yet the idea of tradition itself is not without its problems. Sometimes historians and anthropologists are able to surmise from archival material social, political and psychological trends that are still in

operation centuries later and are explained as traditional. Although they cannot offer scientific certainty, these clues from the past are as likely to shed light on the workings of effective history in people today as they are to describe how people lived and operated in the past. Such clues are the 'invented traditions' of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (2013, p. 1) that arise as practices inspired by real or imagined past events that are ritualistically repeated and transplanted into the present. Invented traditions are more often than not of service to a particular project – nation- and identity-building being two of the most common. Although often they bear scant resemblance to historical facts, these kinds of traditions are nevertheless extremely useful at offering evidence of 'problems which might not otherwise be recognized' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, p. 12). In this way, whereas invented traditions are not in themselves indicators of the past, they can illuminate the relationships groups have with the past. This can be seen, for example, in the dubious 'tradition repeated across Europe of constantly evicting and relocating Roma to almost uninhabitable 'zones of exclusion' (McGarry, 2017, p. 131) based on the belief that they are by nature itinerant people and they are used to moving around. As we will see in chapter 4, such invented traditions communicate volumes about those inventing them, in this case about the non-Roma imaginary wherein 'the presence of Roma living on a rubbish dump is a telling metaphor of how Roma are viewed by the state: as detritus, waste, pollution, a stain that needs to be removed' (McGarry, 2017, p. 131). They often form the basis of group identities, especially those related to ethnicity and race, the next concepts that are crucial to my inquiry.

### **Identity, ethnicity and race**

Identity formation is a fluid process that has recently undergone a process of being revisited, reinterpreted and reconfigured. In their editorial to the journal *Identities*, Claire Alexander, Raminder Kaur and Brett St Louis (2012) point to ways in which 'increasingly, the understanding of identity has been uncoupled from issues of politics or social structure' with the result that 'inequality, discrimination and racism' have either 'fallen off the academic map' or been replaced by an 'obsession with culture and cultural identity' (Alexander et al., 2012, p. 4). This approach



leaves unanswered huge questions about how it is possible for racial and ethnic violence to erupt in the heart of modern democracies that have arguably embraced a discourse of diversity. The journal editors propose that it is their mission to answer this challenge by placing 'culture in the realm of the social, the political and the economic' and into a 'contestatory space' (Alexander et al., 2012, p. 4). Thus, identity can become a politically charged concept.

Nowhere has this been more true than in the case of the ethnic and race identities which are the focus of this thesis. As already mentioned in chapter 1, the work of Barth (1998, p. 11) defines the ethnic group as one that is defined by biological and cultural ties and internal interaction and is self-defined as such. However, the contribution of Barth is to explain how ethnicity, rather than existing in isolation, arises at the fault line between groups. Under the influence of outside influences, rather than immutable constructs, ethnicities are 'organizational vessels' (Barth, 1998, p. 14) that are filled with content depending on the context in which they arise. One such context that is impossible to ignore is race and racism and its effect on all ethnicities that come into contact with it.

While the idea of race emerged as an attempt to describe physical 'differences between groups of people' (Banton, 2002, p. 52), the way these differences were explained had everything to do with the context and the position of the explainer. From early attempts to talk about race in religious terms through to the efforts of natural scientists to mould the idea to their newly discovered methods and theories, to the 'administrative and political use' (Banton, 2002, p. 60), the idiom of race has undergone transformations that mirror the interests of those who were writing its history and influencing its usage. The many ways in which we understand race have changed over time (see also Back & Solomos, 1996, pp. 1-25): the link with the changing waves of history and the relative positions and influence of those who were doing the writing about race is inescapable. From a hermeneutic perspective, we can say that understandings of race have morphed according to the effective history that has provided the context for them. For example, not until the end of the 19th century under the influence of capitalist and imperialist expansion did race become a tool for the

exploitation of slaves, such that it became imbued with 'racism and racial ideologies' (Back & Solomos, 1996, p. 38).

Back and Solomos trace the process whereby race and racism have contributed to ethnic identities becoming politically charged. For example, nation-building and the project of developing modern nation states, as well as the resources required to keep up the apparatus of those states, required that racial ideologies explained differences between people of different skin colours in terms of superiority and inferiority. Indeed, more modern concerns are to 'explore the interconnections between race and nationhood, patriotism and nationalism rather than analyse ideas about biological inferiority' (Back & Solomos, 1996, p. 18). Back and Solomos also highlight the usefulness of ethnicity to majority white populations. They caution that 'the unwritten assumption is that minority populations and their children constitute a group which exhibit interesting, problematic and varied identities, while the identities of the majority are viewed as unproblematic' (Back & Solomos, 1996, p. 132).

The question arises, however, as to the context in which one or another ethnic or racial identity becomes meaningful and thus useful for correctly understanding the world in the sense of the hermeneutic circle. To answer this question, I now return to hermeneutics and its application to critical race theories.

### **From hermeneutics to critical race theory**

As well as being applied to political sciences and political anthropology, philosophical hermeneutics has had a wide-ranging influence spanning areas from literary critique to theology. It has also inspired practical applications such as a new understanding of identity as historically constructed and bounded by tradition (Warnke, 2007).

Warnke's argument, and I will return to it in chapter 4, is that unlike other forms of identity that were not forged through a history of sustained oppression over centuries, racial identities are meaningful in a way that other identities, such as professional or socially adopted identities, are

not. For example, African American identities must incorporate into the logic of their historical becoming the legacy of slavery and that of systematic exclusion from access to social goods. What matters is that this exclusion 'was total, endured for centuries and had devastating consequences that still continue' (Warnke, 2007, p. 116).

Warnke seeks to understand the contexts in which a certain identity is or is not meaningful from a hermeneutic perspective. Certain identities become intelligible or important when considered from a certain historic vantage point, and become irrelevant from another. Thus, Warnke links hermeneutics to critical race theory, exploring the contexts in which highlighting one's racial identity makes sense and, conversely, when doing so is not consistent with the hermeneutic circle. Although she believes that racial identities may in the future lose this significance, she intimates that at this historical moment in time, a racial understanding of identity is historically significant and necessary to correct mistakes of the past – 'these contexts currently include the remediation of past injustices' (Warnke, 2007, p. 119).

This helps to explain why it is necessary to understand and engage with racial identity as a product of an historical background that, for the moment, cannot be easily overcome and that creates divisions. Yet these divisions, once created by a racially inflected history, became internalised and resulted in vastly different life plans and what Warnke calls 'life scripts' which leave some groups of people (generally dark-skinned) excluded and exploited and puts other groups of people (generally light-skinned) in positions of unearned and untenable privilege.

We are indebted to du Bois (1920) for clarifying that, as King argues, to develop an African American identity is to become human 'in a particular, historically inflected way', whereby to become black is to "fall" [...] into racial self-consciousness' (King, 2008, p. 141).

Warnke explains how people's perception of themselves is not always a personal choice; that much of the time people are not free to take on or reject an identity. This is especially true of racial identities. Rather, people are inscribed to an identity as a result of others' assumptions about and

historically constructed perceptions of them (Warnke, 2007, p. 118). Through this process they arrive at 'different texts than those with which they begin' their journey of understanding (Warnke, 2007, p. 170). Thus, people have historically been seen by others in racial terms, and their identities have been defined through a history of scientific racism, so they are forced to take on a racial identity even if they are reluctant to. Warnke shows that, if racial identities are meaningful for one group of people who cannot escape being seen as racially defined (generally because of the colour of their skin), then racial identities are a meaningful category also for everyone else. According to the hermeneutic circle, all parts of reality 'fit into an interlocking whole' (Warnke, 2007, p. 100). While people can opt in or out of other identities, racial identities, because of the history they carry, 'go "imperial"' (Warnke, 2007, p. 84), meaning that nobody who lives in a racially defined society can escape the overarching discourse of racism.

To paraphrase a commentary by Hancock, while there is diversity of class, gender outlook or life trajectory within black and white identity, still all the 'various peoples [...] exist within the veil of blackness' (Hancock, 2008, p. 93). In other words, what is meaningful to one group of people (in Warnke's example this is African Americans) affected by a common history is by necessity meaningful for all the other people (white North Americans) whose backgrounds include that history. This is the historical veil of blackness alluded to by Hancock, a veil that overshadows all people who live beneath it and forces them to operate within the structures of a racialised reality. In this way, the logic of the hermeneutic circle makes it meaningful for white people to see themselves in racial terms. However, just as non-white identities may eventually become meaningless because the racial injustices in whose shadow they have been called to life have been resolved (Warnke, 2007, p. 119), so white identities are only temporarily relevant. Both black and white, Roma and non-Roma identities are temporary constructs that help to elucidate effective history from a certain vantage point, and are not singularities per se.

So far, this may be a highly theoretical viewpoint that is difficult to translate into social realities.

Yet the example of the work undertaken by some of the descendants of Thomas Jefferson, one of

the American Founding Fathers, followed by *The New York Times* (Dao, 2003; Stockman, 2018), rather tellingly illustrates how the concept of the veil of blackness has practical ramifications and can lead not only to contested understandings of history but also to political actions resulting in reparations in the present. The background story of the descendants of Sally Hemings is based on the discovery that Thomas Jefferson had lived in a long-term relationship with and fathered children with one of his slaves, Sally Hemings. Following DNA testing that confirmed quasi-secret family stories passed down through the generations, the descendants of Sally Hemings began to claim their lineage and demanded to be included in the Monticello Association, which represents the descendants of Thomas Jefferson and his wife, Martha. However, the Association engaged in a bitter battle to discredit Jefferson's parentage of Sally Hemings' children that 'has at times taken on the orchestrated nastiness of a political campaign' (Dao, 2003). Yet enough of the Jefferson descendants on both sides fought to engage in an inclusive dialogue with each other, with the result that a new Sally Hemings exhibit at the Monticello cemetery where Jefferson is buried makes clear that all the descendants have been affected not only by their relationship with their common ancestor but also by the history of enslavement and racism that has been part of it. 'It's the culmination of a 25-year effort to grapple with the reality of slavery in the home of one of liberty's most eloquent champions' (Stockman, 2018). The point here is that while hermeneutics allows for a multiplicity of 'stories' or identities that are meaningful in different contexts, it does insist that those stories must be taken together to create a useful framework for understanding and living one's life and ultimately changing it (Warnke, 2007, p. 105).

Nevertheless, neither black nor white are immovable constructs – black people can be oppressors and victims, depending on the context and on the additional identities they carry, while white people can transcend their prejudices (Hancock, 2008, p. 97), and identities are apt to constantly change and be reconfigured, as well as reclaimed and radically reimagined. Furthermore, as the example regarding the descendants of Sally Hemings shows, people whose identities include many other elements that may be equally important (parent, family member, or even national hero such

as Thomas Jefferson), can on occasion be set apart by, or indeed come together to grapple with the mirror images of the veil of blackness. Sometimes, recognising white and black and overarching identities that trump others because of the massive imbalances involved can not only enrich our perspective, but also move us forward in our understanding. This insight – that white and black are no immovable obstacles and if so regarded, can become useful for dialogue and understanding – offers not only a way of softening the determinism and duality of the white–black dichotomy. At the same time, as I will show below, this point of view can provide a platform of solidarity and a way forward for groups who were historically cast as adversaries or separated through monolithic constructs of oppression to achieve new ways of relating to each other. To do so, however, it is still important to acknowledge the starting point and the power relations intrinsic in the encounter, and I will turn to this in the next sections on feminism, intersectionality and queer theories.

Hancock reminds us of du Bois' internationalism and that the veil of blackness extends to other peoples and races (Hancock, 2008, p. 98). This paves the way for the application of the concept to Romani Studies, since logically, the veil of blackness holds true for all those identities born in the penumbra of racism, such as Romani identities. I will address this in more detail in chapter 4, when I talk about the 'multiple genealogies of racial discourse' (Gilroy, 2001, p. 28) and how they play out for Roma and non-Roma.

In summary, hermeneutics as applied to critical race theory brings a few important points to any discussion on racially constructed identities, such as those of Roma and non-Roma: first, hermeneutically speaking, we can only read people and their identities by making the effort to reach a deep understanding of those people and their identity in a context of effective history. In other words, we must always take into account the way those identities were created and the journey they travelled to reach the contemporary seeker of that understanding. For example, it is not possible to ignore the fact that Romani identities have been racially constructed and that this construction it has changed throughout history (Stewart, 2004). This history has to be confronted and taken into account in any analysis pertaining to Romani identities.

Second, if Romani identity is racially meaningful for Roma people, then non-Romani identity is racially meaningful to non-Romani people. As both identities have been historically constructed, Romani and non-Romani people are equally bound to read their identity through the lens of race as they both fall under the veil of blackness. However, as Warnke As I will argue in the next section, for non-Romani people, it is arguably more important to understand how they have been inscribed into a white privileged identity than to spend time analysing Romani identities and traditions.

Third, in order to integrate the meaning of an identity into a hermeneutic whole, we are bound to examine how that identity coexists and interacts with other, just as valid, identities, for both that group and others around it. For example, for any non-Romani individual, their racialised identity will be meaningful, but their gender or religious identity will be equally salient, as I show in the section that deals with intersectionality.

In practical terms, if we have decided that a given identity is currently meaningful and hence worth examining, then, following hermeneutic logic, to fully understand that identity, we must be able to 'grasp' what it is; we must become aware of how we operate with it in practice and we must be able also to express that identity through language.

Finally, according to hermeneutic principles, a dialogue between people with different identities is both possible and useful. Such a dialogue engages with the effective histories of those identities and becomes part of new and continually evolving effective histories, allowing prejudices to be made manifest rather than hidden away and seeking to open participants up to the provocation of the 'other', with the potential of arriving at a partial fusion of horizons. However, the effort of undoing a history of discrimination requires a confrontation of experiences and understandings that goes beyond superficial dialogue or positive discrimination to personal engagement with the deeper meanings and truths of people separated by the 'gulfs of effective history' (Scott-Villiers, 2012, p. 118). Thus, setting up a dialogue between Romani and non-Romani people or communities is not simply a matter of 'cultural exchange' but is a deeper and more politically engaged process. Part of

that depth is given by the history of separation that has accompanied the rise of antigypsyism and is increasingly discussed by Romani Studies scholars writing from a critical race theory perspective.

### **Postcolonialism**

In the context of Romani Studies, thinkers such as Angéla Kóczé and Nidhi Trehan (2009) have started to build up a rich historical picture of Romani identity. They talk about the Romani identity as affected by colonialism under the Habsburgs but also by socialism and neo-liberalism, all of which brought with them strong assimilatory policies. In particular, Kóczé's work (2014) makes a powerful link between the work of postcolonial writer Edward Said and the experience of Roma as colonised people. Said (1978) mentions that 'both geographical and cultural entities – to say nothing of historical entities – such locales, regions geographical sectors as "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made' (p. 11). For this reason, argues Kóczé, the experience of colonialism is ahistoric; it does not depend on a particular locale or time period, or even on the history of colonialism. In this sense, both Roma and Jews have been colonised and rendered subaltern by European society and have continuously been exposed to epistemological and symbolic, as well as physical and mental, violence. Through a series of cultural and political ways of communicating about Roma, Kóczé shows, they have been denied the right to speak for themselves and have been defined by non-Roma through a series of stereotypes. Much cultural production about Roma is focused on a series of 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2013), repeated until they become synonymous with reality in the public imagination. Perversely, Kóczé explains, not only many non-Roma but often assimilated Roma are the ones spreading myths based on essentialising traditions – such as excessive childbearing and even incest in Romani families – thereby establishing the false idea of the 'Romani culture'. We find here echoes of the overarching veil of blackness described in the previous section. This rich history has been added to by the emergence of a number of new narratives by mainly Romani intellectuals such as Kóczé and others writing mainly from a feminist perspective: Jelena Jovanović, Vera Kurtić, Timea Junghaus and Dezső Máté to mention just a few (see Kóczé et al., 2019). However, it is clear that there is still a way to go, and as Annabel Tremlett



(2009) reminds us, Romani Studies is at a point where the field could gain much from engaging with critical race theories and writing a new narrative.

### **Critical whiteness and white identity**

While as we have seen, a new critical narrative has started to emerge in Romani Studies, it has yet to engage with the specific role of non-Roma in perpetuating antigypsyism. The depth of engagement necessary to understand and overcome the role of white people in the context of racism is highlighted by three authors writing about whiteness in a variety of settings and using different terms to describe it.

Hage (2000) talks about racial inequalities in Australia by using the terms 'evil racism' and 'multiculturalism' or 'tolerance' as two side of the same coin (p. 23). He argues that those white people who are actively intolerant and racist and those who are tolerant of multiculturalism are both positioned within a paradigm that he calls the 'White Fantasy'. Whether committing acts of cruelty towards immigrants, engaging in a discourse of intolerance or simply being tolerant of outsiders, white people still have the power to either bestow or withhold that tolerance and consequently treat non-white people as objects to be managed. This is what makes the current discourse around human rights, multiculturalism and tolerance fundamentally flawed, according to Hage. The human rights discourse does not fundamentally alter power in society. In fact, 'those who engage in practices of intolerance do not do so' because they lack tolerance, but because something or someone has 'exceeded their own threshold of tolerance' (Hage, 2000, pp. 92-93). Tolerance and intolerance are, then, a question of degree, and one can flip into the other at the flick of a switch. Indeed, most of our societies are based on the patterns of intolerance that have been temporarily tamed into tolerance and do-gooder attitudes.

The difference between tolerance and outright racist behaviour in Australia, says Hage, is contingent on class (2000, p. 204). He explains how some white settlers in Australia, because of their lower-class status, did not have the chance to become part of the privileged white majority

that became dominant in modern-day Australia. This resulted in some Australians being left behind economically and socially and carrying deep historical resentments about this loss of status. Once they felt their position further threatened by non-white immigrants, those white Australians who were already resentful about their loss of economic privilege were more likely to be openly hostile to non-white Australians. Meanwhile, Australians who felt entitled to a greater measure of social power were more inclined to be tolerant towards immigrants. I return to this false dichotomy in chapter 4 to show how it influenced Roma/non-Roma relations.

Clare Land (2015) takes this understanding further into the realms of practical action by seeking to understand how it is possible to deconstruct the act of solidarity by non-Indigenous Australians and bring to it humility and integrity. She does so by first developing deep relationships with Indigenous activists and allowing herself to be guided by their wisdom and experience. For Land (2015), this is a twofold process: 'solidarity should be directed to decolonization; and the way solidarity is undertaken needs to be decolonized' (p. 4). This means that not only is there a direction of travel, where solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists contributes to a new reality that deals with the historical legacies of settler colonisation, but the act of solidarity also engages with and reckons with the internal tensions of the relationship. The word that comes up again and again in this context is 'discomfort' as the necessary price to truly grasp and address the complexity of a racialised reality. While I return to Land for a model of how to develop *Bildung* in non-Roma (chapter 5), I will nevertheless make the point here that in her view there is a 'cost of whiteness' – that being white without being conscious of what has been and is involved in this identity ignores the fact that 'colonialist thought does its work on "us too"' (Land, 2015, p. 223); there is psychological price to pay for white privilege. This price of whiteness is poignantly described by DiAngelo (2018), who talks about white people being fragile, breakable, weak and lacking in substance. She coined the term 'white fragility' (DiAngelo, 2011), describing it as the inability and unwillingness of white people to step out of their racial comfort zone where they are cushioned from race-based stress and feel that any discussions around race bring up intolerable

uneasiness. Because it is a monolithic construct designed to keep white people socially and economically dominant, whiteness normalises the worldview of its subjects. At the same time, whiteness renders people afflicted by it unable to cope with the slightest challenge to this worldview. As I will discuss in chapter 7, white people lack the exercise of engaging with the concept and practical implications of a racialised reality. Confronted with questions related to race, DiAngelo (2015) argues, white people resort to platitudes such as “Race doesn’t really have any meaning to me” or “Everybody’s racist.” Scratch any further on that surface, however, and we fall apart’ under the weight of our ignorance, exposing the fact that we do not understand much about racism or our role in perpetuating it. In reality, white identity is neither monolithic nor immutable. Instead, it is historically constructed, as we will also see in chapter 5, and fluid or deceptive. Yet non-Roma most of the time do not connect whiteness with racism (whether historical or experienced) and are thus free to ignore it and regard it as a blank canvas, as invisible and as something that does not affect them.

By contrast, people targeted by racism or antigypsyism, such as Roma, expend a lot of energy and thought on relating to whiteness and are very aware of how it is constructed. In an insightful article about ‘passing’ as a mechanism to avoid the brunt of antigypsyism, Pantea (2014) describes how Roma, just as light-skinned people targeted by racism everywhere, have a range of strategies at their disposal to appear white. Sometimes, they pretend to be from other continents (e.g. Brazil) to make outright oppression less likely or to play with their racial identities. For Roma, passing or not passing brings up deep feelings of shame and anguish and can result in them being ostracised by their families (Pantea, 2014, p. 613).

This view of whiteness as an identity that is at the same time denied and obscured from view by its seeming normality for those living with white privilege, as well as being deeply destructive to people targeted by racism (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 132), lies at the core of my research. Not investigating white identity, not taking it apart and expecting the rest of the world (those who are not white) to put up with it is the foundation of white privilege (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 132). According to this logic,

denial of whiteness renders individual white people impotent – and hence fragile and unable to grasp and operate within reality. At the same time, as I have shown above, white fragility in the context of structural racism upholds a system of white privilege and white supremacy that is imbued with enormous economic and social power (DiAngelo, 2018, 22-48).

It is important, insists DiAngelo (2018), to see that white privilege and white supremacy are realities born out of a long history that systematically entrenched economic advantage for white people and disenfranchised those who were not deemed to be white. ‘Exploitation came first and then the ideology of unequal races to justify it’ (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 23), to the extent that different groups would gain ‘social and economic advantages [from] being classified as white’ (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 33). Throughout history, if groups of people could present themselves as having white skin, they were able to become what McGarry (2017) calls ‘exalted subjects’ (p. 88) who enjoyed numerous advantages denied to people who could not do so. ‘The ‘exalted subject’ of the nation is venerated and exalted above all others as the embodiment of quintessential characteristics and the personification of the nation’s values and ethics’ (McGarry, 2017, p. 22). This history of whiteness has produced structures that place white people in unassailable positions of power. These structures are neither the fault nor the consequence of individual white people’s actions. Rather they are the other side of the coin of the veil of blackness I described above: ‘whereas our personal narratives vary, we are all swimming in the same racial water’ (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 9). White fragility, or the patterns of denial and defensiveness that are characteristic of white people, has been acquired through this history as a mechanism that masks and upholds white privilege and supremacy. Prejudice, a limited horizon and a preoccupation with themselves and with false objectivity render uncritical whiteness *ungebildet* and prevent those who suffer from it from seeing the bigger picture of racism and addressing it.

The question that arises for the present research is how is it possible to set up an inquiry into non-Romani white identity that retains its capacity for meaningful critical thought and political engagement while transcending the trap of white fragility? In other words, how is it possible to set

up a hermeneutic dialogue that starts from personal experiences but addresses structural realities? Such a dialogue would have to go beyond cultural exchange to engage with deep-seated and persistent inequalities such as antigypsyism with the aim of making it visible and dismantling it. In this respect, feminism and queer theories offer particularly pertinent answers.

### **Feminism**

Feminist perspectives have brought to the fore the importance of the 'everyday social processes', the personal, the relational and the intimate when it comes to examining race (Back & Solomos, 2000, p. 16). Starting from personal encounters, and then examining relationships and dissecting how these arise and/or are influenced by structures of oppression, provides, through feminism, a reliable route towards understanding how *Erlebnis* links to and morphs into *Erfahrung*.

Feminist critical theorists such as bell hooks (2000) insist on the need to embody and practically apply an understanding of racism to relationships and everyday political activism. hooks demands that feminism as a theory take on the concept of race and points out that feminist activism fails to thrive precisely because it lacks an analysis of racism and black women's experience of racism (hooks, 2000, p. 388). In hooks' view, the wider project of women's liberation cannot move forward until racism is both acknowledged and addressed at a personal level, because racism is a wedge that splits the feminist movement.

By acknowledging the operation of white privilege in personal encounters, feminism offers the tools to address rather than gloss over the difficulties it brings. 'Growing up in segregation [...] reinforces the message that our [white] experiences and perspectives are the only ones that matter' (DiAngelo, 2019, p. 82). Thus, segregation upholds and enables white privilege and white fragility, and personal encounters and relationships have the potential to disrupt both.

From the perspective of the notion that the personal is political, early white feminists were relatively quick to respond to and acknowledge white racism. Ruth Frankenberg (1993) highlights that 'any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it

oppresses' (p. 1). Thus, Frankenberg argues, 'white people are "raced"' (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 1) and a profound racial understanding of 'whiteness' is necessary to move forward and away from racism. In the context of critical whiteness, this means that while feminists are as likely as anyone else to deny the importance of white supremacy and privilege (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 146), they are at least more likely to be able to theoretically understand the weight of truth encompassed in the personal experiences recounted by people targeted by racism and consequently be more likely to listen to that truth.

This is the same theme that Kóczé (2011, p. 64) takes up to understand how the experience of Roma women is different from that of both white males and white females in Hungary. It is from a feminist stance that she encourages a dialogue between Romani women and the 'sisterhood of women of colour' who have challenged the 'totalizing norms of the broader feminist movement' (Kóczé, 2011, p. 65). Thus, Kóczé (2011) articulates a basis from which Romani women can fight their own specific battles against oppression, linking them to 'Black and "Third World" feminists', and suggests that 'critical studies of whiteness' (p. 70) could be a useful next step not just for the Romani movement but also for Romani feminists. In fact, Kóczé's work recognises that what is largely missing from Romani Studies is precisely the kind of work that Ruth Frankenberg (1993) has done in another context.

The present research proposes to respond to Kóczé (2011) and heed her invitation of taking the ideas of 'critical whiteness' further from the perspective of a non-Romani lead researcher, making it possible for dialogue between Roma and non-Roma people to 'create diversity' rather than parallel discourses (p. 65). In the intervening years, several collectives of largely female Roma and non-Roma researchers (Daróczi et al., 2018; Daróczi et al., 2019) have tried to grapple with the question of how to make this kind of dialogue possible while at the same time being mindful of researchers' positionality and the need to be reflexive and deconstruct solidarity. Since I was and am part of several of these collectives, I will describe the processes and dilemmas involved in more detail in chapter 8.

### **Intersectional feminism**

While in recent years, as already mentioned (see Tremlett, 2014), the discipline of Romani Studies has started to engage with wider thinking around race and racism, nowhere has this openness been more marked than in efforts of Romani feminists to engage with the concept of intersectionality and the theoretical and practical complexities it introduced into studies about and by Roma. In 1989, Crenshaw coined the term not only as a way of demonstrating the added burden of discrimination on women who are also black. Instead, she also pointed out that an intersectional lens helps to ‘challenge all forms of discrimination’ by going beyond minor adjustments to the status quo to harness the power of collective action (1989, p. 145).

In a study entitled ‘Missing intersectionality’, Kóczé (2009) highlights the importance to Romani Studies of ‘feminist intersectional theories that posit “race-class-gender” as a central triad, while viewing these categories as entwined, mutually constituting, and reinforcing’ (p. 18). Drawing on a wealth of feminist intersectional scholarship, she highlights the multiple discrimination experienced in particular by Romani women, who are disempowered and silenced by these multiple oppressions, in particular in cases where because of their class background they do not have access to education. Yet at the same time, similarly to the feminist movement in general, Kóczé and other Romani feminists observe and demonstrate that intersectionality has breathed new life into Romani Studies. Anna Daróczi and Jelena Jovanović (2015), in an article entitled ‘Still missing intersectionality’, observe that it allows the emergence of those ‘alternative and missing narratives’ (p. 80) that previously were never heard or valued.

The contribution of an intersectional approach is, beyond allowing a better understanding of the life experiences of those most oppressed by multiple discrimination, to highlight not only whose perspectives are hidden but also whose perspectives are most visible and normalised. Significantly, Frankenberg (1993) credits her personal encounters with black feminists such as Rosamaria Zayas and bell hooks, who ‘challenged me to rethink very seriously my own position within the racial

order and thus set this project [the study of whiteness] in motion' (p. vii). Intersectional feminists take their personal encounters seriously and turn 'accounts of personal experience into politicized and theorized terrain' (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 7). By so doing, they carve new ground and make space for hidden and as yet uncharted areas of thinking, such as the concept of critical whiteness in Romani Studies.

A second important aspect of intersectional feminism is the lack of defensiveness when it comes to acknowledging aspects of identities that place people in positions of power. Faced with the difficult context in which black women were calling out racism in feminist circles, Frankenberg decided, instead of withdrawing from multiracial work, to seek to understand the causes of these frustrations: 'increasingly, this generated for me a sense of contradiction, a need to know more' (1993, p. 2). Frankenberg also took a conscious decision to interview those women who had already challenged the status quo, and thus had the 'potential to shape their articulations of whiteness in both obvious and subtle ways' (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 19).

This willingness to be challenged, to re-examine old certainties and to change one's mind is something that is characteristic of intersectionality. In Romani Studies it has recently led to an attempt to break new ground by attempting to forge parallels between the struggles of African American, Dalit, Palestinian and Romani women. This movement for 'decolonizing feminism' (Harvard University, 2019) is at the forefront of engaging with the issues of Roma as a non-white group united in its interests and outlook with other groups targeted by racism and colonialism. As Daróczi and Jovanović (2015, p. 82) also observe, intersectionality, far from segmenting and weakening movements, has the potential to solidify and unite them and make them less vulnerable to internal strife. As I will show in chapters 7 and 8, non-Roma groups also have much to learn from examining their internal divisions and contradictions.

These three insights from intersectional approaches – highlighting hidden narratives, practising a lack of defensiveness and being open to changing one's point of view as a result of experiential



learning – are crucially important to my research into critical whiteness. They greatly influenced it not only theoretically but also methodologically. Flipping the intersectional argument, I consider critical whiteness one of those alternative stories that gets silenced by the comfort of white privilege. The deeply corrosive phenomenon of white fragility that I have outlined above and will return to in chapter 7 can only be overcome through an attitude of openness and robustness that comes with understanding non-Roma positions as intersectionally constructed. According to this, we can see whiteness not as a binary choice between black and white but through the lens of multiple identities that white (in this case non-Roma) people carry, as I will explain in chapters 3 and 4.

### **Queer theories**

As already mentioned in chapter 1, beginning in 2014, a growing current within Romani Studies sought to destabilise the field by questioning entrenched ways of looking at Roma, especially when they are viewed as the objects of inquiry by outsiders.

Some of the theoretical work that went into challenging normative ways of seeing and doing Romani Studies was undertaken by Fremlova (2017), whose attempts to ‘queer(y) Romani Studies’ are full of insights that shed light on where the fault lines lie in this field of study. Fremlova’s scholarship investigates the unsaid, the unspoken and the taken-for-grantedness of Romani Studies that the LGBTIQ+ Romani movement in particular has been so adept at uncovering.

Fremlova’s work advances the notion that not all is as it seems and that in particular hetero- and white-normativity cover over a lot of lived experiences and diversity and the fault lines of both Roma and non-Roma. Radical Romani feminists looking in from the LGBTIQ perspective have also begun to argue that they do not get a voice (especially in academia) to articulate their points of view (Kurtić and Jovanović, 2018). From my point of view, queer approaches raise the question of what it would entail for mainstream groups such as non-Roma to reach for consciously subversive identities in the same way as groups who had previously been marginalised. I envision this subversiveness as discovering and foregrounding facets of our identities that do not conform to

the status quo or the designations we were handed at birth. Other schools of thought dealing with critical whiteness such as those described by Land (2015, p. 161) and DiAngelo (2018, p. 150), also point the way towards creatively and controversially speaking out against the restrictions of whiteness, understood as structures/discourses of privilege, as opposed to white skin (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 1).

In this way, the critically non-Romani (white) identity that DiAngelo (2018) describes as 'less white' (p. 150) could become not only critical but queer, taking on board lessons from the extremely successful LGBTIQ movements, where

queer non belonging has an important political dimension: espousing a marked (stigmatised) category of identification can be understood as a strategically subversive act undermining key hegemonic systems of oppression: white-normativity, heteronormativity, cis-normativity and patriarchy. (Fremlova, 2017, Abstract)

According to Fremlova (2017), this would entail emphasising and reclaiming those aspects of one's identity that are empowering, while rejecting and/or processing or shedding those aspects of the same identity that are 'hostile, restrictive and/or oppressive' (Abstract). Similarly, a critically white progressive non-Romani identity would be a reclaimed identity. One of the goals of the present research is to describe in detail the elements that could lead to reclaiming critical non-Romaniness: acknowledging and embracing its origins in and dependence on history (understanding effective history – chapter 4); consciously cultivating an attitude of openness (*Bildung* – chapter 5); and shedding white fragility (chapters 6 and 7). Indeed, hermeneutics as a philosophical framework provides the theoretical background to queerness: the constant effort of queer(y)ing something, making something strange or making ourselves see the strangeness of something which is not ourselves. In this way, as we attempt to throw ourselves outside of ourselves in order to see the strangeness of another, we gain hermeneutic understanding.

In this chapter I traced the thought processes and sources of inspiration that led me to the key insights of this research. These range from the insistence of hermeneutics on rigorous understanding but also openness, through its applications to the field of critical race theory and

whiteness and finally to the nuances and additional questions introduced by feminist, intersectional and queer thinking.

In chapter 3 I turn to how I went about my journey of understanding how non-Romani people may reconfigure, reclaim and shed new light upon our white identities. My methodology, while based on the theoretical foundations described above, was designed to experiment with approaches that disrupt and play with some of the more rigid scientific research methods. This seemed particularly important to do in a field such as Romani Studies where we are stuck with some old ways of seeing things from angles that perhaps are less useful if we want to break new ground.

### **Chapter 3 The doing of the thing itself<sup>2</sup> - methodological implications**

In this chapter, I set out the background to my chosen methodology and research methods. I argue that if non-Romaniness is the thing to be understood, then a thorough understanding of it follows three phases, following the steps of hermeneutic understanding (theoretical, practical and dialogical) outlined in the previous chapter. First, I describe how I understand and explicate the basis of non-Romani identities by looking at historical and current definitions and discourses available on the subject. Second, I talk about how I engaged with the way people operationalise non-Romani identities in practice; and thirdly, I look at the way non-Romani identities are articulated through dialogue by both Roma and non-Roma. The structure of my thesis follows this logic, and so does my methodology. To explain it further, I start this chapter with a short description of the way my research was designed. Next, I talk about how I combined hermeneutics with applied critical ethnography and participatory action research to allow the path of understanding to unfold gradually in my research. Finally, I describe how and where the research was carried out and introduce some of the participants whom I worked with.

#### **Research design**

My approach to research incorporates three elements consistent with the theoretical framework that I outlined in the previous chapter. I start from critical anthropology as the basis of gaining a deeper understanding of identities, and in this context specifically Romani and non-Romani identities. I draw on this approach not only to situate myself, figuratively and literally, in my field of study, but also to grasp learning opportunities as they arise, to question and to upend received wisdom in research settings (Minh-ha, 2014, pp. 65-78). At the same time, my research design builds on the concept of hermeneutic dialogue (Figal, 2002), applying it to the 'deep and wide' tradition of participatory research (Brydon-Miller, Kral, Maguire, Noffke & Sabhlok, 2011, p. 388),

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<sup>2</sup> Figal, G. (2002). The doing of the thing itself: Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology of language. *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, pp. 102-125.

as I find the latter particularly suited to the principle of openness when combined with the constant shifts in understanding advocated by the former.

The first goal of my chosen methodology was to move from theoretical understanding to practical action. I wanted to make manifest some of the concepts from philosophical hermeneutics and show how they can be used to widen the horizons of not just individuals but also groups of people (see chapters 4 and 5). Other aims were using dialogue to help bridge the gap between academia and activism that has been a challenge in Romani Studies (I will return to this in chapter 6), as well as finding ways of creating increasing openness among non-Roma to engage with their own identities (I talk about these in chapters 7, 8 and 9).

From the outset, I invited Romani and non-Romani people to engage with the concept of their identity, to seek to understand it theoretically, to get a sense of how they operate with it in practice and to articulate that sense of identity to others in a dialogue. Some strands of that dialogue then sparked practical projects which led participants in the inquiry (Roma and non-Roma) to engage with each other in ways that transcend this research and could lead to further iterations of action.

In my inquiry the three methodological principles and approaches (hermeneutics, participatory action research and anthropology) coexisted and intertwined. Hermeneutics filtered all the way through, although the fieldwork that went into specific chapters was focused more specifically on anthropological observation and interviews (chapters 1, 4, 5 and 6) or participatory projects that I and some of my participants undertook over the past 5 years (chapters 7 and 8). The following themes and concepts underpinned my inquiry.

### **Hermeneutic dialogue**

Hermeneutics is first and foremost a theoretical and philosophical approach to life. Although hermeneutics is not a ready-made methodology, it points the way towards a quality of understanding that, while theoretically based, is only ever realised once we operate with it in life and articulate it through language to each other (Dostal, 2002, p. 3). As already explained in the

previous chapter, hermeneutics rejects the rigid methodology of natural sciences in favour of 'modes of experience' (Gadamer, 2013, p. xxi) such as art, re-examining our beliefs in the light of deeply understood tradition or human encounters that spark deeper understanding. In this way, hermeneutics favours a way of knowing that is more fluid and goes beyond 'methodological self-consciousness' (Gadamer, 2013, p. xxii).

Yet the point of hermeneutics is 'historical living in its fullness' (Figal, 2002, p. 104), and consequently it is concerned not only with ontology but also with ethics and ethical action. Hermeneutic ethics presuppose living by a set of principles for action in the world that allow oneself to open up to historical traditions and to the Other through language and dialogue in order to gain understanding of that which 'hopes to be understood' (Grondin, 2002, p. 43). Hermeneutic understanding thus applies to texts, history, people and situations alike.

As already explained in the previous chapter, in hermeneutics the question that arises methodologically is how to distinguish between the two forms of experience, *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. One of the ways proposed by Gadamer is that of expanding the meaning of the Heideggerian hermeneutic circle. This interpretation of the hermeneutic circle is concerned with constant revisions of understanding in light of new learning and a 'requirement for coherence' (Grondin, 2002, p. 50). The latter demands a practical process that allows for a constant checking of whether meaning ascribed to something is in concert both with the tradition that has brought that thing into existence and the constantly evolving reality that is its effective history.

I conceived of my research as a piece of work that makes manifest this process of reaching back into history to learn what there is to be learned (theoretically) about the topic at hand; asks questions about how that topic is understood (put into practice) by people in the course of their lives; and, finally, considers how we put that knowledge and understanding into language and discourse.

There is a set of methodological implications that arises from the above and that I have employed in my inquiry. One such implication was that I would construct the research as a practical as well as a theoretical undertaking – hence the importance of participatory action research (taking the form of dialogue) that I describe in detail below. Another implication was that I would examine the role of tradition and history and how this results in predetermined ideas about non-Romani identities in an effort to make obvious and deal with those prejudices in the act of understanding, and thus preface and prepare the dialogue. I also examined what specific skills people need to engage in a hermeneutically authentic dialogue on non-Romani identities; and described a possible process of arriving at such skills as openness, a willingness to be wrong and an awareness of personal bias and prejudices. Finally, I wanted a way of checking the integrity of my and others' understanding of the hermeneutic circle, which meant revising and re-examining the basic assumptions and hypothesis of the research in light of new understandings and being aware that any conclusions only stand up for as long as new learning does not contradict them. This idea and practice of understanding as guided by the hermeneutic circle accords with the iterative cycles in participatory action research.

Because of the weight of prejudice and power differentials involved in the subject at hand, two particular aspects of methodology and ethics stood out in the context of an inquiry based on anthropology. I aimed for methods that allowed research participants to understand the inquiry as fully as possible and I wanted a methodology that critically engaged with the tools of its trade. This is why I chose critical anthropology as one of the bases for my research.

### **Critical anthropology**

The entry point for my inquiry was an extended period of participatory anthropological fieldwork focused on a group of academics and activists working with Romani communities in Hungary and Romania who had multiple professional and personal ties to each other. Some of these were Roma and non-Roma who had developed close relationships with each other through addressing

antigypsyism as described in chapter 1. Others were Roma and non-Roma colleagues and friends with whom I had worked closely together on projects related to Roma-led community activism. Without the ambition of constructing a full ethnography, this phase provided a theoretical and practical grounding that made possible later phases of the research. It had several advantages: it allowed me as a researcher who was a relative but not complete outsider to engage with the field (Eriksen, 2001), as well as to get to know potential participants and establish relationships with them. While providing me with invaluable learning in the early phase of the inquiry, the anthropological approach also allowed the participants to get used to an inquiry happening in their midst. This required full transparency around the research aims from the start and constant negotiation with research participants around what was and was not acceptable for them and what methods of communications would allow them to engage more deeply with the inquiry's participatory action research element. This process allowed those I worked with to position themselves in relation to the research and use it to further their learning goals as well as to engage in a joint understanding of non-Romani identities. Gradually, participants started articulating their interests vis-à-vis the research or influencing its agenda in ways that became useful to them.

I used methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviewing both as a process of learning and to build connection and relationships with my research participants, since 'the very essence of unstructured interviewing [is] the establishment of a human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than to explain' (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 75). I was aware that a deeper connection between myself as a researcher and the community comprised as my participants was also key to making possible participatory action research, as well as highlighting and mitigating against a series of risks that the research or I as researcher could unwittingly run (Wheeler, 2012).

Through this process of informal conversations, participant observation and interviews, I built up a picture of the individual lived histories of my research participants. Gradually, I invited them to delve deeper into the research process by having more informal discussions and planning meetings



related to the participatory projects I was planning. At times, the ideas of these projects came from the participants, through questions they asked or dilemmas they raised during the interviews.

To set this process in motion in a way that offered participants the best chance of informed involvement, my methodology drew on the concept of the researcher as 'bricoleur and quilt maker', an idea put forward by Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. 4) based on the thinking of Lévi-Strauss (1966), Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg (1992) and Weinstein (1991). In Denzin and Lincoln's (2008) conception, the 'qualitative researcher as bricoleur' works with a range of 'tools, methods and techniques of representation and interpretation' (p. 4), allowing the process of research to add layers of meaning gained from an active audience to an ever-increasing tapestry of understanding. The advantage of this kind of research is that it allows 'rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth' to be added (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 5) to the inquiry, while also offering entry points to a variety of research participants, some of whom may feel more at ease with visual than oral methods of communication. This richness and layering of understanding is also a good way to build up the sense and logic of the hermeneutic circle.

To this end, in parallel with the methods described above, I took opportunities to learn more about Roma and non-Roma history and activism through attending events focused on Roma commemoration, conferences on antigypsyism or the history of antigypsyism, and through joint research with my participants into the literature on Roma history and activism. Some of these chance encounters, such as curating an exhibition with Romanian Romani artist Alina Șerban entitled 'The Roma – from extra to ordinary'; meeting Austrian historian Stephan Steiner at a series of conferences and discussing his scholarship; attending a Q&A session with Spanish Romani activist Werner Rodriguez Fernandez on antigypsyism; and getting involved in an online polemic about non-Romani whiteness, provided the foundation for particular chapters in this thesis.

### **Participatory action research**

The hermeneutic approach to academic inquiry sits well with participatory action research, my third main methodological approach, whose essence is to learn from consecutive iterations of action and reflection, compare and contrast these with theory and move on to new levels of meaning. Participatory action research, similarly to hermeneutics, ‘sets up a persuasive argument for ongoing defining and adapting “in the doing” rather than having a project fully mapped out in advance’ (Bivens, 2017, p. 79). In this process, the learning of the research participants is foregrounded and becomes an essential outcome of the inquiry. Thus, the participatory action research approach takes the process of *Bildung* further to engender practical action and articulated understanding together with others.

While these principles have been applied mostly to participatory research with communities facing discrimination and oppression, I started my inquiry from the perspective that in participatory processes, it is important to challenge the assumptions and beliefs of those who hold power (Howard & Vajda, 2017). In the case of my inquiry, I was mostly interested in the role played by non-Roma in the wider movement for Romani emancipation. However, my participants included both Roma and non-Roma, many of whom took part in the participatory action research processes that I set into motion over the past four years and that I describe in chapter 8. In designing these, I was most interested in finding out how hermeneutic dialogue could be put into practice using the methods offered by participatory action research.

The critics of participation state that the approach has been hijacked by an instrumentalist ethos that ‘hides and at the same time perpetuates certain sets of power relations’ (Cook & Kothari, 2001, p. 11). However, by its nature, just as hermeneutics and critical anthropology, participatory action research is well placed to open the doors wide for revealing, questioning and paying attention to the detail of how power operates in the process of inquiry. Participatory action research is like jazz in that it brings people together in a creative act of knowledge production, and, like the banyan

tree, it spreads the canopy of knowledge over a wide area and has roots deep enough to allow a profound understanding to surface (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011, p. 387). Yet, it can only do so when relationships between the researchers are deep and trusting enough to allow for discussions about the positionality and the power that each research participant carries. As I will show in chapter 8, the participatory action processes that I set into motion were based on long-term relationships that, while they started from work connections, evolved into deep friendships.

Unfortunately, more often than not, narrowly defined research projects do not create the kind of canvas where deeper matters related to oppression and power can surface and be addressed. As Bivens (2017) shows, genuine participatory research processes should be open-ended, making space for participants to discover and gradually include their own truths into the research agenda. Such extended cycles of action research act as a bonding agent not just for those involved in the research; they also bring the whole community with them, since participation simultaneously ‘increases the social connectivity of participants and brings them back actively into the community, not just as lone individuals looking to improve their circumstances but as concerned citizens who generate information and ideas’ (Bivens, 2017, p. 78) to address common challenges. Often ‘development managers are not comfortable with this open-ended approach’ (Bivens, 2017, p. 79). Most of the time, the learning and gains from multi-year complex participatory learning processes are obscured because of project-based approaches to doing and learning (Daróczy et al., 2018). As I will also argue in chapters 5 to 8, personal relationships can and do provide continuity and substance to participatory processes beyond the confines of narrowly defined programmatic cycles.

Beyond the three major approaches to research outlined above, my inquiry was influenced by insights from the theoretical framework described in chapter 2. In this way, theory and practice meshed with and influenced each other.

### **Implications of critical race theory for research methodology**

Homi Bhabha (2012) writes about how identities come to be contested and negotiated in the interstitial space where cultures are formed. Indeed, it is 'these 'in-between' spaces' that become 'the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood' and give rise to 'innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation' (p. 2).

The critical theory paradigm holds that humans do not operate in an ideal world but one where power struggles have resulted in unequal relationships of oppression based on people's identities (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). In this context, oppositional behaviour or even inaction by subordinated groups is conceptualised as resistance and understood as an element of political action (Giroux, 2001). Thus, the in-between spaces themselves can become sites of struggle as well as of collaboration and a focus on them can uncover white fragility and ways of acting politically upon it.

Kemmis (2008) shows how critical participatory action research in particular has the capacity to take resistance further, in the sense that it can empower people to become critical and reflect upon how their own ways of seeing the world, combined with historical structures such as racism produce 'untoward effects' (Kemmis, 2008, p. 125). Research thus becomes a tool for opening up communicative space, a process of exploring a shared reality and praxis while facilitating 'public discourse in public spheres' in areas and on topics where agreement is usually difficult to find (Kemmis, 2008, p. 131). This communicative space, as Robert Chambers (1997) has shown, should not only be limited to those who are powerless but must also include the privileged. In action research, knowledge has the potential to become emancipatory and produce social change for Roma and non-Roma, while action becomes an intrinsic and necessary companion to socially committed research. Embracing such a paradigm has a major influence on the methodology used, since it asks that the subject of the research has some control over how the research is conducted, with the researcher playing the role of advocate and conduit of communication (Lincoln et al., 2011).

As shown by Fals Borda (2001, pp. 33-34), wider opportunities are also at stake when embracing a participation action research approach. Some of these are a new way of giving rigour and validity to the research; the possibility but not certainty of being able to transfer knowledge from a localised project to benefit a wider audience; the opportunity to subvert 'global trends towards uniformity' (Borda, 2001, p. 34) through well-designed action by minority groups; and the exciting prospect of supporting political action, addressing conflict, violence and repression or even creating 'ethnogenetic emancipatory ethos' (Borda, 2001, p. 34) within communities - in my case within non-Romani communities.

### **Feminism as methodology**

Feminist ways of thinking and exploring the world have also had an influence on my inquiry. In a research process seeking to set up a dialogue between people living in divided communities, feminism highlights the importance of the relational and self-reflexive aspects of research. As already mentioned, Frankenberg (1993, pp. 1-2) was moved and inspired to look at whiteness as an area of inquiry by recognising that the movement she was engaged in was in danger of petering out unless women like her engaged with their own role in perpetuating privilege. Personal stories are important in feminist paradigms, and the ability to create and sustain those relationships where uncomfortable and sometimes hidden beliefs have a chance to be aired becomes paramount.

At the same time, feminist thinking reminds us that there are internal fissures within and divergent ways of practising identities. These can open up new avenues of understanding within and between those groups, as well as building inter-group solidarity, e.g. among women (Daróczi et al., 2019; Gay y Blasco, 2012). I will come back to ways in which I have worked with groups of female researchers to apply this methodology in chapter 7.

Positionality and reflexivity are important considerations in this process of rethinking methodologies and in the effort, crucial for my inquiry, towards openness. They highlight the role of the researcher and how the identities of the person who is asking the questions are key to the

answers they receive. Below I briefly outline why I think that *Bildung* goes beyond reflexivity as understood in anthropology towards a more open-ended and profound shift in consciousness.

One of the most interesting contributions of hermeneutics is to challenge precisely that 'self-certainty and decidedness' (Scott-Villiers, 2009, p. 106) which, because of the profound influence of modern science, we bring to knowledge and to our ways of knowing. Scientific methods of research and project design have a way of promising that if you do A this will result in B, which when it comes to people and the complex systems in which they live is very rarely the case.

Silverman (2019, p. 78) talks about a 'reflexive turn' in anthropology, caused by the second wave of feminism in the 1960s. As Silverman explains, this demanded that anthropologists took on board the fact that they were in positions of power vis-a-vis the peoples they researched. These positions owed much to the origins of anthropology as a white, male-dominated, Western European colonial discipline that could not only be intrusive but also silenced those it engaged with. If Romani Studies is a discipline that has perpetuated some of the patterns of colonialism (Kóczé, 2014), then it, too, must move away from anthropological inquiry understood as an exercise of domination. The method by which it can do this, according to Silverman (2019) is to embrace 'reflexivity to collaboration to advocacy' (p. 81).

When engaging in research from the position of the outsider, it becomes necessary, as in Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Reassemblage* (1983), 'not to speak about/just speak nearby' by consciously trying to address power relations between the researcher and the researched. Minh-ha calls upon the researcher to reflect not only on their role in the process but also on how their identity is shaped by and shapes the research, and from this position to bear witness to other people's lives.

Yet to be open and flexible and reflexive with confidence requires the discipline of opening up and to keep opening up on a continuous basis. Beyond being a theoretical philosophical approach, practical hermeneutics is specifically concerned with leaving the door wide open to points of view that jar with one's worldview and even overturn it. As Scott-Villiers (2009, p. 35) has remarked,

hermeneutics has a way of surreptitiously leading us up the path of questioning long-held and cherished assumptions that we make about others. The essence of hermeneutics is striving to understand something or someone who is ‘from a place impossibly distant from where the reader is now’ (Scott-Villiers, 2009, p. 35). To do so, hermeneutics requires of us a profound form of transformation.

*Bildung* in fact eludes practical methodological implications; instead it evokes no less than ‘the ancient mystical tradition according to which man carries in his soul the image of God’ (Gadamer, 2013, p. 10). Thus, it is not instrumental and not limited to the cultivation of one’s capacities and talents for a particular purpose such as conducting research that is more appropriate, less oppressive and self-reflexive. It is not even limited to self-reflexivity as a route to emancipation (Habermas, 1987, p. 193). Although as already mentioned there is a creative tension between ‘the persistent posing of ultimate questions’ (Gadamer, 2013, p. xxxviii) and the practical ethics of acting in the modern world, to speak about *Bildung* favours the former, including the difficulty of putting into words something beyond language. It demands of the researcher the same struggle that Minh-ha describes as ‘not quite the Same, not quite the Other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out’ (2014, p. 74). Far from setting down a method that can be followed by people trained in a discipline – such as reflexivity in anthropology – *Bildung* casts the researcher adrift. In this space of not knowing what is required for knowing better, she can and does use collaboration, advocacy and/or reflexivity as methods, but is constantly aware that these are not the ultimate goal.

### **Starting points and details of reflection**

In this section, I describe how I applied these methodological insights to build up the research process that led to this thesis. Starting in the year 2005, during a volunteer assignment in rural Romania, I gradually got to know and became part of a Romani family through starting a relationship with the father of my son. In this way, I found myself thrown into a new reality that I

only vaguely knew but had an uncanny sense of being connected to. As I started to get to know my new family, I became aware by degrees of the history and traditions that connected us. For example, as a non-Roma who grew up geographically very close to their village, I had memories of Roma coming to sell and barter in my grandparents' home. Yet we (my non-Romani family) and they (my newly found Romani family) never met until much later when we were brought together by a series of seeming coincidences. I then found out that my son's Romani great-grandfather used to sell brooms and other wooden implements to people lived in the same village as my own grandparents. Slowly, as my own process of understanding unfolded, I came to realise that my heritage and background were those that had delivered me to the point of encounter. However, once contact was made, I made a conscious decision to place myself on a trajectory of deeper understanding of the Other (Roma) and myself (non-Roma) through countless instances where dialogue and communication became possible, were thwarted, started again, went full circle and continue to unfold.

My initial curiosity led me to conceptualise my research as involving a group of Romanian Roma in a participatory exercise and asking key questions about how their identities had developed through their religious faith and subsequent engagement with non-Romani outsiders. While a participatory inquiry would have meant the research happened with the community, the main focus would still have been the Romani way of life (Romanipen as defined by the Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017, p. 6) and their relationships with each other.

However, in 2014 I moved to Hungary and my thinking moved away from studying Romani communities to focusing on non-Romani people. Through engagement with a group of Romani academics and activists involved in the 'nothing about us without us' movement in Hungary (Ryder et al., 2015), I came to see that it was not the place of a non-Romani researcher such as myself to seek to guide or even ask questions about Romani communities. As my thinking developed, one of the questions that started coming up more and more insistently had to do with non-Romani identities, including my own. I began being more and more interested in how non-Romaniness



emerged in Eastern Europe but also, more widely, in how non-Roma (including my family) have operated with this identity and how it could move from an ossified and unwitting set of assumptions towards becoming a live, progressive and positive driver that can address antigypsyism. Similarly to Land (2015), who writes about non-Indigenous people in Australia, I gradually found myself interested in making a contribution to a more progressive, in my case non-Romani, research agenda. In 2015 I wrote an article stating that one way of starting this shift was by looking at what could disrupt the current certainty and entrenched ways of thinking regarding Roma and non-Roma (Vajda, 2015). This was a paradigm that only a few people (notably Fremlova, 2017; Kóczé et al., 2018; Silverman, 2000, 2019) had attempted to dislodge and I became interested in learning alongside and collaborating with them. I describe some of that joint learning in chapter 8.

My field research took a total of five years and was organised in two phases. The first of these was focused on individuals' learning about and understanding of Romani and non-Romani identities. The second looked at the understanding of the subject that arose in groups with similar backgrounds (in this case, Roma and non-Roma separately) and asked questions about how Romani and non-Romani identities were articulated in dialogue with other people and groups.

I chose the people I included in my research through a process of participant observation that lasted roughly two years but continued throughout the period of the inquiry as collective understanding of non-Romani identities developed and new insights became available through people I had not yet met. As already mentioned, I looked for participants who had established deep, long-standing and meaningful relationships with the Other which was the focus of my enquiry, and who I could see were able to engage with those Others in a dialogue that was productive and continuous. For non-Roma this meant being in long-standing relationships with Roma and Romani communities, while for Roma this meant having strong links with non-Roma as a group and individually.

Early on, I organised a meeting of an initial group interested in my research and we had an informative discussion focused on non-Romani identity. I followed this up by inviting those who were present to longer one-to-one unstructured interviews. Over the subsequent 5 years, this group grew to more than 20 people who took part in a series of one-to-one open-ended interviews with me. Some interviews were repeated after a few years to allow for some participants to articulate new insights into and understandings of their identities. In all instances, I started my interviews by asking participants about their own experiences of identity and how and when they first articulated the concept of identity to themselves. I also asked how they believed they developed their various identities. I was interested in their experience with wider categories than ethnic or racial or indeed Romani or non-Romani identity, given that I wanted to capture a capacity for and an exercise of operating with identity or identities (plural). I later narrowed the questions down to ask about Romani or non-Romani identity. However, in many interviews, participants naturally ended up discussing their relationships to their own Romani or non-Romani identity and how they had arrived at a recognition and an articulated understanding of it, since by this stage we already had a shared understanding of the core topic of the research.

In the second part of my enquiry, I brought together several of the original participants in groups including both Romani and non-Romani activists, development workers and academics. This was the participatory action research phase of the inquiry, and those who joined it understood that they had a deeper level of involvement with the research process. Some of this was based on running joint workshops, writing collective articles or organising longer projects focused on developing the concept of critical whiteness in Romani Studies. These groups met sometimes formally and at other times less formally, with the specific goal of engaging in a hermeneutically inspired dialogue on the topic of their Romani or non-Romani identity and how non-Roma could contribute to addressing antigypsyism. The goal of this research phase was to find out how groups of *gebildete* non-Roma (non-Roma who had engaged in long-term processes of self-formation and collective reflection) were able to meet and engage in dialogue with Romani individuals and groups.

By necessity, phases 1 and 2 did not happen in strict succession. As already mentioned, I initiated some elements of participatory action research early on in the inquiry process through group discussions and joint projects. This allowed me to find out which of the respondents I had approached were interested in deeper involvement in the participatory action research phase. At the same time, part-way through the participatory action research I returned to some of the people originally interviewed, some of whom now spoke from the perspective of their involvement in the participatory phase of the inquiry.

The sites of the research were mainly in Hungary, in Budapest and in a small town for which I use the pseudonym Apor to protect the identities of my participants. I also conducted interviews and a participatory action project as part of a conference organised in Bucharest, Romania. The interview with Stephan Steiner took place in Vienna, Austria. Generally, my participants were people living in the territories formerly organised as the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Romanian Principalities, areas of particular importance to the effective history of antigypsyism and the white non-Romani identities that I sought to understand.

I conducted much of the participatory action research in settings that were related to my work as a political advocacy professional, academic and activist working with Romani and non-Romani communities. For example, chapters 7 and 8 mention specific academic conferences that I was involved in as a speaker and panel organiser in Romania and Hungary; workshops that I conducted with the support of Roma and non-Roma colleagues in Hungary; and extended online learning projects that included participants from the countries I have mentioned, plus Bulgaria and Kosovo.

### **Research participants**

While, I conducted more than 20 individual and group interviews with both Roma and non-Roma, not all of them are featured in the final thesis. I selected primarily the interviews of those who later became participants in the action research phase of the inquiry, but also several of those who had particular insights and experiences that illustrated either the workings of antigypsyism or, conversely, ways in which it can be overcome, particularly from a non-Romani white perspective.

Hence, the final edit of this thesis includes interviews and describes participatory action research processes involving 19 participants, including myself. Of these 10 were Roma and 9 non-Roma, while 9 were women and 10 were men. While in some of the interviews and activities I used Hungarian and/or Romanian as languages in common with my participants and recorded them as such, in this thesis I have provided my own translations of this material.

I used pseudonyms for the majority of the participants when they are featured in interviews or events that are illustrative of the work we did together and where there is an opportunity for them to be identified. On first mention in this thesis, I give a short description of participants' identity, based on my knowledge of them but also on self-identification.

For some participants, I did not use pseudonyms. This was the case for Stephan Steiner, Alina Șerban and Andrew Ryder, whom I identified as authors of the texts that they comment on through subsequent interviews in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Equally, where because of the context, identification would be inevitable, I used the real names of the participants involved, for example for participatory action research processes that were documented in the media or in academic events. In all instances this is with the consent of those involved. I did not identify the people or organisations involved in some of the workshops on antigypsyism mentioned in chapter 8 since many of those processes rely on confidentiality of those involved.

Having thus given a background to my choice of methodology and methods of inquiry, in the following chapters I take the reader through the theoretical and practical process of preparing the participatory phase of my research. At the same time, these trace the steps I have found necessary for gaining a hermeneutic understanding of non-Romani identities. I start with chapter 4 where I look at the importance of understanding history. I follow this with chapter 5 which describes the importance of *Bildung* or preparation for fighting antigypsyism; and chapter 6 where I discuss how this preparation can be put into practice.

## Chapter 4 On ‘thrownness’ and the long shadow of our ancestry

This chapter deals with two aspects of effective history and applies these to the development of non-Romani identity. First, I explain how and why history (as a collection of human stories) and our own personal histories both overshadow and define how we can act in the present, whether we are conscious of this or not. Second, I take a look at what happens if we become aware of the effects of history upon our understanding and action in the present, and how that leads to a particular kind of dialogue with that history. Such a dialogue at once illuminates the past and creates new ways of seeing and knowing and acting in the present. To illustrate how effective history has worked on the ancestors of Roma and non-Roma, and through them on their descendants, I use two cameos drawn from my field research. The first is of the non-Romani historian Stephan Steiner, who found himself changed by the Romani history he researches; the second is an account of a play by artist Alina Șerban dealing with the legacy of Romani slavery in the Romanian territories. Taken together, they illustrate the emergence of the non-Romani identity described by McGarry as ‘exalted’ and dominant (2017, p. 25) and trace the process by which it became imbued with privilege and dominance similarly to white identity in other geographies (DiAngelo, 2018; Hage 2000; Land, 2015). The two case studies contrast the way this process unfolded in the former Habsburg Empire on the one hand and in the Romanian territories of Wallachia and Moldova on the other.

### **Thrownness – we are what history makes us**

In an article dealing with Rorty’s hermeneutics applied to (liberal) democracy, Warnke (2003) interprets the Heideggerian idea of ‘thrownness’ as the way in which we as humans are ‘always already a participant in historic traditions’ (p. 107) before we are even born. Later (2003, p. 109) she takes up this theme to explain how effective history means that our understanding is contingent upon the assumptions and preconditions of the historical situation into which we are thrown. There is consequently always a double dimension to thrownness: how we view our present is bounded by history and traditions, while at the same time, we throw our full self at that history, become a part

of it and thereby change it. Where we are thrown matters and how we deal with that thrownness matters also.

As I showed in chapter 2, in hermeneutics prejudice is simply 'a judgement that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 282). The weight of society and history binds us to our prejudices as starting points. In fact, DiAngelo cautions, the belief in the 'key Western ideologies: individualism and objectivity' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 9) and the mistaken assumption that we are exceptions to this universal rule are two collectively held prejudices that keep us from learning and growing. As Scott-Villiers explains in the following excerpt where she talks about a play that she was part of at university, it is important to own our prejudices. Otherwise, we often misunderstand our fellow humans as we mistake our own long-held and unexamined assumptions for theirs. In her example, Scott-Villiers talks about the dangers of seeing the situation of people different to ourselves (in her case people in poverty overseas) through the lens of our own thrownness into a history and situation that is ours, not theirs. Much that we think and feel and believe is correct is in fact beholden to prejudices born and solidified from our own past experiences:

We [the students] made a compelling scene of exploitation, despair and resignation. That we made the whole thing up from our assumptions did not enter my head. I thought of it as a window into another world. I felt full of pity for those poor farmers, dislike for the merchants and full of zeal for putting their problems to rights. I understood that I could understand them by putting myself in their shoes. All my assumptions became theirs, their addresses to me were in fact my own. (Scott-Villiers, 2009, p. 78)

Thus, old assumptions can be reinforced and persist even as we believe we are learning from new situations, especially as 'prejudice is consolidated, [often] in encounter with fear and difference' (Scott-Villiers, 2009, p. 77).

One way of stepping out from under the tyranny of our own long-held and unexamined assumptions is to understand their origin and validity and to see them as part of an historical process that has been generating fore-meanings (assumptions) handed down to us by our traditions and ancestors and our own lived experiences. As Gadamer (2013) insists, seeing a text

(or a situation) in its alterity requires not blindly relying on the assumptions available to us, but rather calls for us 'explicitly to examine the legitimacy – i.e. the origin and validity – of the fore-meanings dwelling within' us (p. 279).

Regarding ourselves and our views as products of a long history (Scott-Villiers, 2009, p. 5) and articulating it to others means that we can incorporate our traditions and prejudices more awarely into our journey of understanding. In this way, fore-meanings, assumptions and prejudices processed through a lens of history can bring us closer to engaging with otherness. While Gadamer often talks about texts as in historical written documents, as Warnke (2007, p. 88) shows, a text is whatever story a tradition or history hands down to us through the generations and that speaks to us. It can be a literal text but equally could be an account given by someone who has lived through a different experience; a work of art such as a play or an image showing or reinterpreting history; it can even be a set of memories and/or experiences from our own lifetime.

This places upon those who wish to be *gebildet* and to see the world in ways which are hermeneutically accurate almost a duty to engage with and take into account the history that works in any given situation. It compels us to engage as fully as possible with what has come before and what is at work in that which is now, and also what is at work in s/he who is engaged in the knowing. We can ignore effective history, yet it does not ignore us; and by engaging with it awarely, we can expand our possibilities of understanding.

It is not that ignoring effective history is 'bad' while taking it into account is 'good' in a moral sense, in the same way that an awareness of effective history does not create 'good' or 'bad' people. Indeed, both Hage (2000) and DiAngelo (2018) see the obsession with good and bad whiteness as the biggest obstacle to overcoming the divisions between white people and the unawareness that characterises white identity. Rather, once we stop questioning whether we have prejudices and start inquiring into how they have shaped our lives, we can move beyond the good/bad binary (DiAngelo, 2018, p.

129) and take action to widen our horizons beyond those traditions into which we have been thrown.

For example, when researching issues related to Roma, ignoring the history of how Romani and non-Romani identities arose in the penumbra of antigypsyism and affected everyone whose ancestors were part of that history makes us all less effective at dealing with the results of antigypsyism. As I have shown in chapter 1, adding an understanding of antigypsyism to policies focused on Roma inclusion can bring more (hermeneutically speaking) accurate and effective results than ignoring it. For this reason, the argument described above is of great importance to the field of Romani Studies and to the discussion about Romani and especially non-Romani identities.

### **Historical horizons**

As already mentioned, Gadamer suggests that when we come into contact with another person, culture or identity different from our own, even if we are not aware of it, that contact is limited and circumscribed by our respective effective histories (Gadamer, 2013, p. 313).

Whenever we attempt to grasp anything, we come up against that starting point, that limitation on our understanding determined by the place within which we find ourselves thrown. Yet it is a moving horizon, one that depends also on 'that other past toward which our historical consciousness is directed' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 315). It is on our not only from the tradition in which we are steeped, but also from this personal, chosen vantage point that we can begin to move outwards into wider circles, or horizons, of understanding. This gives each of us a unique horizon of understanding from where we start to meaningfully engage with the horizon of someone or something other than ourselves.

However, knowing and being aware of our effective history and our thrownness does not automatically expand the horizons we bring with us. The possibility of expanding our horizons emerges in the encounter with the position of another who may have a different view and



experience of history – another version of effective history. In the act of encountering and allowing someone else's truth to touch us, we are provoked to wonder whether there is a reason why what we have always thought to be true is not so in someone else's view. In other words, 'when we find contradictions we question them and make adjustments to our understanding' (Scott-Villiers, 2009, p. 36). From this point onwards, when we begin to deeply question the assumptions and fore-meanings that we bring with us and allow the possibility that someone else's truth may be valid, hermeneutic dialogue can begin.

### **Romani and non-Romani effective history**

Given the above importance of historically effected consciousness, it is helpful, when encountering someone whose identity has historically emerged as racially different to ourselves, to question where that difference originated, how it developed and where it has left us.

Thus, when inquiring into antigypsyism as the specific manifestation of white racism in the Romani/non-Romani context, I found it helpful to learn more about how it was generated historically. In the context of participatory action research, this learning was not just an academic exercise. Just as any history that leaves its effects upon those who grow up under its shadow, the historical antigypsyism has left traces and has created prejudices and fore-meanings for both Romani and non-Romani people. These are the assumptions that create the horizons of understanding for all of us who operate under antigypsyism's influence, as it were. Those prejudices and fore-meanings are the text or original story that has been presented to both Roma and non-Roma. At the same time, Romani and non-Romani effective histories are divergent because of the position of Roma and non-Roma in the racialised reality created by antigypsyism.

These positions matter as they create different life experiences and different societal structures, leading to very different horizons of understanding. Whether we like it or not, or more importantly, whether we are aware of it or not, we all grow up as active participants in a 'historical tradition in which we understand each other in terms of the history of which we are a part' (Warnke, 2007, p. 105). What is more, individual prejudices and acts of discrimination are part of institutional

landscapes that transform them into structures of oppression (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 20). Living as part of a racialised history means that whenever we encounter one another across any racial divide, we bring to that meeting more than our willingness to engage and our curiosity towards each other. Whether we are aware of it or not, it is our racial understandings of each other that we also bring to that contact, as part of living within racialised institutions. We come towards each other steeped in institutionalised racism. Consequently, as non-Roma wishing to approach Roma, it pays to learn as much as possible about how the racial understandings of antigypsyism arose and which were the institutions that shaped and cemented it and still carry it at their core.

Through my research, I found that an historical view of antigypsyism mattered a lot to the people, both Roma and non-Roma, who were my participants. For some, mainly Roma, it was at the core of their understanding of themselves. Consequently, while I briefly outline below some aspects of the emergence of antigypsyism as I see it relating to the wider history of racism, I follow this with the personal accounts of two of my participants. Through their voices, I explore further how they see their relationship with antigypsyism and how they perceive its historical effects on non-Romani people.

### **Historical racism and antigypsyism**

While my research is focused on the effective history of antigypsyism and its consequences for Romani and non-Romani identities, there is a wider context that helps to understand these. That wider context of racism at the same time encompasses and influences antigypsyism, since, as we have seen, it is defined as a specific form, or subcategory, of racism (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017, p. 3).

Homi Bhabha's (2000) argument is that racism is not an anomaly but part and parcel of the wider process of colonialism and nation-state-building and of the 'historical traditions of civil and liberal humanism' (p. 366). Indeed, colonialism and nation-building were intrinsically bound up with exploitation and enslavement of Africans and other people whose skin was deemed not to be white.

DiAngelo (2018, p. 12) explains how certain groups of immigrants, such as Italian Americans, strove

to be seen as white when they first arrived in the United States, accurately perceiving that this assimilation would bring them various economic advantages enshrined in white privilege. In this way, white entitlement was at the core of modern nation-building and was communicated to all national subjects, as illustrated by this quote from Du Bois: 'Then always, somehow, some way, silently but clearly, I am given to understand that whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!' (1920, p. 498).

In particular, in those geographical locations (such as Europe) where the nation state has become the most important organising principle for society, 'the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man show themselves to lack every protection and reality' (Agamben, 1998, p. 75) and instead become secondary to the rights of citizens. Yet modern nation-building is rife with racial differentiation, so, as we will see in the rest of this chapter, being non-white brings with it a disadvantage when it comes to acquiring citizenship and the rights arising from it. Paul Gilroy's (2001) thinking is particularly apt in showing the way towards a complex understanding of the historical processes involved in the development of the concept of race. Gilroy insists that it is important to

reconstruct the history of 'race' in modernity. We need to offer multiple genealogies of racial discourse that can explain how the brutal dualistic opposition between black and white became entrenched and has retained its grip on a world in which racial and ethnic identities have been anything but stable or fixed. (Gilroy, 2001, p. 28)

History, Gilroy (2001) says, teaches us not only to understand where racism comes from but also how different concepts of race coexist and interact with each other in the present and how it is possible that attitudes that were thought to have died in the 'bloody penumbra of the Third Reich' are layered below and among 'the culturalist, anthropologically-minded race-thinking of the 1950s' (p. 31).

Yet it would be a mistake to believe that we learn history so as not to repeat the mistakes of the past. If that were true, anyone who understood and logically internalised the injustices of the past, as well as deciding not to repeat them, would be able to distance themselves from any such future

wrongdoing. The problem is that these brutal traditions bind us; they are those into which we, for better or for worse, are thrown, and thrownness is not something easily overcome. Instead, racism and, with it, antigypsyism, are solid constructs carried by attitudes and behaviours but congealed into societal structures such as citizenship, state policies or work practices (Keen, 2015, p. 33). To dismantle them will involve grappling with the full weight of that history and its effect on us, which, even as we ignore it, works through our present-day thoughts, policies and actions.

Speaking from a North American perspective, Warnke explains this grip that history has on us as follows:

[T]hese [hermeneutic] circles are historically rooted [... and] bequeathed to us by the histories and traditions to which we belong. For us, these include those frameworks that comprise the European encounter with Africans and subsequent ideas for cheap labor. Our heritage is therefore one that includes the Atlantic slave trade, the institutions of slavery and segregation, the development and demise of biologicistic notions of race, and the civil rights movement and its aftermath. Given this heritage, we cannot go back before the point at which racial understandings of individuals became available to us. (Warnke, 2007, p. 103)

This idea of not being able to go back to before racism arose as if nothing had happened is particularly important. As we have seen, effective history happens, whether we are aware of its operation or not. Racism casts its veil of blackness over anyone who is thrown into the particular racialised tradition that included the colonial nation-building process.

Yet, as Gilroy (2001) also observes, not only do past layered histories matter to us today. The hard facts of history included in the development of any given heritage simultaneously effect and affect personal experiences and histories. We constantly struggle to come up with new, more personal understandings of history that are inscribed into the arc of the traditions we find ourselves in. At the same time, our thinking becomes part of effective history in that it has the potential to reinterpret and change the course of history.

Turning to the complex genealogies of racialised understanding of Romani people, it is useful to think back to how medieval notions and realities of oppression and slavery aimed at Roma played out in Eastern Europe. According to Ian Hancock (2002), 'institutionalised antigypsyism in Europe

began in the fourteenth century with slavery and continues to this day' (p. 54), with the sources of this virulent prejudice starting with religious intolerance and the mistaken association of Roma with Islam in the times of the Crusades and continuing with the general equation of Romani people's skin colour with blackness and evil in the European mind. However, Hancock (2002) also points to a more recent 'parallel, created "gypsy" image' (p. 61) and to the phenomenon of scapegoating that feeds on earlier prejudices and continues to fan the flames of antigypsyism.

This account of the development of anti-Roma racism is backed up by extensive historical research using data from contemporary records from the Middle Ages until the development of modern nation states in Central and Eastern Europe. For the purposes of my inquiry, I have focused mostly on two of these studies. The first is Achim's (2004) account of the emancipation of the Gypsies in the Romanian Principalities (currently roughly the territory covered by southern and eastern Romania). The second is the already mentioned research undertaken by Steiner (2019) on the discourses and policies of antigypsyism in the Habsburg Monarchy from the 15th to the 18th century.

Achim's (2004, p. 109) work shows that not only did the enslavement of Roma in the Romanian Principalities last for centuries but also that it developed into institutionalised racist structures that had long-lasting effects which continue to linger in the modern Romanian nation state. His research describes how the emancipation of enslaved Roma by the Romanian states of Wallachia and Moldavia in the 19th century resulted in shoring up non-Roma white privilege at the expense of erstwhile slaves. Particularly pertinent in this respect is an example provided by Achim (2004, pp. 111-113). In the year 1831, the Romanian states both in Wallachia and in Moldavia adopted a seminal legislative package called the Organic Regulation. Its express aim was to bring the two Romanian principalities into the modern era and build the nation state. One part of this, the Wallachian Regulation for Improving the Conditions of Gypsies, as its title suggests, was ostensibly concerned with emancipation of Roma slaves. Yet while it transformed state-owned Roma into tax-paying subjects, it did not do away with the institution of slavery. In fact, the legislation included

further coercive measures focused on those Romani subjects who were considered unmanageable because of their nomadic way of life:

As to the Gypsies who caused problems to the authorities, it was proposed that they should be dispersed and resettled in groups of five to six families per village, and that their freedom of movement should be restrained; they were allowed to leave their villages only with permission from the authorities. (Achim, 2004, p. 112)

Similar legislation was soon adopted in Moldavia. What is more, in Wallachia the state brought in additional policy measures through which it started buying up privately-owned Roma from the boyars whenever possible. Hitherto, the labour of Roma slaves had been used by boyars as a hidden tax cut as privately-owned Roma were not subject to taxation (Achim, 2004, p. 113). Consequently, under the Organic Regulations, 'the transfer of a slave from private to state property was in fact equivalent to the acquisition of a new taxpayer' (Achim, 2004, p. 113) for the state and a transfer of wealth from private to state hands. Meanwhile,

the law satisfied the desire of the boyars to get rid of their Gypsy slaves, especially as these Gypsies were not always profitable and their sale to other private owners was not always possible. (Achim, 2004, p. 113)

This process of so-called Roma emancipation in the Romanian territories thus illustrates the creation of a class of non-Roma who had the luxury of feeling magnanimous whereas in fact they entrenched their positions of white economic power and dominance. What is more, by becoming taxpayers, erstwhile Romani slaves were in effect forced to subsidise their own liberation and were subsequently used as a source of income by the modern Romanian state:

The capitation which the Treasury was to obtain from these emancipated Gypsies, once they had become taxpayers, would be used for the redemption of Gypsies put on sale by private owners. (Achim, 2004, p. 117)

This is the point made by Matache and Bhabha in their article calling for 'symbolic, moral or legal' (2016) reparations for Roma slavery. Although he stops short of demanding economic reparations and naming white privilege, Ciprian Necula (2012) takes a stab at the former, arriving at the figure of '247,249,700,235 Euro – rough calculation of the Romanian state debts to Roma during slavery' (2012, p. 40). Even allowing for margins of error in his estimate, he makes the point that non-

Romani white privilege has a basis in economic realities and that it has been established over almost five centuries.

Furthermore, by linking the struggles of the abolitionist movement in Romania to those of similar bourgeois revolutions in Western Europe, the emancipation of the Romani slaves also cemented the good/bad non-Romani binary and the notion that modern, Western-inspired citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe was that which gave at least nominal rights to Roma. The struggle for the emancipation of Roma slaves was inscribed in the drive for a modern nation state in the Romanian Principalities. The implication was that abolitionists were fighting for progress and tolerance, to the point that 'some owners freed their slaves without requesting any compensation' (Achim, 2004, p. 117). This mirrors precisely the same kind of 'discourse of enrichment' that Hage (2000, p. 94) talks about whereby white-dominated states use ethnic groups as ways of creating wealth for those whites who have access to and are entitled to manage the nation. Naturally, this kind of process, as Hage also points out, leaves out a great many (typically lower-class) disgruntled white people who then complain about and argue bitterly against any emancipatory measures for ethnic minorities and see cosmopolitan elites as their oppressors (Hage, 2000, p. 205). The resulting differentiation between good and bad white people, as already mentioned in chapter 2, serves to cement 'White national will' (Hage, 2000, p. 18).

I now turn to Steiner's (2019, pp. 131-154) archival research which links the rise of national identity in the Habsburg Monarchy and the Holy Roman Empire to some of the earliest notions of antigypsyist mythology in European societies. Steiner describes how, through a series of malicious narratives and policy measures, Roma in the territories ruled by the Habsburg Monarchy and the Holy Roman Empire were falsely accused of spying and treachery and later effectively banned from much of the territory of Central Europe. In spite of an effort by the authorities to bring charges and to convict so-called Gypsy spies and traitors, it turned out that there was no proof of their spying or treasonous activities. In spite of this, the unfounded accusations were used as an excuse

to persecute, exclude and even kill Roma, whereby the ancestors of modern-day Roma were cast as 'the enemy within' (Steiner, 2019, p. 131).

Based on these fabricated animosities, in the 18th century, the Habsburg Monarchy and the Bohemian Crown took a series of draconian legislative measures to make sure that Roma were met with extreme violence whenever they tried to settle in territories controlled by those empires. Steiner (2019) gives the example of a series of wooden warning signs 'which stated the Gypsy ban and the possibility they could be shot without consequences, if they "resisted by the use of arms"' (p. 144). In spite of the extremely brutal policies enacted by the state to keep Roma away, as we will see in the next section, interactions between Roma and the local population were more amicable but still extraordinarily racist and exclusionary. Thus, the officially sanctioned antigypsyism resulted in

the obsession with a territory 'cleansed' from 'Gypsy riffraff, harmful and mischievous to the country' (*schaedlich- und landesverderbliche Zigeunergesindel*). [This] was a utopia the authorities of the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg monarchy yearned for during the long 18<sup>th</sup> century. What seemed utopia to them turned out to be dystopia for the persecuted Gypsies. (Steiner, 2019, p. 149)

This exclusionary discourse mirrors the essence of modern antigypsyism as defined by the Alliance against Antigypsyism (2017). From a political scientist's perspective, McGarry (2017) also links anti-Roma racism with the project of nation-building, where nation states had need of an 'exalted' national subject who benefited from the privileges of modern nation states. This process of setting apart the national subject as the exalted citizen is highlighted as part and parcel of modern Central European nation-building that used the earlier prejudices to entrench the power of the non-Roma national subjects as dominant. In this context, being Roma was qualified as belonging to an 'internal other' and forced Romani people to live as second-class citizens. What is more, by selectively or unscrupulously manipulating historical data, 'the exaltation of the national subject at the expense of the outsider presents the relationship as antagonistic rather than symbiotic' (McGarry, 2017, p. 25).



The debasement of Romani people accompanied by the exaltation of the non-Romani citizens of the nation state is similar to processes of white-identity creation in other geographical settings. For example, Zinn (2013) traces the drawing of 'the colour line' (pp.23-38) in the United States in the 17th century. This is one of the specific historical circumstances through which white settlers of lower class in the United States chose to become white under circumstances of extreme brutality that they only escaped by in turn oppressing African slaves. It is also similar to the role of the 'ideological imagination' highlighted by Hannah Arendt with reference to how antisemitism structurally underpinned the rise of European national fantasies (Arendt, 2017, p. 63). These stories give valuable clues about what it means to become racially inscribed.

I have shown how Central and Eastern European nations used Roma as both enslaved and indentured subjects to create the wealth of the modern nation states, as well as casting them in the role of scapegoats. The real or imagined way of life of Roma was constantly contrasted with that of white non-Roma Central and Eastern Europeans. In this way, modern nation states used earlier prejudices such as those highlighted by Steiner to artificially create narratives of Roma as vagrants, unlawful and workshy (see also Baumgartner, n.d.). Consequently, Roma in Central and Eastern Europe were either forced to assimilate, change their way of life and effectively renounce their identity or be perennially excluded and exploited for the benefit of majority populations.

This history gives a sense of the origins and the rise of the prejudices that bring us to the point where we find ourselves today vis-a-vis our respective identities in the context of antigypsyism. This history of brutal oppression is the background of the texts bequeathed not only to Central and Eastern Europeans by their forebears but also, through similar mechanisms elsewhere, to most non-Roma the world over (see, for example, Okely (1983) for a description of the rise of antigypsyism in the UK). Given this historical baggage, it is fair to say that antigypsyism has led to Roma and non-Roma being completely segregated from each other or forced into relationships that mirror the structural inequalities embedded in their history of enslavement and forced assimilation.

Indeed, it is the case that ancient patterns of segregation and inequality persist to the present day, creating a thoroughly entrenched history of white non-Romani privilege and dominance akin to that observed in other contexts by Land (2015), Hage (2000) and DiAngelo (2018).

We can observe these patterns through a mechanism that Steiner calls ‘the tip of the iceberg’ (Stephan, field interview, 2018) that I will describe in the next section. Whereas white dominance ‘obscures racism by rendering whites, white privilege and racist institutions invisible’ (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 26), it is possible to tell stories that make white identity visible. These illustrate how effective history operates and throws its shadow on all of us, but also how ‘awareness of the effect of being historically situated’ (Warnke, 2003, p. 108) can change narratives of antigypsyism in the present.

### **Effective-historical consciousness at work**

I illustrate my argument through two case studies drawn from my fieldwork. They both describe the experiences of individuals who have spent a considerable part of their professional lives gaining an understanding of antigypsyism, its historical roots and the way it operates in society. For this reason they bring with them a great awareness of their historical situation. At the same time, their work has an effect on the discourse around antigypsyism. While they each look at different historical and geographical locations, both draw similar conclusions from their research. They use different mediums to articulate their understanding, yet they concur that a history of oppression and antigypsyism has shaped the lives and thinking of not only Roma but also non-Roma. Through their scholarship or art, they describe how the history of antigypsyism has left traces in the present that are meaningful enough to inform not only discourses pertaining to Roma, and individual relationships between Roma and non-Roma but also policies and societal structures enacted by states in Central and Eastern Europe.

Methodologically, I chose to first engage with written texts produced by my two participants, and in the case of one of them, with a play that she directed and performed in. Then, I interviewed both

of them separately, asking them to talk about the historical sources of their respective texts and the thought processes that led them to articulate their interpretations of history. At the same time, I asked questions about the effects of their research and/or artistic production on their lives – how their own consciousness had been affected by an awareness of history. Finally, I tried to understand how the discourse around antigypsyism had been changed by their historically inspired work.

The two geographical and historical contexts are meaningful as they illustrate two distinct interpretations and applications of antigypsyist policies and actions by medieval and modern states and groups of people living in these states. The first case study, as already mentioned, is narrated through the eyes and work of historian Stephan Steiner and focuses on the Habsburg Empire in the Middle Ages. The second case study, based on the work of actor and director Alina Șerban, deals with the legacy of Roma slavery in the Romanian territories of Wallachia and Moldova.

### **The Habsburg Monarchy – exclusion, brutality and assimilation**

Steiner is an Austrian historian who at one point in his career was struck by how little he knew about the persecution during World War II of the Roma people who had lived in the village where he grew up. At the same time, Roma had been part of his reality growing up, especially tradespeople who had cordial relationships with his family. This got him thinking about how ‘many societies are deeply impregnated by this knowing and not knowing at the same time’ (Stephan, field interview, 2018), an insight I will return to in chapter 9. Consequently, he decided to undertake extensive archival research into the origins of myths and prejudices surrounding Roma in Central European consciousness. The insights he shared with me regarding these are based on both his scholarship and his reflections as a non-Romani scholar regarding how these myths take the shape of reality in structures, but also in norms and beliefs about the self. The Alliance against Antigypsyism (2017, p. 6) describes the outcome of these myths as the non-entity of ‘gypsyism’, a figment of non-Roma imagination built up through centuries of oppression and structural exclusion. Indeed, ‘what those who embody antigypsyism are antagonistic towards is actually a creation of the collective

imagination that is entirely ignorant of Romani cultures and perspectives' (Alliance against Antigypsyism, p. 6).

Steiner's research (2018) vividly illustrates some of the historical processes that led to the creation of part of that collective imagination in non-Romani thinking. Specifically, as already mentioned, he analysed how the myth of Roma as spies and traitors led to a series of brutal policies of exclusions legislated by the Habsburg Monarchy and the medieval Bohemian state. Yet, 'it has to be stated that not a single archival source to date has ever substantiated these allegations against the Gypsies' (Steiner, 2019, p. 139).

Still, the myths uncovered by Steiner led to brutality and an entrenchment of antigypsyism in Central Europe. What is more, 'a renewal of this patent [of Gypsy warning signs] extended its effects to the majority population as well: those who voluntarily offered lodging to Gypsies were punishable with execution' (Steiner, 2019, p. 145). However, in our interview, Stephan talked about the contradictory effect that state policy and human relationships had on the fate of Roma in what is now modern-day Austria. While the legislation was clearly focused on expelling Roma at the borders of the Empire, nevertheless Roma groups tried and succeeded in travelling through or settling in these territories. The majority population, meanwhile, varied in their willingness to comply with or disobey the government's antigypsyist policies. Partly because of the economic need to use Roma labour and partly because of ignorance or lack of engagement with the state, 'there's not so many cases that we have when people actually did it, they were not killers, I mean those farmers' (Stephan, field interview, 2018). Thus, historical research shows that peasants were, if not welcoming, then at least tolerant of Roma as and when they needed their labour for agricultural work. Stephan called this the 'zoom-in/zoom-out perspective' (Stephan, field interview, 2018).

Of course if we are staying in the zoom-out perspective then you had these processes going on, the processes of othering. [...] If you zoom in, let's say for instance to a village level, then things get really interesting. So on the one hand you have the juridical norms that basically outlaw Gypsies for a very long period of time, but what you can see on the village level is that those people were communicating, they were interested in each other. (Stephan, field interview, 2018)

In Stephan's view, the zoom-in perspective can reveal what happens when individual people acknowledge traditions, history and/or policy but use their agency to change the official or traditional text they have been offered. As we can see, people do this in the face of sometimes extremely heavy oppression or a threat of violence from authorities. In some cases, Stephan explains, you can find evidence of strategies of resistance to oppression in the ancestors of both Roma and non-Roma.

Albeit different historical processes and populations in the Habsburg territories led to different results, the economic and political behaviour of non-Roma populations today can be traced back to past state policies or ways of relating to Roma. Stephan articulates a mechanism that helps him explain this operation of effective history. The way that antigypsyism leaves deep scars and prejudices that can be revived and enacted at a moment's notice sometimes centuries later can be observed as the 'tip of the iceberg' (Stephan, field interview, 2018). This is a phenomenon that Steiner believes is historically robust enough to explain how ancient resentments, myths or prejudices are translated into modern-day behaviour in white majority non-Romani populations.

He cautions against rash conclusions, yet he cites examples of where 'there is something there, there is something transported over the decades, over the centuries but speaking in scientific terms is very hard to find out what that could be' (Stephan, field interview, 2018). For example, he described a series of posters created as propaganda by the far right in Austria that have an uncanny resemblance to the warning signs erected by the Habsburg authorities in the 18th century.

In this terrible attack against the Roma in Austria in the 1990s when we had this bombing series [...] they were killed because there was a placard put in front of the village... a placard saying 'Roma, back to India' OK we have this long tradition [of the Habsburg Monarchy] of using placards against Gypsies and here comes a placard which is... there is also something historical going on. (Stephan, field interview, 2018)

Towards the end of our interview, I asked Stephan about the effects the texts he researched have had upon him. He responded by saying that 'it is banal to say you are more aware of problems of Gypsies, of Roma in this case. Of course this is the case and you get more alert' (Stephan, field interview, 2018). The awareness he has gained compels him to teach history differently. As a

lecturer, he also feels an urgency to articulate this knowledge to his students, even though their field of study (psychotherapy) does not appear directly connected to history, or to Roma for that matter. He talks to them about how they can do their work ‘with an eye which is not only fixed on your own contemporary existence. [...] this just moves you from one centimetre to the right or the left, it is interesting, it gives you more room, it opens up the space’ (Stephan, field interview, 2018). This insight about how antigypsyism infects everything is important and I will return to it in my conclusions (chapter 9).

This opening up of space is a crucial point for the present research. In this case, Steiner opens up not only his own mind but also that of his students through close contact with and analysis of history and its effects upon the present. It is one element in a longer journey of becoming less white or critically white as a non-Roma. In the next section, I will talk about the experience of a female Romani artist who has made it her mission to open up history-inspired spaces for Roma and non-Roma alike.

### **Reinterpreting the history of Romani slavery**

Over a number of years starting in 2016, Alina Șerban wrote, directed and performed in *The Great Shame* (Șerban, 2018). The play is based on historical research that includes a number of sources, for example the already cited works by Achim (2004).

It is the antigypsyism born of this prolonged period of Roma slavery that in Alina’s interpretation has serious consequences in the present. *The Great Shame* artistically reinterprets and renders intelligible to the Romanian public the period of over 500 years of Roma slavery in the Romanian territories of Moldova and Wallachia. While skilfully giving a great deal of historical background, it is chiefly concerned with the consequences of this history for a number of Romani and non-Romani individuals who are highlighted as emblematic of ways in which Roma slavery has affected and effected their lives.

The main Romani characters are Magda, a young Romani student writing her master's dissertation on the topic of 500 years of Roma slavery in the historical Romanian provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia; her brother Matei, a priest in the Orthodox Romanian tradition, who has to confront the institutionalised racism embedded in the church; Oprea, a Romani university teacher who wants to write a book about Roma slavery, but finds she cannot do so without Magda's help; and Elena, Oprea's daughter, who struggles with her Romani identity. The main non-Romani characters are a university professor (Prof) who is Magda's supervisor, and Daniel, Magda's boyfriend.

The play is both educational and illuminating, as well as, in my experience, deeply moving. It deals squarely with the legacy of the three historical institutions that upheld Roma slavery (church, state and landowners) by owning and using slave labour to cement their wealth and power. It gives a brief historical account of the origins of the institution of Roma slavery, first documented in 1428 under the ruler Alexandru cel Bun (Academia, 1975), and its formal abolition on 20 February 1856 by the Moldavian ruler Ghica (Achim, 2004). The play shows enslaved Roma bearing instruments of torture such as muzzles or spiked collars designed to keep them from falling asleep when working; female Roma slaves being raped as the property of their owners (possibly the origin of the belief that Romani women are 'passionate'); and families brutally being torn apart as they are sold separately to different owners, etc. Throughout the play, the marks of that history are visible in the behaviour of both Romani and non-Romani protagonists. These are the 'tip of the iceberg' moments described by Stephan, the effective history that can be seen in ways that Roma and non-Roma treat each other and that capture behaviours that everyone who has lived in Central and Eastern Europe will recognise. Some of these behaviours can be seen in Oprea and her daughter, on the one hand, and Magda and Matei on the other hand, who have to struggle hard to keep their families together under the weight of racism; the way in which Matei ends up being treated and rejected as just another Gypsy slave by his parishioners; the small but telling vignettes of Oprea's non-Romani students who are blithely appropriating Romani culture from a place of ignorance; and the

ultimately exploitative relationship between Magda and Daniel, where Magda is ready to compromise everything and still ends up being rejected for being Roma.

What is particularly interesting in the play from the point of view of my research is that on the part of the Romani characters there is a sense of understanding that consciousness is historically affected and effected, and consequently, all the Romani characters evolve and grow and learn and transform throughout the play. Meanwhile, the non-Romani characters are unable and unwilling to confront the past, they act defensively and display classic patterns of white fragility (the following is my translation of the original Romanian):

Romanian professor: Well, Miss, these are things that happened a long time ago... what are you implying? I haven't bought a car for 10 years; what kind of slave owner am I? So I should understand now that if I don't feel shame, then I am a racist? That was the policy then, to own slaves. Everyone did it. You can't judge with today's morality and sensibilities what used to happen in those days. Or what do you want from us? Would you like those of us alive now to account for what our ancestors did? We live in a democracy now – those who are capable, succeed. Look at yourself, you are at University and studying for a master's degree. Aren't you a Gypsy? Pardon me, a Roma...' (Șerban, 2018, p. 92)

Not only does the professor reject the deepening understanding of his Romani students and colleagues, he actively blames and shames Magda by calling her 'too fiery' (Șerban, 2018, p. 91). This scene echoes the many similar cases recounted by DiAngelo (2018, pp. 113-122) as demonstrations of the inability of white people to understand and process white racism. While I will return to this discussion at length in chapter 7, at this point it is important to point out that in Alina's play, the lack of openness of non-Romani characters links back directly to their inability to process non-Romani effective history. The non-Romani characters miss several opportunities to open up their horizons of understanding. Even when they do so, their grasp and interpretation of effective history is shallow and stunted.

Consequently, in *The Great Shame*, every one of the Romani characters undergoes a profound transformation and their struggle and engagement with history is a palpable presence, while for the non-Romani characters, the struggle is either absent or inconclusive. For the Roma, every scene is imbued with deep historical gravitas and through that constantly develops meaning;



relationships between family members (Magda and Matei; Oprea and Elena; Magda and Oprea) are healed and grow into solid alliances. In particular, Magda and Oprea's relationship becomes one of 'solidarity between Romani women' (Alina, field interview, 2018). Meanwhile, the relationships between Romani and non-Romani characters disintegrate or never get off the ground. There is a beautiful illustration of this contrast between intentions and reality when the visible actions of the characters are juxtaposed on the stage with their shadows symbolising their feelings, longings and inner worlds. This shows that Roma and non-Roma often act in contradictory ways. For example, while Magda and Daniel embrace in seeming reconciliation, their shadows slowly drift apart. This echoes and reminds us of the devastating consequences of racism for both people targeted by racism and for white people. The problem, according to DiAngelo (2018, p. 67), is that white people are not socialised to recognise that racism and segregation from people of colour are a real losses. The painful conclusion in Alina's play is that the unwillingness and inability of the non-Romani characters to engage with and integrate within themselves the historical meaning of Roma slavery and the reality of white privilege leaves them stranded, isolated and pompously ineffective.

Apart from anything else, *The Great Shame* is a poignant illustration of the difference between Romani and non-Romani people. In the play, the former are, through suffering from antigypsyism, increasingly aware of their historically effected consciousness and are operating with it in the interests of the liberation of their people. Meanwhile, the latter appear unidimensional, limited, fragile, diminished and exploitative because they lack that understanding.

*The Great Shame* is a play inspired by Alina's lived experience as a Romani woman. In it, she recounts some of the same struggles for meaning and the same missed opportunities that she mentioned in her field interviews with me. For example, she described the process that led her to developing, writing and performing *The Great Shame* as a struggle:

[I]n 2015 I came back [to Romania and] not only I had to fight my own cynicism, I had to fight the cynicism in Romania. (Alina, field interview, 2017)

In noting this cynicism, she contrasts it with the more forward-moving attitudes of other parts of the world where she lived and where, she says, people had the exercise of dialogue, of self-reflection, of exploring differences and of processing oppression:

And all these discourses could be changed but we don't have discussions about them. How can I come and start a discussion about slavery when you don't know that slavery existed? (Alina, field interview, 2018).

Alina's comments relate to the bigger historical canvas, the point at which Romanian society found itself at the time when she was taking the decision to write her play. She found that in 2016, most Romanians laboured under a profound ignorance about what Romani artists had to say beyond the obvious traditional music and dancing that has, as I have already said, been appropriated and is seen as the epitome of Romani culture, while deeper social issues are completely ignored.

We have [the city of] Cluj with the biggest names in music, bigger even than Bucharest, and at the same time they carry a very big stain [*pată* in the Romanian original]. And I want to tell them: you have a stain [o *pată*] on you, on your neck! (Alina, field interview, 2018)

This is a direct reference to the case of Pata Rât, a marginalised urban space in Cluj inhabited almost exclusively by Roma who have little or no access to any municipal services and many of whom work as garbage collectors. Activists from Pata Rât have fought long-standing campaigns to redress the multiple inequalities that resulted from municipal policies that have not only failed Roma communities but are perpetuating patterns of historical antigypsyism (Vincze & Raț, 2013). Alina's point above is that in Cluj, the wilful ignorance of the majority population regarding the historical mechanism that led to social exclusion has resulted in a situation where the city is hailed as a beacon of prosperity that benefits from the cultural appropriation of Romani music, while Roma continue to be evicted and placed in racially segregated settlements. Effective history reaches into the present to construct a vastly different reality for Roma and non-Roma. This is a situation that arises not only for people targeted by racism (in this case Roma) in Central Europe but also in Australia (Land, 2015) and the United States (DiAngelo, 2018) and is a function of white privilege and supremacy brought on by history.

Alina comes to realise that she must tell a different story about Roma slavery than the largely absent one she has experienced growing up in Romania. Her account consciously embraces those aspects of history that lie at the core of antigypsyism and that could help move forward and heal Romanian society. It is precisely the difference between a shallowly understood Roma inclusion project on the one hand and a meaningful transformation informed by antigypsyism on the other hand that Alina is getting at. Her own cynicism refers to her lack of faith that anyone in Romania would understand what she wants to do, as illustrated in the following quote from the same interview – showing that that misunderstanding ran deeper than she expected in her closer circles:

I was thinking of working with this director, and she is very progressive, you know, she brought some of the social message in the State Theatre, so I would only ask her to open some doors, but at that table together with the other artists, she said something that is in my play, in *The Great Shame*, she said ‘Ah, it’s not about discrimination, there is actually no discrimination in the race sense, it’s more a class issue... and that was the moment when I realised that I need to get my play’. (Alina, field interview, 2017)

Many times throughout her interviews with me, Alina talked about the pain that brings her to her artistic creations and how it reaches the point where it propels her to act and express it through her art. There is the same sense that comes across in her play, of a Romani woman struggling with the weight of history, the weight of oppression and the weight of people who do not understand, but all the while learning, developing and evolving. And, as in the quote above, this is matched and mirrored by the same sense of most (but not all) non-Romani people simply not getting what she is trying to communicate.

Throughout her life, Alina said,

I had to deal with many microaggressions that were not bad intended, so you were many times put in a bad situation, not because people want to put you in a bad situation, but because there are many untold stories and we are not, as I said, we are not used to the exercise of listening to the other. (Alina, field interview, 2017)

*The Great Shame* is a commentary on the untold stories which hurt us both, Roma and non-Roma. While she expresses her anger at the exploitation and stonewalling she experiences from various associates, Alina was also very clear that all are living under the same veil of history as herself, and the biggest pain for her arose when she found that people, Roma and non-Roma alike, were

unwilling to engage with that history. Paraphrasing Alina, I would say that these days, it is precisely that unprocessed effective history which causes suffering or at least amplifies and blocks the healing of the pain caused by antigypsyism.

### **Changing the text of antigypsyism**

The examples above show what effects history has on present-day reality, where each 'illuminates the text from within a specific horizon' (Warnke, 2007, p. 118). That text, in this instance, is the genealogy of antigypsyism and the hold it has on us in the present. Each example is a take on the historical legacy that is congealed, so to speak, in the historically effected consciousness of Roma and non-Roma today. In the act of making manifest their interpretation, my participants engage with others in a dialogue about that interpretation and through this change the text of antigypsyism in the present.

This transformation is perhaps best illustrated by Alina's live dialogue with her audience. She describes the pleasure she took in these post-play discussions with the public ('I liked the discussion better than the play', Alina, field interview, 2018), and talk about one memorable occasion when a Romani man said the following:

Miss, there is not a day in my life where I don't feel that I am a Gypsy, in this country, there is no day from God where I don't have to carry this. Because on me, you can see [that I am Gypsy]. And you know what, Miss? Today I brought all my five children here with me and I was very glad to see that they had a place where they could learn about themselves and be proud, because we don't have anywhere to go and learn about ourselves and feel this way. And for this I thank you. (Alina, field interview, 2018)

These are the encounters – more about this in chapter 7 – that start the process of reclaiming the effective history of Roma and non-Roma in a way that does not look away from past traumas but processes their effects. That reclaiming is at the same time a way of rewriting the historically effected consciousness of the participants in these encounters. The goal of this process is to become fully aware of that effective history, and by 'recalling the conditions of understanding' (Warnke, 2007, p. 119) to work towards a time when racial differences are no longer meaningful in remedial contexts, that is, when they are no longer necessary to right the wrongs of the past.

I have shown in this chapter how history both frames our understanding of our identities in ways that bring forth our prejudices and gives us the background necessary to start the dialogue with the past that can create new futures. However, that job is not an easy or quick one. It requires considerable engagement with a form of understanding that is not only beholden to history and traditions but also reinterprets and acts upon these (Warnke, 2003, p. 111). To reach such an understanding, preparation is of the essence. I have argued that the first step in this preparation is to acquire an awareness of effective history and how our thrownness determines our starting point. In the next chapter, I will look at several other preconditions for people to become aware of and grasp the alternatives Warnke talks about. It is a matter of *Bildung*, a concept that I will illustrate and reflect on through the eyes of my research participants.

## **Chapter 5 - *Gebildete non-Roma*: opening up non-Roma to their role in the constellation of antigypsyism**

I begin this chapter with reflections on the much-talked about ideas around education as a panacea for Roma integration and Roma inclusion (see, for example, ERRC (2002) or Rostas (2012)). I explain why simply engaging in education as it is currently imparted through the school system will not suffice to address antigypsyism. Beyond the obvious ‘invisibility of antigypsyism in human rights and anti-discrimination education’ (Keen, 2015, p. 14), I see a problem with the very nature of that education. I argue that racism and other oppressions pervade the formal and informal educational systems to such a degree as to render them incapable of providing the openness and critical thinking that can dismantle antigypsyism. To address this shortcoming, I turn to hermeneutic *Bildung* as a process whereby we can transcend these limits. Through extensive interviews with some of my key participants, I explore what it means to embark on this lifelong journey towards openness. I thus mark our *Bildung* as the second element that allows non-Roma to grapple with antigypsyism, following on from a deep engagement with history.

### ***Bildung* vs education**

The moral actor or skilled craftsman takes a set of instructions, whether moral or technical, and applies them to the case at hand. (Warnke, 2002, p. 83)

There is a lot of discussion among those concerned with Roma integration and inclusion about the need for education (Rostas, 2012). It is typically assumed that the main problem is the exclusion of Romani children from the mainstream school system, so much so that a report from the European Roma Rights Centre recommends as one of the first measures of redress that ‘Romani children currently excluded from schooling are swiftly integrated into the mainstream school system’ (ERRC, 2002, p. 1). While the report specifically mentions campaigns that speak out against racism in education and including educational resources that inform students about contributions of Roma to society, this is not the main thrust of it. This and other authoritative texts (Brüggemann, 2012) are unanimous in their view that Roma are in need of being educated in order to integrate into mainstream society – ‘swiftly’ as the quote above mentions. There are several problems with

this point of view, all related to the dominance of non-Roma and their role in upholding antigypsyism by not questioning white privilege. I discuss these one by one below, as well as sharing some of my insights regarding how they can be overcome.

The first problem is whose power determines which children are included? While the forms and consequences of unequal access are highlighted by all the reports mentioned, there is not enough discussion of the power relationships involved. For example, technical solutions such as encouraging universal access to education by covering the costs of school attendance for Romani children (Brüggemann, 2012) fail to take into account that children may not attend school because of other less obvious factors such as 'cultural exclusion' (Ryder, Rostas, & Taba, 2014, pp. 520-521). The barriers in many cases are a result of the non-Roma majority's invisible power, a phenomenon described as the way in which social processes result in inequality: 'power relations help to shape the boundaries of participatory spaces, what is possible within them, and who may enter, with which identities, discourses and interests' (Gaventa, 2006, p. 26). Thus, power concentrated in the hands of non-Roma, *a priori* includes some and excludes others whose behaviour or ways of learning are seen as unacceptable or not fit for purpose. I will return to this below.

The second problem is what kind of education do mainstream schools offer? Even if Roma were able to attain the highest levels of achievement, they would still do so within the confines of an education system that is steeped in antigypsyism. Described as the 'continuous headwind' (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017, p. 3) that, unless addressed, will thwart all efforts at Roma inclusion, antigypsyism pervades non-Roma discourses, policies and structures of supremacy, including education. Hence, it is important to strive for education that addresses rather than ignores antigypsyism.

The third problem is that with its focus on Roma, the debate around education misses the point that, as shown in previous chapters, non-Roma of all ages are also (or perhaps more) in need of learning about, understanding and expanding their understanding of Romani people and

communities, rather than the other way round (Vajda, 2015). Since antigypsyism itself is 'not a minority issue' (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017, p. 3), in setting educational policies to combat it 'our attention needs to shift to mainstream societies' (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017, p. 3).

More than that, oppression (not only racial oppression but also oppression of young people, women, people from working-class backgrounds and more) continues to educate all, Roma and non-Roma alike, towards an understanding of reality that perpetuates rather than challenges exclusions (Freire, 2018) from which all people emerge with their horizons limited rather than expanded. In keeping with Freire's principles, the following question arises: what could a pedagogy of liberation bring to Roma inclusion?

All these are big questions and many of them rest on the issue of openness, or the lack of it. Education systems as currently constructed are inherently not equipped to deal with the effects of antigypsyism and to include Roma, or to offer a hermeneutic way of seeing the world. Education is predicated on imparting knowledge rather than opening horizons. This point is made very poignantly by Ryder (2017) in chapter 4 of his book dealing with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller resistance and empowerment. Ryder begins by describing the negative treatment of a large group of (English) Gypsy students in South Forest School, a UK-based educational establishment that is trying hard to raise its overall standards and where management feels that these efforts are continually hampered by the strategies and behaviour of its Gypsy students and their families. After many conflicts between the school and the Gypsy, Gypsy students ended up being blamed for the 'deterioration in relations and engagement with school' (p. 48); they were *de facto* segregated in Special Educational Needs classes that were under-resourced and where education was neglected while disciplining and punishment were favoured; teachers continued to shout at students, students were more and more violent with each other; and on several occasions, Gypsy parents withdrew their children from the school altogether.



Several observations spring to mind: first of all, the similarities between this case and the situation of Roma schooling highlighted by bodies such as the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC, 2002) and the United Nations Development Program (Brüggemann, 2012) in Eastern Europe are striking, suggesting that a wider phenomenon of antigypsyism is at work when educational outcomes in well-resourced societies such as the UK and others less affluent such as Slovakia, Hungary or Romania are almost carbon copies of each other.

Second, Ryder's case study in the UK reads like a textbook example of missed opportunities: The Gypsy Bridge Worker's role is misconstrued as that of making sure that Gypsy children comply with school policies, rather than as a mediator between the Gypsy community and the school – with the result that the person employed in this role resigns. The Traveller Education Support Services (TESS), an integral part of the Local Authority, are not consulted and are marginalised. The behaviour of Gypsy students is seen in simplistic terms as bad and disruptive rather than being understood as a wider and well-documented phenomenon (for other racial minorities) of student subculture. Statutory mediation 'enthusiastically' offered by TESS is declined by the headteacher. Ryder's conclusion is that

the management's failure to foster a 'preventative approach' and promote dialogue, mediation and innovative anti-racist measures contributed to the difficult relations within the school. (Ryder, 2017, p. 60)

Third, it is glaringly obvious that in spite of an 'ambitious and complex piece of legislation'<sup>3</sup> stipulated in the UK (Ryder, 2017, p. 60), any chance of learning, mediation or dialogue – in that order – was largely lost in the defensiveness and lack of understanding that both sides in the conflict (the Gypsy community and the school management) exhibited towards each other. It is important to note that, in Ryder's (2017) example, while the community was blamed and exhorted to change its ways and be more accommodating, the non-Gypsy school management and teachers were seen as simply doing their job. According to Gillborn (2005), UK education policy amounts to a tacit

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<sup>3</sup> Ryder refers to the UK Race Relations Act (2000) that stipulated the need to counter racism in education.

intentionality on the part of white power-holders and policymakers to enforce white supremacy by not explicitly tackling it. This kind of invisibility, passivity and non-engagement of statutory service and development workers and their lack of engagement is similarly detrimental to Roma inclusion in Central and Eastern Europe. It is one of the factors that, if addressed, can result in tangible changes (Howard & Vajda, 2017). A Roma activist quoted in Howard and Vajda's (2017) article describes the 'ghetto subcultures' (p. 37) that thrive the world over when oppressed groups are marginalised. The solution to ghettoisation of services could be

seeing, challenging and overcoming social norms that allow majority citizens and dutybearers to mistakenly blame the marginalised group for current difficulties' rather than addressing 'historically created and perpetuated structural inequalities'. (Howard and Vajda, 2017, p. 37)

Yet how are majority citizens (non-Roma) to achieve this ambitious transformation? How are they to overcome those entrenched social norms that stop them from noticing and effectively engaging with Romani communities? In practice, when politicians and the public demand change, the first people that are expected to change their ways are those very same

dutybearers [who] are often in a middle agent position where they have to notice inequality since it is their job to do something about it; yet they find themselves without the knowledge and the resources to do so effectively and without the necessary support from the wider society, and are often the object of criticism from both marginalised people and the majority population. (Howard & Vajda, 2017, p. 13)

As can be seen in the example in Ryder (2017), it is a notoriously difficult situation to be in, and one that is thankless, to say the least. When it comes to schools, the most visible sites of anti-Roma discrimination, society often expects change from educators and educational management, yet it does not give them any support to make that change. We find here a good example of what Hage (2002) describes as those white people who take more than their fair share of blame because they are in direct contact with non-white people. At the same time, all white people are responsible for addressing racism, and in this case antigypsyism. Either way, non-Roma find themselves in a bind.

The solution to these problems, I argue, is to reclaim an education that allows for a multiplicity of voices and perspectives so that, rather than a frustrating grind and strife and 'cage fighting' (Ryder,

2017, p. 111), we may arrive at ways of learning and understanding that open up our perspectives and horizons rather than closing them off and perpetuating divisions. I propose that a new concept of education that, borrowing from hermeneutics, allows us individually and collectively to view the world through an ever-expanding lens, could help in these cases. This kind of education would allow for profound learning about oppression to happen in schools, both for individuals and for groups of people engaged in an effort to understand each other, such as Roma and non-Roma.

### **Enter *Bildung***

So what are the elements of an educational approach that could help Roma and non-Roma alike to expand their minds to deal with antigypsyism and come closer to one another rather than continue to be segregated? To answer this question, in this chapter I will draw on my own field research with individual Roma and non-Roma and with groups of Roma and non-Roma activists and development professionals who have valuable experiences to share about breaking down barriers between the two groups.

Yet first of all I would like to circle back to the theoretical background afforded us by hermeneutics and look at what its study of understanding, knowledge and dialogue can bring to the debate and how it can lead us to conceptualise a formative process that I will call, in keeping with hermeneutics, *Bildung*. The hermeneutic *Bildung* has almost nothing in common with achievement as we think of it in the kind of formal school-based education that I talk about at the start of this chapter. *Bildung* has been described by Nicholas Davey (2011) as including a ‘process of self-formation’, ‘a contextualised development of inherent [...] talents and capacity’, ‘a thoughtful disposition towards experience’, and a certain ‘craftsman like “feeling and tact”’ (p. 46). According to Davey, *Bildung* is also a practical ‘capacity to act’ but without a definite end-goal (‘it has no goal outside of itself’, p. 44) and is concerned with the process of acquiring a certain maturity that allows the human as a being-in-motion to move freely but with poise and purpose through life. *Bildung* allows one to question and remain open to new experiences, while at the same time grounding

these in a thorough understanding of the past. Thus, *Bildung* is profoundly anti-essentialist (Davey, 2011, p. 43).

One of the key characteristics of *Bildung* is 'keeping oneself open to what is other – to other, more universal points of view' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 13). That openness and lack of instrumentality is missing from educational systems worldwide, although some child-centred education and critical pedagogy comes close to fostering it (Cohen, 2008). One can have acquired much information and knowledge through formal education and still be *ungebildet*, limited by one's own lack opening up to the understanding and viewpoints of others and of grasping the wider context of a thing. Warnke (2002) puts it like this: 'Neither moral nor technical instructions can be given to an untrained person; rather, they make sense only to someone who has the skill or ability to use them' (p. 83). To become *gebildet* (to acquire *Bildung*) is to be able to continuously strive to reach an understanding that is universal and hence less beholden to the particulars of a situation.

To this question, then, I turn in the rest of this chapter. I explore how non-Roma can acquire *Bildung* and how they can make use of this wide capacity for openness to relate to Roma in the face of an effective history that has prejudiced us so that we are closed to one another. How can non-Roma continue to notice and antigypsyism even when ignoring it would be more comfortable? How does one acquire what several of my interviewees, both Roma and non-Roma called 'the exercise' (Bianca, field interview, 2017; Linda, field interview, 2017) of relating to people other than ourselves? To answer this, I hypothesise that *gebildete* individuals at some time in their lives would have gone through a process of awarely engaging in *Bildung*. This could be described as a constant and conscious opening up rather than closing off of horizons; it includes acquiring information but learning to operate with that information creatively; it takes into account as much of the reality of others as possible; and crucially, it is a process that allows people to come towards each other in an authentic dialogue (in the sense mentioned by Gadamer (2013, p. 371)).

In particular, I wanted to find out whether the people I invited to participate in my enquiry could articulate their journey towards opening themselves up to the Other, whoever this Other may be, and how they felt about this process. I asked whether this process was something initiated by certain external events or an inner need to engage in dialogue. In yet another insight derived from hermeneutics, I wanted to explore whether that process of *Bildung* would lead people to an understanding that prejudice is something that can be freely acknowledged as a point from which we can grow and open up horizons, rather than something which is denied and defended as the ultimate truth, as in the example of the school management highlighted by Ryder (2017, p. 60).

I was curious also whether such a process could be observed, acknowledged and articulated by the participants in my research and whether from their individual experiences some kind of general learning could be drawn that might be useful for others seeking to embark on such a process.

#### **Individual *Bildung*: early protest, integrity and turning towards the Other**

I included myself in the interviews on the explicit understanding that I was a non-Romani person who had herself undergone a process similar to that which I was asking everyone else about, that my curiosity was as much scientific as human and that I wanted to include myself and my story in our emerging collective narrative of non-Romani identity. I talked to my participants about my personal life. In one interview (Violeta, interviewed by Andrew Ryder, 2015), I explained how I had known that I approached the Romani family of my son with a huge baggage of prejudice, by no means certain that I was doing the right thing by entering into a relationship with a Romani man. Yet I also knew and articulated to myself that not engaging was not an option and that engaging on a superficial level would be losing out on a chance to make profound transformations in my life and perhaps also in those of the Roma people and communities around me.

Many years and many errors later, I am very clear that none of my encounters with Romani people or Romani communities are merely professional. In fact, I was intrigued when I accompanied a group of my female Romani activist friends to the conference of an organisation we are all part of

and was asked by another conference participant why I was seeking to set up a special project focused on Roma. I found it telling that non-Roma the world over still think of Roma as a special project. I reflected privately after the conference that for those of us non-Roma who, for whatever reason, choose to engage closely with Roma, the concept of Roma projects is nonsensical, for the simple reason that I, like many others who are part of the Romani movement, count Roma not only as friends but also as family members, colleagues and fellow comrades – anything but a project. We learn that opening up to Roma means getting linked to the wider project of combating antigypsyism; the project thus becomes our own *Bildung*, our own transformation.

The people I ended up working with on the current research were almost all colleagues and close friends I made between 2014 and 2018. Collectively, because of the strengths of our relationships and the fact that we were connected with each other, we were a group worth studying from the point of view of critical whiteness since we stood apart from the segregated reality of most Romani and non-Romani people's experience. Over the course of many individual interviews, I came to understand that for each of the individuals I spoke to there was a defining moment, usually in their teenage years, when they took an individual decision to go against the status quo handed down to them by family or society. They instead decided to think critically about assumptions they were raised with, not only about Romani or non-Romani identities but also more widely about identity formation. In fact, for many this critical thinking first arose as a protest against the way their families thought about their own identities. From working with my participants, I was able to trace their journey from otherness to protest and then to a critique of the system of whiteness and further into building solidarity between Roma and non-Roma.

For example, several women I interviewed decided early on in their lives to question the sexism that they saw enacted in their families. Bella is a young Hungarian NGO worker and academic who identifies as Roma. She told me that from an early age she was incensed at the constant servitude that her father (a Roma) expected from her mother (a non-Roma). Meanwhile, Linda, a Hungarian non-Romani woman decided in her teens that she would consciously develop a feminist identity

that would protect her from being objectified by men. Feminism was in fact a constant thread of common identity that transpired in the interviews with women, and one set of beliefs that even in real life connected and still connects the people involved. The two women above in fact found each other and discovered common ground and became politically active together through a joint commitment to feminism, where otherwise they may have slipped past each other. They went through a similar process as that already highlighted by Fremlova (2017) of 'strategic sameness' (p. 238). Although from different backgrounds, these women perceived their feminist identity as 'othering' them and thus pushing them to engage with a wider viewpoint than that espoused by their respective families.

Other early identities that set my participants apart from the norm were also significant: for Andrew Ryder, as described in his book (Ryder, 2017, p. 5), understanding himself as a (non-identified and mistreated) neurodivergent youngster became important when he noticed the same traits in his son; yet from his teenage years, seeing himself as different set him on a trajectory of activism and solidarity with marginalised groups (Andrew, field interview, 2015).

For Lena, being a non-Roma foreigner growing up in a Central European country was doubly unfashionable not only because she was different but also because she was part of a group until recently seen as the political oppressor in her host country. She said '[O]bviously, there is a point in life when you start embracing otherness [...] but at that time you just want to be like everybody else' (Lena, field interview, 2015). Yet, she did not renounce that otherness, and when older, started to engage more closely with this identity, recognising that it was something which taught her to look critically at the world around her and her host country. Later in life, she used this to intentionally step out of her comfort zone, move to a different continent and understand that diversity is strength. Now back in Central Europe, she has another view from everyone else, and experiences it by turns as hampering her efforts at inclusion but also as a badge of honour. In this way, Lena has moved away from her roots, then came back to them with an expanded horizon of

understanding. *Bildung* is thus acquired by moving in and out of spaces, understandings and contexts; it leads to a constantly expanding hermeneutic circle.

For each of the people I interviewed, there came a particular point where the otherness they had experienced as young people, instead of solidifying into prejudice, morphed instead into an openness towards groups which are themselves oppressed in some way. That in itself is an interesting process worth examining a little more closely. It has much to do with the hermeneutics of expanding our horizons of understanding. Andrew Ryder describes this expansion as starting when in his teenage years he got close to groups excluded from UK mainstream culture, such as black people: 'I suppose a key point for me crossing the Rubicon was, there was a black girl, bit older than me, whom I met there and dated for a while. And that was very very unusual then, for mixed-race relationships. When we were out together, I got a lot of looks in town...' (Andrew, field interview, 2015).

So why do some people 'cross the Rubicon' and others do not? What allows them to turn an experience of being an outsider and an intuitive early attitude of rebellion into a consciously owned and long-term process of continuous openness and of engaging in learning and dialogue with people other than themselves – in general and in particular with either Roma or non-Roma – the Other? How does early recognition of prejudice morph into *Bildung* and where does the energy and determination come from that allows the people I worked with to end up as staunch supporters of groups that they do not belong to, in our case Roma?

While many of those I spoke to provided a wealth of insight, I was lucky to get as fully fledged a description of the process of *Bildung* in one sitting. My conversation with Linda, a non-Roma feminist colleague, happened on a train journey taking me and my interlocutor, from the north-east of Hungary back to the capital, Budapest. Over an hour and a half, she gave an exquisite illustration of this hard-to-describe process which is by turns internal and personal and by turns undergone in solidarity and collaboration with others. The interview came after an occasion when



the two of us spent a weekend with a group of Romani women activist friends living in Apor, a segregated settlement in the Hungarian countryside (to whose story I return in chapter 8). We were there to coach them to develop their activism, but we also consciously engaged in a mutual process of opening up about each other's lives and, significantly, about being present at a time when one of the women gave birth to her daughter.

It was in this context that I asked Linda to tell me the story of her own journey towards developing a non-Romani identity. She started by telling me about how her two main identities, that of Central European and female, developed over the course of her teenage years, were linked to a decision not to settle for the immutable way identity was viewed in her family. 'From early childhood I had a need to keep re-evaluating', she said. In concert with others I spoke to, her identities developed 'from absolute negation'. In other words, she knew inside 'that for me for some reason, this did not [work]' (Linda, field interview, 2017), *this* being the picture of identities set in stone that she inherited from her family.

First of all, she made a decision not to settle for the Hungarian nationalism that pervaded her country but instead to reach for a wider (more universal) identity of being Central European, which she then had the chance of exploring and understanding better through engagement with people in other Central European countries. Second, as already mentioned, she decided not to settle for female objectification by consciously taking constructing her identity as a woman (through choice of clothes, hairstyle, interactions with others) in a way that would mean she would be seen and valued for her thinking rather than her looks. This struggle for a different identity is a need that Linda developed by testing the horizons of her family. Sometimes she went along with their prejudices, only to discover that conforming to those limits landed her in situations that she did not like or want to be part of. At other times, she expanded her understanding of who she was by overstepping the conventions of her family and society, and risked being ostracised and severely criticised by her people. She credits this process of experimentation, alternately staying with the

status quo – which led her to feel uncomfortable in her own skin – or breaking out of it and seeking to understand who she personally was, with making her the activist she is today.

For Linda, an unusual educational situation afforded by an experimental high school that sought to introduce democratic principles into learning was helpful in allowing her to continue to question, open up and find others with whom she could share her quest for alternative meaning:

We started this democratic way of seeing things that I had not encountered before, it became commonplace. You were able to discuss things, you were able to say things openly.  
(Linda, field interview, 2017)

It is perhaps not a far-fetched assumption to say that many young people have similar aspirations to engage in their own independent process of *Bildung* – but that this process is often thwarted by rigid educational institutions that segregate and separate and punish young people for questioning and rebelling. As in Andrew Ryder's chapter (2017, p. 45) described above, when resistance against an oppressive and under-resourced system of education is seen as misbehaviour, when education is frontal and geared towards the learning of facts and when young people are asked to unquestioningly absorb the prejudices of their elders, then *Bildung*, that constant opening up of horizons, becomes that much harder. Often, formal education seeks to deny young people a chance of discovering their own truths about themselves and their colleagues and friends, and thus entrenches normativity and privilege. Conversely, when 'identity offers scope for resistance' to young people (Ryder, 2015, p. 2), *Bildung* can take its course.

#### **Queer(y)ing non-Romani identity<sup>4</sup>**

We have seen how an element of successfully opening up rather than closing down one's sense of identity seems to be a willingness to be unpopular. Linda's experience is a case in point. For a while, her family, whose limited horizon of understanding she kept questioning, hoped that she would get over this phase and quieten down. However, when they realised that she would remain

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase is borrowed from Fremlova (2019)

outspoken, they started a barrage of criticism that has continued throughout Linda's life. Thus, for Linda, the cost of opening up to others was to come into conflict with her family.

It is something that many of my participants (including myself) could identify with. My own journey of opening up to Romani communities was fraught with heartache and difficulties but it has led me to a personal commitment to living critically as a white non-Roma. Most of the difficulties I experienced on this journey arose from the lack of understanding I encountered from my non-Romani family once I chose a Romani partner.

No sooner had I announced that I had a boyfriend, my father said: 'I hope he is not a Roma!' When I answered that in fact he was – and how had he known to ask precisely this question? – my father added, 'Well, I want nothing to do with him now or ever'. And you know what, he was true to his word and until the day he died, he refused to ask one single question about the father of my child or acknowledge his existence. On one significant occasion, he even refused to enter the family home of my son's relatives, parking in front of it and waiting in his car until our visit was over. Yet I also avoided the subject and retreated into an unspoken distance from my father. (Violeta, interviewed by Andrew Ryder, 2015)

I will return to this story in chapter 6 to show how close relationships between Roma and non-Roma can change life trajectories. Yet for me and my father, the separation brought on by my decision to open up to others was real and permanent, and while it was partly mitigated by his relationship to his grandson, my decision made our family life very uncomfortable for the rest of my father's life.

This element of unpopularity is present in most, if not all of the interviews with non-Roma, as well as coming up anecdotally in many of my discussions with Romani human rights activists. One male Roma colleague, Kalman, often talks about how he read everything he could lay his hands on when he was young, whereas his brothers simply went with the flow and ended up in the family business, which mean they had no significant contact with non-Roma. Through his self-taught human rights activism, Kalman set himself apart from his family and ended up separated from them as an underpaid activist who stands up not only for Roma rights but also for women's emancipation, when 'I could have been wealthy if I only went along with their values' (Kalman, field interview, 2016).

In her interview, Bella described in great detail how, as the daughter of a Roma father and non-Roma mother, she was welcome in her non-Roma grandparents' house, but her father never was. For a long time, her grandfather had to meet Bella in secret, as her grandmother wanted nothing to do with the Roma side of the family.

Those of us who take the decision to keep open to others and seek new horizons have learned to live with this separation from family and (sometimes) former friends. This is precisely the process of queer(y)ing one's viewpoint that Fremlova (2017) describes: '[critical whiteness in Romani Studies] is very "queer" by nature of being counter/non/anti-normative in relation to whiteness as a social norm (white-normativity)' (p. 137). Through a process that questions, departs from received wisdom, deconstructs and reconstructs identities, those I spoke to ultimately arrived at a reclaimed version of Romani or non-Romani identities, all the while creating new communities of meaning and understanding. All of the people I interviewed developed a self-ascribed non-Romani or indeed Romani identity that was counter-/non-/anti-normative, going against the normative, normalised and mainstream identities they were handed down by their families. The vehicle for this was *Bildung*, that constant capacity to open up, see things from multiple viewpoints and incorporate the truth of others. Many of them traded privilege (material wealth, family support or comfort) for a capacity to stay open and engage with others. Overall they were a group who insisted on keeping their horizons open pursue their own learning path (sometimes at quite a high personal cost) rather than submitting to the educational system as it was presented to them. This cost in Linda's case transpired when her self-chosen field of sociology was dismissed by her parents as Linda 'going off again to save the dirty Gypsies and homeless' (Linda, field interview, 2017) and was met with derision and lack of respect throughout her life. This is a crucial point and I will return to it in chapter 6.

### **The exercise of identity**

While formal education had a role to play in my participants' process of *Bildung*, the details and trajectory of that education ultimately came to be directed by them individually and were continuously re-examined in light of new understandings. This, 'the exercise of intensive self-reflection' (Linda, field interview, 2017), was an important recurring element in many of my participants' stories and is profoundly hermeneutic in nature. It was a way of developing the finer aspects of their identities by constantly checking and re-checking what they knew and learned, and applying that self-reflection to new learning. Once acquired, this self-reflective capacity seemed to be something that transcended personal identities and showed the importance of self-reflection as a route to emancipation (Habermas, 1987, p. 194). For Linda, who works as a trainer, coach and counsellor, 'some kind of attitude change or some internal work' (Linda, field interview, 2017) is a prerequisite for requiring others to do this internal work on themselves. Whether she is working with women developing their own capacities or Romani communities seeking to learn new ways of working democratically together, she applies the same exercise she asks of others to her own situation. For Linda, working with others is much more about becoming open and available to them than it is about gathering information. As Linda puts it regarding her feminist identity, 'there were always new dimensions [of being a woman] that left room for interpretation and unavoidably, these related to me and required me to work on them' (Linda, field interview, 2017).

### **The essence of *Bildung***

The lived process of individual *Bildung* as described by my research participants is similar to its hermeneutic definition (see chapter 2). It includes a few elements that are described by most of those I interviewed: a personal and early decision to look for our own answers; a group of peers, parents or an educational establishment (often encountered in teenage years) that supported rather than suppressed this quest for individuality and asking questions; a continuous exercise of exploring one's own identities; the willingness to be unpopular (which may well be individually assumed, but again, could be encouraged or suppressed by educators); a chance to meet and engage

with people of different identities who were also engaged in a similar process of identity exploration; a sense of integrity and being true to oneself; and the continuous exercise of doing all of the above.

The exact nature of *Bildung* is difficult to grasp, but in Linda's words:

Well this internal work... I could describe it like this: that whatever the issue that socially or in any other way relates to another human being, I cannot be neutral to it, I cannot be neutral to it within myself, or rather I cannot afford not to deal with it in my own life. (Linda, field interview, 2017)

The idea of *Bildung* requiring work is significant. For this reason, I dedicate chapters 6 and 7 to examining the nature of the effort that is needed to apply this effort to relationships between Roma and non-Roma.

### **Building the movement against antigypsyism**

Yet *Bildung* is not always only individual. Personal *Bildung* by many can also lead to a constellation of collective *Bildung* which then becomes a movement within which there arise new complexities and insights. I will now return to the movement against antigypsyism that I described in chapter 1 to illustrate how *Bildung* made an important contribution to its unfolding and how that led to a wider collective understanding, an openness of sections of European society towards engaging with antigypsyism. As I argued, in the past decade I observed how a group of Romani and non-Romani activists became consciously engaged in an effort to question the limited assumptions intrinsic in the idea of Roma inclusion and Roma integration. As I will demonstrate below, their movement to conceptualise and start the discussion about antigypsyism has been one of the biggest discourse changes in the academic field of Romani Studies as well as in policymaking, and it has the potential to change how Roma are seen in Europe as a whole. While the work of these scholars and activists can be described as opening up individual horizons of understanding and individual processes of *Bildung*, theirs is a collective endeavour that amounts to more than its parts.

Through interviews and extended conversations, individuals such as Andrew, Bella, Lena, Kalman and Linda (some of whom were instrumental to expanding the notion of antigypsyism) described

to me how they made informed decisions throughout their lives transcend the horizons of understanding that they inherited from tradition, striking out in ways that often distanced them from their peers and families. In this process, individuals made their own choices about expanding their horizons (some, like Linda, describing this as an innate need to do so) and thereby often agreed to suffer a certain amount of personal hardship and isolation from those who do not make the same choice. In other cases, whole families made choices that set them apart from their communities. It is the case of Kalman, for example, whose wife and two daughters are all activists and consequently as a family, live a life full of hardships and strife rather than material comfort. In this way, *Bildung* has become a matter for a group of closely connected people.

Taking this argument further, the struggle to conceptualise and expand the understanding of antigypsyism shows how it is possible to bring along with oneself in a process of expanding horizons whole communities of people. For those people who fought for a new understanding of anti-Roma racism, such as the Alliance against Antigypsyism or clusters of non-Romani academics such as Tremlett, McGarry and Fremlova, who researched alternative ways of looking at Romani identities, the quest of thinking beyond what they had inherited became a powerful vehicle. In this process, not only did they co-create knowledge and social change but also, by articulating their understanding, they successfully expanded the horizons of the whole group with whom they worked. This expanded understanding, in turn, affected not just those immediately involved but rippled out across Roma and non-Roma communities. In this way, whole communities, in this case of Roma and non-Roma, can make use of their individual capacity for openness or become collectively *gebildet* and change the discourse for a whole field of knowledge.

This manifestation of *Bildung* in its collective aspect, is not necessarily open-ended. Indeed, those involved in describing and advocating the concept of antigypsyism formulated goals that they wanted to achieve as a group or a movement and measured their success or lack thereof by making reference to those goals. However, it is possible to see these goals as steps towards ever-greater openness, and increasingly open modes of communication, which of course are an integral part of

hermeneutic understanding. The modern understanding of antigypsyism described in chapter 1 has all the hallmarks of what Warnke (2003) calls ‘an understanding that derives [...] from our history and traditions but can nonetheless grasp alternatives’ (p. 111). It is steeped in a knowledge of tradition and history, yet at the same time challenges everyone to get ‘out of oneself as far as possible’ (Warnke, 2003, p. 110). Its proponents are asking the whole field of Romani Studies to embrace new understandings in the three senses suggested by Gadamer: of individual minds opening up and being made aware of new ways of seeing things; of people making the effort to revise their fore-meanings in order to find a new ‘unity of meaning’ and of starting processes of dialogue to arrive at a knowledge that is ‘different and more satisfying than what we already believe’ (Warnke, 2003, pp. 111-112).

The outward manifestations of some of this collective process of *Bildung* have been punctuated by a series of encounters but also by the creation of institutions based on the insight that Romani Studies is best served by incorporating the lens of critical theory, especially that which is based on understandings from postcolonial studies and intersectionality. It has been a process fraught with conflict and discomfort. A recently published article (Stewart, 2017) and the subsequent storm of Facebook messages from some of the prominent people involved in the debates around bringing a critical theory lens to Romani Studies lay bare the conflicts and challenges inherent in the power struggle that aims to bring this new meaning, methodology and direction to Romani Studies. In the article, Stewart, while granting historical importance to the movement of engaged Romani activist scholars who are aiming to reframe the debate about Romani communities in a critical way, ultimately dismisses their efforts as a way to position some Roma favourably in the struggle to acquire newly minted academic and professional positions. To make his point, Stewart (2017) talks about ‘autonomous academic research – research conducted to “find stuff out”, not to serve anyone’s political agenda’ (p. 133). Yet hidden in this sentence is precisely the quest for objectivity debunked by hermeneutics as a legacy of the natural sciences that lingers on in other disciplines. It contains a denial of prejudice on the part of some researchers (typically, white researchers who



have a higher education and who come from a Western European tradition of anthropological academia). On the other hand, Stewart (2017) considers ‘the questions posed by our more political and mobilised colleagues [...] not only empirically poorly grounded but also potentially damaging’ (p. 135). Once a hermeneutic lens is employed, however, it becomes obvious that all researchers and activists must by necessity be labouring under and be limited by their prejudices, including antigypsyism. Hermeneutics and critical whiteness teach that it is not tenable to say that some of us have these prejudices while others do not. I will return to this point in chapter 7 when discussing critical whiteness, where I pinpoint the incapacity to deal with white non-Roma privilege as a source of white fragility.

As Warnke (2007, p. 96) shows, the hermeneutic circle needs to take into account as much of history as it can encompass, and the more it can encompass the more accurate it is. As I have shown in chapter 2, hermeneutics operates with the concept of correctness, understood as that which is congruent with the widest possible framework that we can see of reality at any given moment. It is possible to check and recheck our viewpoint by widening our frame of reference and testing whether in that frame of reference what we know and believe still makes sense. If what we previously knew comes into contradiction with that wider frame of reference, new data from reinterpreting reality allows for changes in our horizon of understanding. Our understanding of reality thus depends on the reach of our perspective and how much and how widely we can understand and how much of reality we can perceive and incorporate into our view of the world in a way that still makes sense when all the knowledge available to us is taken into account.

According to this framework, once made, the argument for antigypsyism by necessity changes the perspective of any non-Romani scholar who works in Romani Studies. No longer can we look away and not engage with the constructs that antigypsyism has placed in our minds. No longer can we talk about neutrality and objectivity in the way that Stewart does, without risking ignoring some of the most important insights that have come to the field from Roma activists and academics who live with antigypsyism as a part of their lives.

Once we have seen something it cannot be unseen. Globally, a wealth of knowledge and understanding about critical whiteness is now available (DiAngelo, 2011; Hage, 2000; Land, 2015) that shapes our understanding and contributes to collective *Bildung* on this subject. Similarly, the wealth of scholarship and understanding that has informed feminist, queer and intersectional theory and has been incorporated into Romani Studies (Kóczé et al., 2018) cannot be undone. These advances in human understanding are far from being ‘a tragic cul-de-sac’, as Stewart (2017, p. 141) believes. Instead they are shaping up to be some of the defining thought processes of our times, and not applying them to Romani Studies again leads to only partial understandings of social and political phenomena.

This brings me full circle to the main theme of this research and the applications of *Bildung* to the problematic of antigypsyism. When not only individuals but also the community of academics, policymakers and development professionals who are concerned with it examine from every possible angle how antigypsyism affects us personally and as a society, this has the power to drive a discourse change that benefits everyone. This examination of antigypsyism’s roots not only structurally but also through our personal histories, far from getting people bogged down in endless navel-gazing, is essential and part of the solution to it. As we will see from the next two chapters, it is helpful for those who hold power by virtue of their identity (the non-Roma in this case) to spend some time processing the historical baggage that has conferred white privilege upon them.

In this chapter, I have looked at individual *Bildung* – that process which starts with an individual decision to strike out towards understanding and leads to a lifelong and ultimately personal formative process. This process is one that is concerned with opening up, creating awareness of and questioning preconceptions and prejudices rather than acquiring information. I have shown that *Bildung* is not about formal education but rather about a willingness to let ourselves be touched and transformed by the experiences of others; being able to use the exercise of self-reflection in all that we do; and being able and willing to put ourselves into situations where we approach the Other and take risks, not in order to ‘help’ but so that we can acquire a sense of integrity and be true to

ourselves. *Bildung* can and does unfold through personal undertaking but also in formal and informal spaces for education that allow discussion, disagreement and questioning of norms. It can also engage groups of people working and learning and opening up their perspectives collectively. As I will show in chapter 8, activism and organising can lead to the formation of a group of *gebildete* Roma and non-Roma who can engage with each other on terms that are beneficial for both groups. This can happen in universities, schools or workplaces or in our own homes. However, ‘once a consciousness is in operation it seems [that] it begins to have an active effect on understanding’ (Scott-Villiers, 2009, p. 40). As I already mentioned, *Bildung* is not instrumental and differs from self-reflection. Once engaged in, it is open-ended and brings meaning to all situation. It is something that we engage with personally and intimately, but also collectively, for the rest of our lives, in all situation.

As I will argue in the next chapter, gaining the capacity to use *Bildung* and applying that capacity to everyday situations where racism is present, transforms our quest for openness from an intellectual exercise into a flexible ability to meet the challenges of antigypsyism. Exercising our openness is the third element of preparation that can move us, Roma and non-Roma like, towards a productive fusion of horizons rather than isolating us from each other. It combines with an understanding of history and the capacity to remain open to others, to result in a robust and workable critique of whiteness.

## **Chapter 6 Life thinks and thought lives<sup>5</sup> – exercising critically white non-Romani identity**

In the previous two chapters I asked what can open up the space for non-Romani people to think about their personal and collective identities. I found that these conditions included an awareness of the historical genealogies of our identities (including non-Romani identities); as well as the development of a capacity for openness and critical engagement with one's own and other identities. I will now explain how I found that as non-Roma our journey towards openness and a hermeneutic consciousness leads us to engage with a third element that operationalises or makes manifest critical whiteness. This is the exercise, or the consciously assumed work, that we put into understanding and processing our non-Romani identities. This is the capacity to operate with the tools of our understanding.

Thus, the current chapter is concerned with the internal struggle to live out critical whiteness in day-to-day life. There are both theoretical and practical reasons why I feel it is important to understand that struggle. Theoretically, I am curious about how the hermeneutic principle that 'to understand is to participate immediately in life, without any mediation through concepts' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 215) plays out in the context of non-Romani people's understanding of antigypsyism. In other words, can non-Roma engage with and understand antigypsyism to a level where that understanding is immediate and personal? If so, according to hermeneutics, we become immediately part of a new effective history, a new discourse on antigypsyism. By turns countering antigypsyism in practice and taking part in wider efforts to do so, non-Roma can reclaim the role of the participant rather than the bystander in the effective history of the struggle against antigypsyism as described in previous chapters.

My practical motivation for looking at what this exercise involves is that over the years I had observed a small number of my non-Romani research participants engage in positive encounters

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<sup>5</sup> Gadamer (2013, p. 215)

with Romani colleagues, friends and movements by agreeing to take on the struggle against antigypsyism in their everyday lives. At the same time, I could see that the non-Roma themselves were transformed by these actions in the sense of becoming more open, more connected with Roma and each other but also more able to stand in solidarity with Roma and see themselves as part of a movement against antigypsyism. I called these non-Roma critically white and I wanted to find out what allowed them to have that impact. Sometimes the changes this attitude brought about were visible and immediate: as I will describe in chapters 7 and 9, the simple presence of a non-Romani individual who is fully engaged in fighting antigypsyism can encourage a Roma to speak up, open up and keep going with their own struggle against antigypsyism. At other times, the effect was subtler and more long term, where Hungarian Roma friends and colleagues would say that somebody was a 'jó fej' ['a good guy'] and I could see that they implicitly trusted that person to support them in their lives and with their activism. Over the years, I observed that there was a small but growing group of non-Roma that Roma seemed to rely on and allow into their lives in ways that seemed permanent and beneficial. In this chapter, I will argue that this is because they have succeeded in making critical whiteness a part of their everyday life to a degree that permeates their behaviour in most circumstances. From their experience, I try to draw conclusions that are more general and hopefully replicable by other non-Roma.

For example, Linda's general attitude of openness and her deep understanding of identity, although not specifically related to her non-Romaniness, allowed her to come towards Roma with a measure of confidence and trust that was then reciprocated. I could see how in her case, *Bildung* led to an openness that permeated her actions towards most groups of people different from herself. She seemed to have an understanding of history and its link to identities, she regularly engaged in the exercise of examining and reimagining her own identities and she had found ways of dealing with the continual re-evaluations involved in opening up and being more accountable. Linda talked about this as 'authenticity': that processing elements of her identity brought her to a more authentic way of working with others.

Yet I could also see that in Linda's actions a capacity of showing up and putting that preparation and understanding into practice when it mattered specifically in the context of antigypsyism. I wanted to find out what the difference is between being a somewhat passive supporter of tolerance, multiculturalism and human rights and someone who can take action to change themselves and to counter antigypsyism?

Land (2015) says that to be 'whitely is to embrace "habits and dispositions that reproduce racial hierarchy and white privilege"' (p. 20). Whiteness is characterised by passivity; it is not just about being *ungebildet* but also about being inactive. Conversely, becoming critically white requires action and work. For Land, this means taking steps such as questioning her motivation for working with Indigenous people; developing a critique of the impulse to help; embracing a broader agenda of change rather than just improving the lives of Indigenous communities; reconstructing the interests of white people to a point where they understand that the act of true solidarity is bound up completely with their own self-interest; and reclaiming their altered identity to a point of no return (Land, 2015, pp. 202-207).

### **Is critical whiteness even possible?**

Having spent, as my participant Kyle reports, 'over a decade of thinking about it a lot, and failing a lot' (field interview, 2018), in an effort to understand my role and that of other non-Roma in the constellation of antigypsyism, I wanted to know if and how non-Roma could transcend the limits of antigypsyist thinking and behaviour in practice to a degree such as that outlined by Land (2015) above. By the latter stages of my inquiry, I was asking virtually everyone I interviewed and engaged with a set of similar questions. It boiled down to the following: have you ever seen a non-Roma truly transform their attitude towards antigypsyism? What have you seen that has worked? Much of my fieldwork was dedicated to asking these questions in a series of interviews, but also in different forms and different forums, of different people and in different settings – conferences, meetings, informal discussions. In chapter 8 I describe how I set up action research processes to

test my preliminary understandings to move these forward in collaboration with groups of Roma and non-Roma colleagues and friends.

However, I wanted to triangulate my theory by finding out whether anyone else had discovered or observed a workable process that could bring transformation to non-Romani thinking. I was looking for at least one other (preferably more) persons who had independently discovered how we could go beyond tolerance towards Roma, who believed critical whiteness rather than whiteness (Land, 2015, p. 20) was even a possibility and who roughly agreed on the way to put this attitude into everyday practice. Such people were few and far between.

Generally, whenever I put my questions to most interlocutors, I received cautious answers along the lines of 'I don't know, I've tried this and that but nothing that has really worked'. In one memorable instance, when I asked two highly respected Romani youth activists speaking on a panel about antigypsyism at a conference, they both replied emphatically: 'No, it's not possible for a non-Roma to change their minds, we have not seen it happen', and then, half-joking, 'Sometimes people fall in love with a Roma girl. Other times, they have a religious revelation' (field observation, 2018). Usually, they said, people just manage to stop being openly obnoxious and killing or hurting Roma, but a fundamental change of mind? In short, no was their answer.

Three years prior to this, in 2015, I had put the same question to one of my key Romani participants, Bella. I asked her whether she had seen non-Roma who had changed their stereotypical views about Roma and, if so, to describe to me that process of change. At the time she replied that she was very sceptical about the possibility of this ever happening and that most non-Roma she knew became defensive when confronted with their role as oppressors of Roma. What is more, 'there are people that are immune to any influence or argument' (Bella, field interview, 2018). Even when it came to her own colleagues at university who were attending intercultural courses, there was very little evidence she could see of genuine transformation.

I attended these intercultural psychology and pedagogy [courses at university], we had this sensitivity training, cultural training and gender training... and I thought that this so-called

‘experiential training’, that this training based on real-life exercises is the most useful and the most transformative. But as I then discussed it with the people involved, I had a lot of negative experiences. Often, people are pushed into a role and they feel momentarily uncomfortable; they will reject it for that very reason and they are not willing to take on that role and feel that discomfort or empathy. (Bella, field interview, 2015)

Based on her own experiences, Bella believed that if non-Roma people could relate to the discomfort experienced on a daily basis by those targeted by antigypsyism, they would acquire a measure of empathy and be less willing to behave in discriminatory ways. However, she had to face the fact that people from privileged backgrounds were unwilling to experience any measure of discomfort in order to understand the position of oppressed groups (I will return to this phenomenon in chapter 7, when I discuss white fragility). Clearly, university-offered awareness-raising courses were not enough to change such entrenched attitudes, yet this kind of training was often the best on offer, she said.

In a second interview, two years later, Bella suggested that because of this lack of empathy and understanding, many of those who were meant to be helpful to Roma, especially non-Roma led funding institutions that supported Roma projects, instead ended up enacting antigypsyism. She complained that rather than being open to supporting her thinking about how to bring about changes in the lives of Roma, ‘they used me for their own strategic purposes’ (Bella, field interview, 2017). Not only was she sceptical about personal change but she could also see the links between the lack of personal understanding or racism and the perpetuation of structural oppression.

### **Fighting windmills**

In late 2018, I decided to re-interview Bella a third time. I wanted to see if the growth of the movement against antigypsyism described in chapter 1, that she had been involved in, had changed her opinion about the capacity of non-Roma to take on the struggle with whiteness. By this time, Bella’s thinking had become more hopeful regarding a number of the topics we discussed the first time, and/or she shared more of her insights with me. For example, she talked at length about the importance of history in developing Romani consciousness; and she described in detail the positive developments brought on by the changing discourse on antigypsyism, especially in the links she



could see between Romani activism at the European and grassroots or national levels. Towards the end of the interview, she offered a vision of a how dialogue between Roma and non-Roma could be set up in a workable way. Yet no matter how many times and how many ways I asked her over the years, Bella still couldn't see a significant change in how non-Roma related to Roma, either individually or as a group. Experiential learning came up again as a theme:

I have not become more of an optimist. Or rather my problem with experiential learning is that you can see tiny changes in certain individuals, but even if you work on it for a long time, how many people can you get to? And even for them, there are minute changes but [there is] no true change in outlook or identity. It all seems like fighting windmills. (Bella, field interview, 2018)

In fact, according to Bella, the only general change in non-Romani attitudes since our first interview was that many people had lost even the tiny veneer of anti-racism that had been conferred on society by political correctness. (By this she meant that people were now acting in openly rather than covertly racist ways, without bothering to use language they perceived as correct). In the context of my other observations and interviews on this subject, as well as her repeated and adamant replies, I had no choice but to conclude that in general, non-Roma had not made significant strides against antigypsyism.

We also discussed at length the way in which antigypsyism develops in non-Romani people's minds. After some reflection, Bella decided it was important to see it as an imaginary set of beliefs and prejudices 'into which you can put every last bit of garbage that you can think of' (Bella, field interview, 2018). This, of course is also how antigypsyism is defined by the Alliance against Antigypsyism (2017) and is close to Hage's (2000) concept of racism as a white fantasy created by white minds to preserve their diminishing power. In this context, Bella's choice of words ('fighting windmills') was particularly apt. For her, fighting antigypsyism was, on the one hand, a 'fight with windmills' in the sense of a real fight with an imaginary foe that nevertheless creates non-imaginary structures of power. On the other hand, she clearly saw it as a never-ending quixotic and foolish quest for an ideal that may never come to pass.

Still, from clues dropped into interviews and conversations with my Roma participants, but mostly from the experience of action research processes I had initiated and will describe in chapter 8, I came to the conclusion that it is possible for individual non-Roma to arrive at a way of living as critically white that is more alive and more robust than a superficial support for human rights. I could see that for non-Roma to move beyond an attitude of benevolent inclusion and tolerance to where they could connect emotionally with the effects of antigypsyism was a key step in moving towards a critically white identity.

Yet the idea of non-Roma moving against antigypsyism as a group is a lot less realistic, according to my participants. As shown in chapter 1, Roma have come to expect more than to be integrated into and included in the non-Roma world and have articulated that expectation through advocacy and in academic research. Historically, non-Roma have directed and controlled the limits of Roma integration or inclusion. Moreover, the discourse of inclusion has frequently been used for the enrichment of non-Roma or for the purposes of building the non-Romani nation state: 'any interaction between Roma and non-Roma is conducted in the context of the exalted subject who holds all the cards' (McGarry, 2017, p. 25). More often than not, the very words used by non-Roma to describe that limited interaction enraged many of the activists I knew:

I asked those highly educated gadjos – what do you mean by integration? We often talk about words, but we don't define what we mean by them. For example, me, I have gone back to school after raising my family and have not just a college diploma but am also highly trained in many other skills. Am I now to be considered integrated? But how about the Roma guy whose only ambition is to have a manual job, raise a family and make a living? Is he integrated? I don't think so, because no matter the level of your education and achievements, at the end of the day you are still just a Roma. (Andi, field interview, 2018)

Andi's point, echoed by a number of my other Roma participants, is that antigypsyism is experienced as strongly as ever, regardless of the level of education and achievements of Roma and regardless of how politely they are treated by those non-Roma who see themselves as tolerant and open-minded. The attitude of most, even liberally minded, white non-Romani people, is imbued with the discourse of tolerance, and their commitment to ending antigypsyism often stops at the point where their own social status or economic interests are threatened.

In the words of Bianca, a young Roma activist from Romania:

There is so much shit... especially from the people who pretend to know something. I prefer the simple ignorance of someone who says 'tell me something about you', rather than these... it's like men explaining what it's like to be a woman. Makes me want to die. The most unpleasant experience is when you are not listened to. People pretend to listen but in fact can't wait to get their own points across. (Bianca, field interview, 2018)

The Roma I quote above are separated by geography, level of education and outlook. Andi is a community organiser living in rural Hungary; Bianca is a highly educated activist and academic. Yet they are both united in their conclusion that Roma integration or inclusion policies as currently practised are a sham, that antigypsyism is as strong as ever in all areas of society, and that many non-Roma who call themselves enlightened and tolerant are in fact simply perpetrating a more hidden version of racism. DiAngelo (2011), calls this phenomenon an 'insulated environment of racial protection [that] builds white expectations for racial comfort' (p. 54). The task for whites, she says, is to constantly go beyond that comfort zone and become personally accountable for racism.

In the remainder of chapter 6, I tell the individual story of those of my research participants who have engaged in this internal growth towards living with critical whiteness and describe the steps that such a process might encompass. In chapter 7, which follows, mainly through the voices of Romani participants, I will engage with an important aspect and obstacle to becoming critically white, described as white fragility. I will take a look at its corrosive effects, as well as point to ways in which these can be mitigated.

### **Whiteness as a personally and emotionally alienating experience**

Listening to a number of my non-Romani participants, I noticed that sometimes they cared about racism and/or antigypsyism to a degree that they privately experienced 'whiteness, [as] alienating to its subjects' (Leonardo, 2002, p. 45), yet could not or would not communicate this to others. They felt the discomfort of being white, but they seldom talked about it.

Here's how one of my non-Roma research participants, Kyle, described his anguish following a tense and difficult discussion with a non-white friend about racism. In this discussion, Kyle

understood that he had hurt the feelings of his friend by not acknowledging her experiences of discrimination:

There's this distinct feeling kind of like, like I don't want to feel like I'm a bad person, you know, but then I also feel like I want to understand and feeling frustrated about that kind of intersection where I feel like my inquiry [about racism] is already traumatising... but also frustrated with myself for not being able to ask the right question. (Kyle, field interview, 2018)

He went on to describe vividly

the sense of tension and confusion, like there was not a clear way forward, if that makes sense, and that felt really disempowering, hurtful, kind of like I wanted to wash my hands of [racism], you know, even though I knew that I can't. I know that I can't. (Kyle, field interview, 2018)

Kyle's account laid bare a turmoil of emotions seldom experienced or reported by white people. He was filled with anxiety and insecurity and a realisation that something had happened that was outside of his realm of experience. At the time (several years before our interview), this was a struggle that he did not recognise and had no way of processing but that he knew he would have to grapple with if he was to live up to his commitment to addressing racism. Feeling this sense of discomfort is raw and confusing and seems to have no easy resolution. At the same time, allowing it to happen is what makes non-Roma able to open up to the possibility that they may have made the wrong assumptions about Roma and to see antigypsyism. It is precisely this sense of discomfort that is the mirror image of the alienation felt by Roma when targeted by antigypsyism. Whenever it is possible for non-Roma to connect with this sense of loss and confusion that is the price of privilege, they signal to Roma that they take their role in antigypsyism seriously enough for it to matter. It is the key to living critically as white people and of connecting not just to Roma but also to other non-Roma who can show that racism matters to them to a similar degree.

As a Roma, Bianca put this sense of recognition particularly poignantly when she reflected on the experiences of her closest friends: 'In fact all my friends are the same. I have few girlfriends but once they decided to stand by my side, their lives changed for real. And it's not something

comfortable, even to this day they suffer the consequences in terms of the social harm they experience' (Bianca, field interview, 2018).

While she did not elaborate on the nature of that social harm, Bianca intimated that once they became her close friends, the lives of the women in question became more uncomfortable, laced with tension and loss of status, and were permanently transformed. Bianca said that she did not value glib expressions of anti-racism, especially when non-Roma pretend that they have it all figured out. On the contrary, Bianca found that, given the traumatic experiences of antigypsyism she has to live with, only those non-Roma who can connect with the reality of the oppression are credible partners in the fight against antigypsyism. This echoed Bella's unfulfilled wish to see people face the discomfort of antigypsyism, which would be a sign that they are willing and able to transcend the comfort of a tolerant multiculturalism and instead let antigypsyism matter to them personally. The question is what would induce non-Roma to put up with that kind of discomfort? The answer in many cases is close, committed relationships with Roma, where non-Roma get to see first-hand the effects of antigypsyism on their loved ones.

### **Marrying into antigypsyism**

Right at the start of our 2018 interview, Bella laughingly asked whether I wanted her to present me with the solution to resolving antigypsyism. I replied that yes, I was looking for some pointers, and she replied: 'I think the solution would be if all white people would marry or live together with a non-white person' (Bella, field interview, 2018). However, she immediately hotly contested her pronouncement and decided that this solution had not brought much progress, notably in her own mixed-race family. I reminded her that in her 2015 interview she had spontaneously brought up 'a close friendship with a famous politician whose policies you could influence' (Bella, field interview, 2015) as one of her more radical ideas for change. By the end of the 2018 interview, she had half-jokingly settled on the thought that the solution to antigypsyism was building communes of Roma and non-Roma people, where there would be opportunities for dialogue for decades or even

generations ('children would be born into this setting'). She added 'but only if people would be willing to understand each other's viewpoint' (Bella, field interview, 2018).

In separate interviews with other Romani research participants, I had heard them voice similar thoughts. Alina firmly believed in the power of close relationships to fundamentally change hearts and minds. In one of our interviews, I asked her to explain the nature of the relationship between her Roma and non-Roma characters Magda and Daniel featured in *The Great Shame* (Şerban, 2017). I interpreted the relationship as an example of impossibility, where two people on either side of the racial divide try their best yet fail to connect over the long term and end up separated by the inability of the non-Roma, Daniel, to fully take on the struggle against antigypsyism. To my surprise, Alina was much more hopeful about the growth her characters experienced as the play unfolded. She conceded that Magda ended up misunderstood and abandoned by Daniel, whereas by contrast her relationships with the other Roma characters blossomed with a sense of untold future possibilities. Still,

Magda changes and Daniel changes too. He is the same guy who wants the same girl as before, but she has changed. [So he says]: 'OK, you want to bring me up to your level and perhaps you are right, but I cannot do it. We live in two very different worlds.' So they as a couple don't manage to get where they hoped, they cannot take this thing on. [...] Yet in terms of the couple, to me, what is important is their mutual respect that remains intact. Daniel exhibits some toxic masculinity but lo and behold – at the end he says: 'I have never before been in a relationship with a woman I admire. I respect and admire you very much, Magda.' Hang on a minute, you know?! I don't want to say that his man has not evolved. It's as much as he can give at this point vis-a-vis this issue. You know the point here is that if we are to take this thing seriously, this kind of *wokeness* [English in the original] becomes *wokeness* in all circumstances. Once you have opened the door you can no longer say: 'I am an anti-racist here but later at a beer with my friends it's OK [to go back to racism]'. Everything changes around you. (Alina, field interview, 2018)

Here, Alina used the term 'wokeness' in its positive form. In many circumstances throughout my interviews with her, she was more than ready to be scathing about non-Roma who only pretended to be anti-racists. However, at any time when her friends or people she met or even the characters in her play were willing and able to enter into personal relationships with Roma that set up long-term commitments, she would hotly defend them.

To different degrees, and with different levels of hope and confidence, both Bella and Alina, both Romani women, were saying the same thing: relationships matter. Long-term relationships matter; they change people. Perhaps it is the only thing that changes people, mused Bella repeatedly. It is one of the things that definitely changes people permanently, asserted Alina.

As I already mentioned, I had personally experienced how relationships between Roma and non-Roma based on deep and abiding trust brought about transformations. My own life had been irrevocably transformed and placed on a trajectory where fighting antigypsyism had become a priority through my relationship with the Romani family of my son's father; and later through the experience of raising a child whose paternal family are Roma. For many years since, I have talked about and analysed this experience, seeking to understand how it fits into the wider process of *Bildung* that I am engaged in. I came to the conclusion that my reaching across racial lines touched and transformed the relationships I had with my own non-Romani family. For example, my decision to break the taboos around cross-racial relationships in small Transylvanian settlements highlighted a tacit pattern of secrecy and denial that runs in my family. For years, in our village we had shared living space with Roma people, yet we never discussed these arrangements. In the same way in which my father and I were not able to discuss and get to an agreement over many issues – my choice of profession, for example – we also faltered when we were faced with the racial discomfort of breaking with centuries of segregation from our Romani neighbours. Stepping outside of these patterns in my adulthood, I found that my family and I were unable to deal with this new-found openness when it involved Roma. By contrast, in spite of the obvious cultural differences, my father had enthusiastically welcomed my previous marriage to an Englishman. In a perfect example of white fragility (discussed in more detail in the next chapter), both my father and I chose to deal with racial discomfort by ignoring it. It was not until I acquired a second Romani family, that of my friend and fellow activist Andi, that my non-Romani family and I became able to live with and notice antigypsyism. I will return to that story in chapter 8.

It is clear from all this that being critically white entails an engagement with the negativity of antigypsyism while staying closely connected to those who experience it. Keeping away emotionally in the manner of the multicultural 'good white nationalist' (Hage, 2000, p. 78) is no longer an option.

For many non-Roma, once they have personal relationships with Roma they cannot afford to be emotional disengagement from antigypsyism, as this would keep them away from Romani family, partners or friends. At the same time, allowing themselves to become emotionally engaged with the topic of antigypsyism not only creates turmoil but also brings new and lasting connections. This comes across in the following quote from an interview with Alina:

[Take] X, this famous Romanian non-Roma actor. Out of all the international actors who we worked with – I argued with them because they were going around saying 'what does it matter if you are Roma or not?' – I liked X best of all. He adopted a Romani little girl. All his other children are blond, and he has this little girl who is Roma, visibly Roma. He said to me: 'Now I go around, and I hear it [the antigypsyism] everywhere, and I keep saying: remember my little girl is also a Gypsy.' And I kept saying to him: 'Yeah, welcome to my world. Every day!' (Alina, field interview, 2018)

The world of the critically white non-Roma is thus permanently altered. The one who has 'crossed the Rubicon', in the words of Andrew Ryder (field interview, 2015), effectively crosses over into a new territory where he or she gets to feel at least some of the weight of antigypsyism, but also the deep connections that come from standing up to that injustice.

Beyond the pleasantries of multiculturalism and tolerance – where we can enjoy and possibly appropriate Romani culture – there is a literal battlefield, and it looks just as bleak as described by Bella in her metaphor of 'fighting with windmills'. Yet there is solidarity to be had beyond the feelings of frustration. However, facing discomfort and building personal relationships are not enough to combat antigypsyism. As already mentioned in previous chapters, being critically white also means being aware of antigypsyism as a form of structural oppression.



**‘Killing joy’, aka facing the systemic nature of antigypsyism**

As already mentioned, for DiAngelo denying the existence of white identity is closely connected to a belief in individualism and objectivity whereby white people allow themselves the luxury of thinking that they have choices in how they approach a racialised reality. ‘Individualism allowed white people to exempt themselves from the forces of socialisation’ (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 3) or, in the hermeneutic sense, allowed them to ignore the weight of effective history. However, as we have already seen, not engaging with effective history does not mean that history does not engage with us. Rather, mentally divorcing ourselves from its operation, far from engendering objectivity, simply means that our perspective remains limited and *ungebildet* and that we are less able to have the desired influence on the world around us.

Instead, as Kyle frequently reminded me in the course of our collaborations, ‘you have to understand whiteness as convergence [of privilege]. I mean it’s a whole system that’s supported by multiple institutions, you know. State institutions, non-state institutions, media, school systems, I mean, the economy, all of these things are ultimately about privileging whites’ (Kyle, field interview, 2018).

For him, critical whiteness includes addressing antigypsyism

in terms of the institutions that create it. I think the problem is we don’t actually understand that well how to [do this], how is it that institutions continue to prop up racism, because there’s been this neglect. Everybody is so focused on what Roma people want to do in the kitchen as opposed to how they continue to experience racism, that I think that you know, it’s even hard to kind of get to the point [of talking about structural antigypsyism]. That said, I think that there are people that know, and they’re [Roma] activists. (Kyle, field interview, 2018)

Confronting antigypsyism includes seeing our individual experiences of anxiety and upset in the context of wider structures. It means understanding how seemingly impersonal systems such as bureaucracies or town planning engender racism and human suffering and, instead of focusing on personal battles only, taking on structural oppression. During our work together, Kyle often reminded me that participatory research must engage with and include learning about those

structures. For him, there was a sense of personal pain in noticing how racism created segregation in education and housing. As I will show in chapter 8, this constant effort to notice the details and the bigger picture of antigypsyism often felt like putting our noses in puddles of misery. Yet many times, when we non-Roma were able to notice structural racism and our personal connection to it, our Roma friends breathed a sigh of relief. They revelled in those moments where we finally saw that everything was suffused with structural antigypsyism.

Referring to the non-Roma who were her main support, Bianca observed that ‘their friendship and their exercise of killing joy and really putting the finger on what’s happening helped me also’ (Bianca, field interview, 2017). Since the whole of my 2017 interview with her was concerned with ways in which Bianca is able to make her voice (literally and politically) heard in a racist society, those two phrases (killing joy vs helped me) juxtaposed were particularly revealing. For Bianca, entering into a friendship with a Roma means that non-Roma take it upon themselves to create discomfort in cross-racial settings. It is then a question of teasing out what the ‘exercise’ on the part of non-Roma is that allows them to deal with racial discomfort and support a Romani person to make their voice heard. Because of the importance of this aspect of being critically white, I will explore it in more detail in chapter 7. Before that, however, I will talk about one more step in becoming critically white that I believe is of crucial importance.

### **Crossing the divisions between non-Roma – safe spaces for white people**

As illustrated by my own family’s story above, and by the accounts of my participants in chapter 5, antigypsyism leads not only to separation of Roma from non-Roma but also to the alienation of non-Roma from each other. This dividedness and separation stop us from reaching for unity and solidarity with other white people, most often within our own families, and reinforces the ‘good and bad binary’ (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 69) between whites. By contrast, non-Roma are often found romanticising the togetherness of Roma and their sense of community – which is simply another manifestation of antigypsyism. Often the disconnect felt by white people from each other is another

manifestation of effective history. Hage argues that, historically, white people have been divided from each other and have put each other down in the interests of preserving the white fantasy of superiority. In this way, one group (usually those who are comfortable with their class privileges) becomes the acceptable face of whiteness, while the other (usually the people who feel they are losing in any given economic context) is vilified as the outright racists who are stuck in old ways of thinking (2000, pp. 179-205). Neither group has done the work on their traditions to understand where their grievances against each other come from, and neither group is ready and open enough to come towards each other from a place of understanding and kindness. Working through the historical conflict and separation between good and bad whites, remarks Hage, could overcome these entrenched positions and contribute to resolving racism.

One of the biggest Eureka moments of my fieldwork came when a conversation with one of my participants convinced me that relationships between white non-Roma can be just as transformative as those between Roma and non-Roma. In late 2018, I finally got around to interviewing Kyle. He and I had worked side by side for months and had a shared commitment to a particular Roma-led grassroots activist organisation. From many informal discussions and joint activism, we knew that we were united in our understanding of non-Roma solidarity. I had come to respect his deep commitment to addressing structural antigypsyism through his own work and he knew about my own research on critical whiteness that we had discussed over the years. By the time of the interview, we had both witnessed how each other's efforts were more than welcomed by the Roma activists we both knew.

In spite of this, I was more than surprised when, in response to my question about what we would need to do as non-Roma to process our white identities, Kyle proceeded to describe almost word for word my own vision of safe spaces for non-Roma. It was something I had, to my knowledge, never clearly articulated in our conversations, nor written down anywhere, although by then I had over a decade of experience of working in safe spaces with other white people committed to addressing racism. It was clear that Kyle had come to these conclusions through his own efforts

and reflections. I became acutely aware in of living through a special moment of hermeneutic dialogue. We were suddenly engaged in one of those creative ‘cases of perfect speech [...] namely when we really say what we want to say’ (Gadamer, 2013, p. 569). We had suddenly gone beyond ‘preformed articulations of meaning’ (Gadamer, 2013, p. 570) and were thinking afresh about new possibilities. We were talking about processing our whiteness in order to end racism, sharing ‘the same kind of general outlook that you’re not here to feel better about being a white person’ (Kyle, field interview, 2018).

As I hope I have shown throughout this inquiry, I have a deep and abiding respect for the efforts of non-Roma to overcome antigypsyism. Still, we are more than likely to fail many times on this journey, and when we fail, we typically remain isolated from each other, while at the same time gravitating closer to our Roma friends. This makes it difficult for Roma, who are then called upon to comfort us in our racial discomfort. In my conversations with Kyle we started to discuss how to avoid putting the burden of our struggles back onto the Roma who are already targeted by antigypsyism.

In Kyle’s words, to change this dynamic it is important to go beyond declarations of intent and slogans in our relationships with other white people. Often white people have

just kind of taken on the mantras of the anti-racist movement and positioned themselves as this kind of incredibly woke, politically active person, without actually doing the work of understanding how it is that their whiteness is perpetuated through this process. And it comes out when you actually start to talk to the people of colour [who] do experience a lot of racism, specifically from people who are supposed to be doing the work of undermining it. And I would say that’s partially because we haven’t done the work ourselves, internally, of understanding our own whiteness, and of actually giving space to those real actual feelings of discomfort. (Kyle, field interview, 2018)

Through many discussions, Kyle and I decided that what we needed to allow non-Roma to have those discussions were non-Roma-only spaces

where you can talk and just be honest and open, [where you can] say the things that are bothering you, hurting you, that are kind of keeping you up at night, that you’re holding all that tension. It’s an emotional thing, I guess. (Kyle, field interview, 2018)

Having arrived at this explicit understanding with another non-Roma, I felt a surge of hope. Here was someone I knew and respected and was working with closely who seemed to have a positive idea of how to live as critically white. It was not that his idea was novel to me or that I had not tried it out in the past – quite the opposite. I had worked hard at building formal and informal relationships with non-Roma that would allow us to work together to dismantle antigypsyism. I had spent much time inviting non-Roma to join me in the effort to counter antigypsyism. I had even tried to set up several such groups of non-Roma, which had mostly been successful. What gave me hope was doing this together with another non-Roma whose understanding of antigypsyism and intentions of fighting it were so close to my own. I will return to the details of our collaboration and the effects it had in chapter 8.

As I have shown in this chapter, becoming critically white requires a sustained effort, and is helped along by a number of capabilities or sensibilities that allow non-Roma to engage authentically with Roma. These are: giving up the sense of racial comfort conferred by white privilege; building long-term close relationships with Roma people; gaining an understanding of antigypsyism as a systemic form of racism; being able and willing to take action against it; and finally, creating spaces for non-Roma to process the discomfort that comes with taking this stand against antigypsyism. Thus, the journey towards critical whiteness is by no means harmonious and easy. In an effort to dispel that illusion, in the next chapter I focus on the fourth element of preparation towards critical whiteness. White fragility is at once one of the biggest obstacles and to understanding and dialogue between Roma and non-Roma, as well as something that has to be addressed if we are to be able to reclaim non-Romaniness to a point where it becomes transformed and transformational. White fragility came up insistently and stridently in most of many of my conversations with Roma participants and I observed it often in my action research projects, derailing the process of dialogue right at the point where Roma felt they could articulate their truth. It seemed to best illustrate where and how dialogue and communication breaks down and was also one of the most difficult obstacles that Roma experienced in their efforts to explain antigypsyism to non-Roma.

## **Chapter 7 It's not about you! The provocation of white fragility for Romani Studies**

The previous chapters have all had the goal of preparing the ground for or explaining the conditions necessary for hermeneutic dialogue. These are a deep and personal engagement with effective history resulting in a sense of own's on racialised identity; an attitude of openness arising from a process of continuous and intentional re-examination of our prejudices; and a decision to do the work of ridding ourselves of racial prejudice. In chapter 8 I will attempt to explain what all the preparation is for and how it makes a difference in specific and significant encounters between Roma and non-Roma. However, before I do this I return to that the moment of provocation that I described in chapter 2 as the make-or-break element of hermeneutic dialogue; and to the fourth element in the process of preparation for critical whiteness – dealing with white fragility.

'White fragility' defined (DiAngelo, 2011) as the usual way white people deal with any challenge to their racial superiority and entitlement. Although it manifests as lacking the stamina to deal with racial discomfort, 'white fragility is not weakness per se' (DiAngelo, 2018, p. v). Instead, it covers up white power and advantage like a protective layer. It can masquerade as vulnerability and distress, or conversely as 'various forms of dominance and intimidation' (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 134). According to DiAngelo, white fragility is the key obstacle to dismantling racism, arising boulder-like right at the point where progress could be made in dialogue between people targeted by racism and their racial oppressors.

Since it is a universal accompanier of white racism, white fragility also characterises non-Romani people and communities in our encounters with Roma. White fragility tends to appear, with damaging effects on understanding and further dialogue, in the moment of provocation when Roma feel empowered to issue a challenge, whether overt or subtle, to non-Roma regarding antigypsyism. However, such is the segregation between the two communities that non-Roma can feel they have lived their whole lives without ever encountering a challenge to their sensibilities. On the one hand, even becoming aware of white fragility in the context of antigypsyism, to get to

the point where it becomes visible by being challenged, requires non-Roma to work for years on their relationships with Roma. On the other hand, of course, most of us who grew up non-Roma have had plenty of challenges handed to them on a plate, as it were. Almost all non-Roma I have asked over the years can remember instances when they felt as if Roma were encroaching on their way of life. In reality, as chapter 4 has shown, it has been non-Roma who have disrupted Romani lives, benefited from their (often unpaid) work and generally made it impossible for Roma to live as equal members of society.

### **White fragility in the context of Romani Studies**

White fragility is part of a robust discussion around white privilege that has become part of the general racial discourse, at least in North America if not in Western Europe, but is still largely missing even from academic discussions on antigypsyism. In the words of one of my Roma participants, Charlie:

When I heard you explain what you're doing in Budapest, I thought, yeah, this makes a lot of sense and in some ways I thought it was ultra-progressive for anywhere in Europe but normal for North America [...] we need a few more people to be aware of their privilege. (Charlie, field interview, 2018)

This was echoed by several of my Romani but also non-Romani participants who had either grown up in North America (like Charlie) or had spent extended periods of time studying there, including Werner. The latter was of the opinion that while North American identity politics had influenced Romani and non-Romani activists and academics working on Romani Studies, their understanding of topics such as white privilege was still shallow or superficial (field interview, 2019).

Charlie's comment above encapsulates a demand for white people to transcend their fragility and 'build the stamina to sustain conscious and explicit engagement with race' (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 66) as one of the most important elements to bridge the divide between white and black people. One of the first and immediate consequences of white fragility is to shut down conversations about race and/or to 'assume the blame when no one is putting the blame on them to begin with' (Charlie,

field interview, 2018). This can induce in people targeted by racism, such as Roma, a dread and unwillingness to put themselves and their thinking on the line.

Sometimes Romani people (activists in particular), knowing from previous experience that the chances of successful communication are minimal, simply do not bother to spell out how they are hurt by racism or to seek to change non-Romani attitudes. The justified expectation of Romani people that, as soon as they speak out, they will encounter white fragility and backlash often stops Roma/non-Roma dialogue before it can even start. When non-Roma misinterpret an invitation to discuss antigypsyism as an attack on themselves, they immediately close off that all-so-important openness without which dialogue cannot happen. In one of our early interviews, I asked Bella 'What makes it possible for non-Roma to stand firm and be willing to feel uncomfortable in order to learn something about antigypsyism?' Her response was:

It's very easy to bring up that kind of discomfort, the problem is that often it has negative consequences. When I first started to believe in experiential learning, my then boyfriend said that I was evil because I deliberately wanted to provoke bad feelings in these people. And I said, yes, I do want people to feel bad, but not because I'm an evil person. Rather I want people to become aware of how others feel [in situations of oppression] so that later they don't inflict these bad feelings on their fellow humans. (Bella, field interview, 2015)

To be seen as an evil person by someone who is close to you is a very big price to pay for speaking out about discrimination. The word fragility is perhaps too mild to describe the veritable onslaught of animosity that most Romani people experience as soon as they dare to question established power relations. I remembered this exchange with Bella years later when explicitly discussing white fragility with Charlie, who said:

If Roma bring up that they're being discriminated against, everyone is double turning and saying, 'no you're the ones that are reverse discriminating against us, you need to be put into your place'. (Charlie, field interview, 2018)

This 'putting of Roma in their place' is particularly prevalent in relationships between Roma and non-Roma. Both of these quotes corroborate DiAngelo's (2011, p. 55) observation that many times, facilitators of multicultural training programmes or courses refrain from addressing racism directly for fear of the host of negative emotions that they know will be provoked in the white participants.



However, outright hostility is just one reaction that Roma experience when questioning antigypsyism. Another kind of backlash, while seemingly less damaging, also has the effect of stopping conversations about racism. As Bella explained in her interview, many times she was met with complete silence and lack of understanding by her university colleagues when she tried to open up conversations about antigypsyism. It seems that even a simple discussion on the subject of racism is likely to elicit one of these two responses: outright hostility or defensiveness; vociferous denial or a guilty silence, the latter often coming from precisely those white people who consider themselves anti-racists.

It is the same frustration encountered by Werner. He too decides not to talk about what he believes to be correct – that white privilege has a big role to play in the propagation of antigypsyism. Instead, the burden is on him to find a solution that does not bring up the guilt or defensiveness of non-Roma. I choose to quote him at length here since his description of white fragility is particularly illuminating:

I use [the term] white privilege sometimes but I use it less and less in the Romani context in Europe. I'm not sure it's useful for non-Romani people in Europe, and I'll tell you why. Because when you use 'white privilege' you create a divide in the audience. So the audience will divide into two. The ones who fully accept the term will feel terribly guilty, but then, because they feel terribly guilty, they will not do anything in the Roma field, or take any leadership or initiative, because they feel guilty, it's not their role, they're privileged, whatever, and they start this neurosis, they do nothing. Which for me I think is not the most convenient. And then in the other part you have the white people who will reject it and say, 'you don't know anything, you don't know about my life, you don't know about my privilege, how can you make this generalisation?' So, people who are actually prejudiced against Romani people or who have no interest in listening to how privileged they are, will not change and become confrontational when you talk about white privilege. And your potential allies, they will become useless. (Werner, field interview, 2019)

Werner very accurately describes here the process of losing white (or in Werner's case non-Roma) dialogue partners before the conversation even begins. The tension between on the one hand the importance of having conversations about race; and on the other hand not being able to have these conversations because the non-Roma audience literally or emotionally leave the room, become defensive and even aggressive, is a constant source of frustration for Roma who are keen to instigate such conversations.

One of the most complete definitions of white fragility came from Charlie during an academic conference in which we were both participants. He put it like this:

Ok, white fragility: it's when you try to explain a situation of discrimination or how something might be offensive to someone from a minority group, whether it's LGBTIQ or Roma or both, or intersectional, and you try to explain that there's an injustice that's happening, that there is a prejudice, simply a prejudice that everyone has, and it's neutral. But that prejudice acts upon someone in a negative way that, it restricts their ability to be themselves, restricts their ability to communicate, restricts the world's perception of them. [...] And if the white, the fragile white person is confronted with such a situation, and someone is trying to explain the situation to them and they immediately have a kind of self-defence mechanism, a defensive reaction of the kind, a gut reaction that immediately causes them to be defensive because they think it's personal, it's against them specifically, that they need to excuse themselves or, or, or someone is demanding them to apologise for someone else's actions... that's the fragility. (Charlie, field interview, 2018)

Here, Charlie brings up another dimension of white fragility: non-Roma taking personally something that is universal. Hermeneutically speaking, lack of *Bildung* is taking its toll on non-Roma who are unable to place the notion of antigypsyism in its historical and structural context and instead, as we have seen in the previous chapter, take it personally. Not being able to see the bigger picture of antigypsyism means that non-Roma are at a disadvantage. They literally feel scared of being confronted with their prejudice and thus resort to unthinking behaviour to try to mask their lack of knowledge and understanding. This inability to transcend white fragility in its two forms – passive and withdrawn ('good white nationalists' – Hage, 2000, p. 78) or aggressive and retaliatory ('evil white nationalists' – Hage, 2000, p. 27) – makes non-Roma and other white people appear at best wooden and unreal and, at worst, turns them into perpetrators of racism. These acquired patterns of white fragility in fact alienate not only people targeted by racism but also white people from each other and contribute to the general isolation, ineffectiveness and stuckness of white people, including non-Roma.

This is how Kyle puts into words the vague unease experienced by many who find themselves in the presence of the typical non-Romani human rights activist:

I have a kind of gripe about the white activist that sort of drives me nuts, like you know, white activist putting themselves in the middle of things, always just repeating what they're supposed to say. It's like they've internalised a whole series of, of structures and ideas, and

they've put it together and they know exactly what word needs to go where, and they just repeat this over and over again, but you get no sense. (Kyle, field interview, 2018)

As Kyle so vividly expresses, non-Roma also yearn for real conversations about racism and whiteness rather than formulas repeated by rote. We also recoil when our fellow white people are either aggressive once the subject of antigypsyism arises or, conversely, are too scared or too guilty to look at their feelings and thoughts around it. White fragility hampers everyone, Roma and non-Roma, from having discussions about our historically created prejudices about each other. It stops us from questioning antigypsyism and from organising to end it.

Hermeneutics teaches us that it is possible to transcend the boundaries of this kind of learned behaviour but that it takes the kind of work I have outlined in the previous chapters. The task is to go beyond pre-learned, conventional ideologies to where we succeed in 'making these pre-formed phrases into living, fluid speech' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 569). The prize is that elusive total understanding, where we say precisely what we mean and the Other hears exactly what we meant to say. Therein lies the authenticity of human communication and the hermeneutic dialogue.

One additional clarification: white fragility is not synonymous with white vulnerability. In fact, in this context, in many ways they are the antithesis of each other. Fragility is to do with white people crumbling in the moment of provocation under the weight of their prejudices, while vulnerability is to do with the white person showing themselves fully, with all their prejudices freely assumed and acknowledged. From a hermeneutic viewpoint, showing emotions, not knowing or openly admitting ignorance or confusion are not in and of themselves barriers to dialogue. These are all part of owning up to our prejudices and working to resolve them. Covering up our feelings, ignorance or prejudices, however, can become an insurmountable barrier. The difference is often subtle and ineffable and often does not become apparent until tested in the encounter itself. Again, hermeneutics has no set methods or to-do lists to offer. It is the state of mind that matters. Our ability to bring our preparation work, our exercise of identity and our capacity to be open and emotionally available to our relationships with others can tip the scales of dialogue.

### **White fragility in the moment of encounter**

My research shows that it is often in those moments when non-Roma are able or conversely not able to shed their white fragility that Roma decide to speak out or stay quiet about antigypsyism. In the split second when a Roma makes up their mind whether to take on the battle against discrimination and continue the conversation, it matters whether their non-Roma interlocutor displays a version of white fragility or, conversely, opens up and is able to be robust enough to allow the dialogue to unfold. The thoughts that arise in the minds of Roma at these crucial moments are along the lines of 'is it worth the effort to do this, are they the type of person that is worth the effort for this or... or am I tired, I don't feel like dealing with this, and it's not my job to fight every single battle' (Charlie, field interview, 2018).

This internal dialogue that goes on for Roma is an important process of decision-making. Because it has happened repeatedly and activists especially (who are usually the most willing to engage in discussions about antigypsyism) have become tired of explaining themselves, the window of opportunity can come and go in a fleeting moment. Unless they have prepared themselves consciously and are ready to meet the moment of provocation, that chance can completely escape the attention of the non-Roma. If the non-Roma who are party to the conversation are preoccupied with thoughts and attitudes arising from white fragility and if they don't have the 'exercise' (Bianca, field interview, 2017) of engaging with Roma continuously and consciously, they can easily miss this opportunity for dialogue. A Roma addressing a non-Roma on the subject of antigypsyism is a momentous decision on the part of the former because of the history of segregation separating us – and no encounter is too big or too small, as I will try to show in the rest of this chapter. It can either lead to engagement and an opening up of new horizons of understanding for both parties or become yet another dead end and entrenched racial segregation.

Gadamer (2013) refers to 'this interior conversation with ourselves, which is always simultaneously the anticipation of conversation with others and the introduction of others into the conversation with ourselves' (p. 569). We all constantly take unspoken and often unaware decisions about

whether it is worth engaging in or possible to engage in conversations and whether we are able or willing to open up to dialogue or to understanding the viewpoint of another. Sometimes we judge that the odds are so stacked against the possibility of communication that we would rather stay separate. Yet we are all always looking for that 'perfect speech' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 570) in which we are able to express that which we really want to say. And any and each moment is ripe with the occasion to transform our inner dialogue into a live encounter with the Other.

The additional difficulty that often arises between Roma and non-Roma is that 'in language we are trained in conventions and social norms behind which there are always economic and hegemonic interests' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 573). In other words, as Gadamer puts it in response to Habermas, there is no perfect speech; there are no opportunities for understanding that are devoid or outside of relationships of power. Instead, we are surrounded by dynamics of hegemony that allow some people to dominate the conversation while cushioning themselves against the discomfort of dislodging their long-held opinions and considering that others may have an equally valid point of view. It is precisely this that DiAngelo (2011, pp. 59-63) refers to when speaking of white comfort, white-dominated contexts, racial arrogance and individualism that is born of separation and lack of communication and leads to a situation where whites 'consistently choose and enjoy segregation' (p. 62) and systematically devalue the intelligence and knowledge of people who 'have thought complexly about race' (p. 61). In du Bois' (1920) words, 'this seeming Terrible is the soul of white culture' (p. 502): white people are not able to understand the loss they suffer by ignoring and sidelining the perspectives of black people in the interests of keeping economic and political privileges.

How is it possible to tip the scales of the internal dialogue? What makes it possible for an encounter, when Roma choose to speak their truth, to become a constructive, transformative experience for both Roma and non-Roma? And what happens when that experience is a missed opportunity? To answer these questions, I will give a few examples of encounters between Roma and non-Roma that I have witnessed during my fieldwork or that my participants have recounted. They highlight the difference between being ignored or rejected or, conversely, known and understood, as experienced

by Roma on a regular basis. All of the case studies below are descriptions of occasions when Roma took the risk of speaking up about antigypsyism. It is, however, important to remember that there are many more instances when non-Roma white fragility arises even before the discussion about antigypsyism starts. These times are incredibly difficult to capture because they mostly go unspoken: they are the occasions when Roma do not even feel able to say anything because they feel that they will not be heard. In chapter 8 I will return to the conditions I tried to put in place to tease out some of the communication usually hidden under the weight of racism.

### ***1. Direct confrontation and breakdown in relationship***

One of my Romanian Roma participants, Janos, described to me how he challenged an organisation he worked with regarding its structural antigypsyism. In one of the strategic meetings of this highly prestigious institute working on behalf of Roma, he asked why there were no Roma in positions of leadership. He wanted to know why, ‘even though they had the money, they refused to do capacity building programmes for Roma organisations, to help them grow and allow them the [political] space for advocacy’, while they [the bigger organisations], could have moved more towards policy analysis’ (Janos, field interview, 2015). To be sure, Janos’ request was a bold one – it asked no less than for some non-Roma to step aside and/or move into another area of expertise altogether to enable Roma to take over some of their work. He was trying to make them aware that through its actions, the pro-Roma organisation was advertising the opposite of Romani empowerment. The response of the decision-makers to his questions, according to Janos, shocked him to his core:

The fabulously shocking response of the institute’s director, a very smart woman, to this challenge, was: ‘Well, I don’t do this job because I love the Roma or because I like the Roma; I do this as part of my commitment to human rights’. Right, so for her we were a *human rights*, yes? And I said: ‘Wonderful, excellent, *commitment [to] human rights*, yes?’ Well then what exactly gives you the right to go and speak in the name of Roma, right? and to *shape the fucking public agenda on their behalf*? Well, at that moment the break [rift, failure, separation] happened. (Janos, field interview 2015)

Such rifts, separations, breaks or failures (the original Romanian word ‘*ruptura*’ carries all these meanings) are all too frequent in relationships between Roma professionals and pro-Roma organisations. As I already mentioned, Kóczé and Trehan (2009, pp. 60-61) describe other similar

cases, and I have witnessed many more throughout my professional life. The culprit is almost always white fragility: non-Roma who feel threatened in their privileged positions quickly become defensive in response to bold yet legitimate questions from a Roma questioning those privileges.

There are several elements in this encounter that lay bare the lack of preparation of the non-Roma director. I will seek to describe these using insights from my previous chapters. First, she shows a total lack of understanding that antigypsyism is a specific form of racism that affects Roma, and that therefore a commitment to human rights in general cannot even be conflated with a commitment to Roma rights, let alone with a commitment to ending antigypsyism. Second, an admission that she does not like or even love Roma means she does not have those all-important personal relationships that she can fall back on when things get difficult. She is at sea, segregated and isolated in her whiteness, and even if she wanted to, she would have no Roma to turn to if she wanted to learn more about how to represent them. Third, it highlights the much-discussed element of non-Roma speaking on behalf of Roma, when in fact well-qualified Roma would be ready and willing to step up and do it themselves. Incidentally, following our interview, in a very short while, my participant became a prominent figure in European Romani circles, respected and valued not just in his home country but internationally. So at the time when this conversation happened, it is likely that he was more than ready to take on a position of responsibility in the organisation he challenged but was stopped by antigypsyism and soon left his job there.

## ***2. Direct confrontation and backlash***

Unfortunately, all too often it is the experience of Romani people that, when exposing racist behaviour, they either become the target of backlash or are blamed for the situation. Conversely, all the attention goes to the non-Roma who was challenged, leaving the Roma stranded both practically (e.g. out of a job) and emotionally and struggling to overcome the repercussions of daring to issue a provocation, mostly in isolation. In the previous situation, the Roma and non-Roma involved parted ways less than amicably, but to my knowledge, Janos did not suffer any direct

repercussions for daring to speak out. Even though he chose to leave the organisation and the non-Roma-led organisation lost his expertise as a result, he was not directly reprimanded beyond the obvious momentary backlash. In the next example, the non-Roma went further by directly ostracising and punishing a Roma who dared to challenge their approach.

When racism happened [and was exposed by Bianca], it literally lit up white people's fears, even though I was the one that was putting everything on the line, [it was about me] my life story. I was the one [who was wronged. But] – because I wasn't crying as she [the non-Roma], everyone [...] started to back up her reputation very fast and everybody knew how much she is crying, it was completely not funny but so abnormal. I asked 'Why are you crying woman? You were being racist!' but everybody was backing her up. (Bianca, field interview, 2017)

Perhaps this is the most telling scenario of all. The situation involved two women: Bianca, a Roma, and a non-Romani colleague. Bianca chose to point out one small way in which her colleague had acted in an antigypsyist way, whereupon the non-Roma became distressed and started crying, feeling herself attacked by her Romani colleague. Not only does the relationship between Roma and non-Roma break down in this example, but in an interesting twist on racism, the resources available in the situation gravitated back to the non-Roma, who felt victimised and literally leeches away all the available attention. Bianca was not only abandoned by her colleagues but also suffered damaging consequences that affected her life in real, tangible ways as a result of non-Roma casting themselves as victims of such encounters. DiAngelo (2018) refers to this subtle form of white fragility as 'white women's tears' and describes it as 'white people's laments over how hard racism is on us' (p. 131). She shows how damaging it can be for people targeted by racism to be faced with (sometimes literal) tears shed by white women in cross-racial settings. The automatic implication when non-Roma show distress upon being challenged by Roma is that they are the party that has been wronged. In reality, scratch the surface and it becomes apparent that structural antigypsyism is at play. While non-Roma may be feeling distressed, it is not Roma who are the cause and perpetrators of this distress. Non-Roma are simply feeling (perhaps for the first time) the racial discomfort that comes with their centuries-old role and white dominance. Roma are simply



highlighting this dynamic and acting as witnesses by simply pointing out the discrimination they have suffered throughout history.

In the example above, Bianca's reputation was damaged and her career suffered as a result of everyone rushing to take the side of the non-Romani woman. Bianca took a long time to recover and even had to move countries to do so. Here the effect of white fragility is compounded not only by blaming the victim but also by withholding resources from her in an effort to shore up the self-esteem of the non-Roma. In Bianca's case, white fragility had a major effect on her life, but she used her strengths to recover and continue her personal and professional path. Yet in other instances, particularly when it affects Roma who are not highly educated and have little recourse to resources outside of their own families, white fragility can have more sinister consequences.

Take the case of a Slovak Hungarian-speaking Romani activist I know and have worked with in a recent project. Igor Hudak lives in one of the most marginalised Romani communities of Slovakia. His plight shot to notoriety when he and several other inhabitants of the community complained of being brutally beaten by police as a result of one of many raids that are well-known methods of keeping Romani communities under control in Slovakia. In conversations with me, Igor recounted his story, which has also been published in the Slovak press (The Slovak Spectator, 2017): following the raid in 2013, Igor and several other Roma living in the same community lodged a complaint alleging police brutality. Their case was taken up by the ERRC and Amnesty International, and after being dismissed as unfounded by the Slovak authorities, it is making its way through legal channels to the European Court of Human Rights. Meanwhile, however, as 'the [Slovak] investigation found no mistakes in the police's actions, consequently four Roma now face charges of perjury' (The Slovak Spectator, 2017). Suddenly, from plaintiffs, Igor and his colleagues had been turned into victims of the legal system. Perjury is a serious charge, Igor told me, and it could result in him going to jail. The case is being heard in the Slovak courts as I write this thesis, and the outcome is far from decided. This stark example of white fragility goes beyond personal relationships or even individuals. It is a case of an antigypsyist system fighting back with all its might against any

challenge to its supremacy. The odds are clearly stacked against the Romani activists in this encounter, and they are the ones who stand to lose the most. Yet antigypsyism dictates that they should be penalised for daring to speak up.

Sadly, this kind of situation is quite widespread and expresses the core of contemporary antigypsyism. The inability of non-Roma to confront the fact that they are the ones inflicting hurt is a key element in non-Roma not only lashing out and physically hurting or killing Roma throughout the world but also, more often than not, standing by and letting oppression continue unchallenged in their name.

### ***3. Direct confrontation and momentarily reaching a new horizon of understanding***

Sometimes, however, non-Roma understand that they are privileged to bear witness when Roma communicate their raw emotions about racism. At times, non-Roma are even wise enough to receive that emotion in a spirit of understanding and apologise for their part in it but not disappear into self-pity. In the example below, Bianca issued a challenge to a non-Roma and experienced the reaction of the non-Roma as a positive outcome:

I jumped from my seat like a panther, and it was like a circle, and I was in the circle now, in the middle, and I was looking at everyone like a tired animal, I just said to that woman 'how dare you, how dare you tell me this, do you know who I am, do you know my experiences of life? How can you just put some labels on me, because you've worked with three Roma in your life.' [...] I was making such a hard point because I was so hurt [by what she had said], I was completely like an animal, just putting my fist towards those barriers, because I was so tired, I was like 'can you not see that this is hurting? Just stop talking about this and just listen. This is what I was talking about, listen to the other's perspective and shut the fuck up. It's not about you, can you understand, yes?' and this is what, with women, they do understand more, I sound a bit sexist, but I do believe with men it's even more difficult, to tell them 'it's not about you'. This concept of it's not about you is even harder to grasp. (Bianca, field interview, 2017)

The person who had made an insensitive comment about Bianca on that occasion happened to show a high degree of integrity, said sorry and asked to learn more about what she had done to offend Bianca. According to Bianca, the way she asked her subsequent questions was with genuine humility, and when Bianca explained what she had found oppressive 'she was receiving that with a kind energy and we were afterwards at dinner talking and saying "hey, nice to meet you", and it was

a nice, a nice connection' (Bianca, field interview, 2017). In those moments, transformation can happen – the 'horizon of understanding' can unexpectedly widen for both Roma and non-Roma. It may be only momentary, or it may lead to future deeper understandings. Such moments make a big difference and allow Roma to keep speaking out and demanding to be heard.

#### ***4. Choosing humour to defuse the situation***

Sometimes Roma have enough slack to raise instances of racism in a humorous and relatively unthreatening way. Some of my Roma participants see humour as a way forward in fighting structural antigypsyism and addressing white racism. For example, Bella, who frequently said in our interviews and discussions that 'there was nothing we could do about non-Roma', once laid out a whole strategy that she had worked out to address racism through humour:

I have a real big dream with the stand-up comedy, and I think it would be possible to make it somehow. In the US and in India, and in South Africa or the UK, there are people of colour, stand-up comedians, wow! They really make you, they really make white people... they make white people feel uncomfortable about what they think and that's something I really like. And I want Roma stand-up comedians to do the same. [...] the main idea is to make fun of racists and sexists in a way that they... I don't know how I would reach them, but there is this thing when you read an article and in the beginning you are smiling and then you think, oh! but it's about me, shit! (Bella, field interview, 2017)

Although Bella admitted that she had not had enough energy and resources to make it a reality, the possibility, the vision, of using humour was there. I have often seen humour used to good effect by Bella herself or other Roma in our work together. While it does not provide an answer to or resolve antigypsyism, it does have the advantage of making non-Roma think and stop in their tracks. In particular, in the context of close relationships, it can bring some unexpected benefits.

My friend and colleague Kalman is a deep thinker and an extraordinarily powerful Romani grassroots activist. His physical appearance – he is a dark-skinned, large Romani man – is often apt to raise non-Roma fears, to the point where he is always followed around in shops by security guards and non-Roma women snatch their purses away if he sits down at the table next to them in cafes. Kalman often uses humour to deal with these situations, which for him are part of everyday life to a degree that he has well-worked-out strategies to gently educate unsuspecting non-Roma. He has

frequently said to me, 'Violeta is having a racist day' when I failed to notice something important about antigypsyism. At other times, as a method of direct action, Kalman and wife will go to a shop together. They split up for a while, confusing the security guard who no longer knows whom to follow. Late they both approach the security guard at the same time, asking for directions in a friendly way. Apparently, this is really useful in challenging the prejudices of shop employees who have been told to follow all Roma and cannot decide who should be their primary target.

On one of our work trips, Kalman, another Roma friend, Robi, and I were buying burgers in a restaurant. The person serving us was very respectful, kind and helpful. When she wanted to know who was paying the bill, Kalman, obviously having decided that she deserved to know more about Roma and non-Roma friendships said: 'Violeta is paying because she is a racist and has much to make up for!' We all laughed and then settled down to a nice meal, with a renewed sense of solidarity.

### ***5. Well-prepared dialogue leads to new horizons***

As we have seen, the starting point for Roma whenever they consider engaging in a conversation about antigypsyism is already loaded with past disappointments. Yet sometimes they make the decision to do so, consciously taking the risk that it may not go well for them. I was very curious about what the element was that allowed Roma to overcome that obstacle and still decide to engage. And if so, what the conditions were that would allow the engagement to lead to new understandings. In late 2018, at a conference on Romani Studies, I had the chance to find out through a seemingly coincidental discussion that nevertheless had been preceded by a long period of preparation. I will describe the preparation that went into the encounter in more detail in chapter 8, as it involves a carefully designed process of dialogue between non-Roma who were committed to questioning antigypsyism.

In this chapter, I will describe one seemingly fleeting encounter that was born out of that preparation. I was at an academic conference with my Romani colleague Charlie. We did not know

each other well but we had both worked hard to establish a relationship of trust and respect. One evening after a successful panel on the theme of critical whiteness, we both found ourselves on the margins of the conference, in one of those less formal spaces that Chambers (2012) advises to allow for because ‘you cannot fit exploring, experiencing and learning to tight, preset timetables’ (p. xiv). From past experience, I knew that it pays to be extra vigilant in these informal conversations when people let down their guard and are willing to be more flexible and open than in the formal spaces of professionalism that characterise most work meetings.

At this after-conference party, I chanced upon a heated exchange between Charlie and two other non-Roma colleagues. The two non-Roma, Brian and Stephen, were close friends with each other and I knew them well from other conferences. Brian had previously been party to a rather acrimonious Facebook exchange involving him and a number of Romani activists, including Charlie, on the topic of white fragility. In the Facebook exchange, Brian had retreated, declaring himself hurt by the accusations levelled against him of being a non-Roma who enjoyed white privilege. In a way, the current conversation had been waiting to happen for several months and could have gone either way – the group could have made headway and left with important new learning, or the would-be dialogue partners could have separated again, feeling deeply misunderstood and defensive. At the point when I joined their conversation, Charlie was trying to make the point (which he had also communicated in the Facebook discussion) that antigypsyism is a systemic, structural oppression. He was upset that some non-Roma academics were not willing to admit that identity matters when it comes to debates, whether academic or professional, between Roma and non-Roma, and were proposing that these were based on objective scientific neutrality. In our conversation, Charlie found he was continually frustrated by the white fragility that was stopping Brian from hearing the points Romani activists had been trying to make about structural antigypsyism. Instead, Brian was taking the blame upon himself and personally feeling attacked. As a result, Charlie felt that his wider points were ignored and instead the conversation became focused on non-Roma individual guilt rather than on the manifestations of structural

antigypsyism. The next day, in an interview, Charlie described the internal dialogue he had been having at the moment that I joined the conversation:

At a certain point I was thinking like no, this is rhetoric, if you're not willing to really listen to me I don't think I want to continue this conversation and I was getting ready to give up actually. Cos I didn't have, I didn't have that one phrase or the key vocabulary, it was just, it was too hard for me to remember... I was ready to shut down and not bother explaining any further. (Charlie, field interview, 2018)

Here was a perfect illustration of the thought process that Romani people conduct silently when they are trying to decide whether to talk to non-Roma, laid bare, explained and illuminated. In spite of being a highly articulate and confident individual, when faced with white fragility, Charlie had found himself trapped and ready to give up because he was not able to find the one phrase or right example that would explain his thinking.

Because of the previous Facebook discussions Charlie and others had had with each other about the importance of structural antigypsyism, as soon as I joined the conversation, I knew the arguments that each side was trying to make. I could also see from the body language of all those present that they were at an impasse. It was at this point that Charlie turned to me and said something like: 'Here's Violeta, she can explain this better than me'. I did as instructed and gave my opinion of the systemic nature of antigypsyism, saying several times that I believed both Brian and Stephen were OK, that I trusted and liked them and that we were actually on the same side. I ventured that antigypsyism as a structural phenomenon would be easier to undo if we acknowledged our respective positions in its constellation and that I did not believe we were personally to blame for it. This seemed to bring the conversation to a good end and allowed Charlie to make his points more clearly. Subsequently, we all had several other fruitful conversations. It felt that we had collectively managed to defuse and move beyond an acrimonious and divisive situation that had started online and that we had long sought to bring into the realm of personal dialogue in order to have a chance to resolve it.

There are a few important points to make here about why it was possible for me to intervene as I did and why I think my intervention worked. First, we had a basis for dialogue and cooperation

within the group of non-Roma. Everyone knew that we were striving to learn and to develop our thinking together. There was a measure of trust and respect between the non-Roma: we had known each other for a long time as colleagues and in some instances as friends. Hermeneutically speaking, we were prepared through *Bildung* to listen to others' viewpoints.

Second, Charlie and I had established a lot of trust and respect before coming to the conference. Over the years, I had learned much from Charlie's work with Romani networks and movements and had great respect for his achievements; and through our joint work during the conference, we had strengthened our relationship and knew that we were both engaged in challenging whiteness.

Third, using that basis of trust, we all stayed present and engaged in the discussion at hand, in spite of difficulties with previous conversations and in spite of our feelings of hurt and/or discouragement. We all made the decision in the moment that it was worth fighting to be understood. Charlie went against his frustration and despondency. Brian went against white fragility by staying put and listening to Charlie. Stephen did not intervene much but stayed supportive and present both with his friend Brian, and with the dialogical situation. And I felt able to speak out on a topic that I believed in because of the respect of my interlocutors.

These are the moments that we strive for, when 'from the multiplicity of experiences, there arises something like a consciousness of the universal which endures through the changing aspects of the life experience' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 569). Yet Gadamer (2013) also cautions that it is a struggle and a stretch to turn convictions and opinions that are imbued with past prejudice into authentic dialogue (p. 570). Yet that struggle, as in my example above, is worth it, since it propels us beyond the repetition of schematic myths and unchallenged beliefs into a more accurate truth about each other.

It is interesting to contrast the examples above – some lead to rifts and further suffering while others can bring healing of old acrimony. Using a visual image, such moments of encounter can result in a chasm looming larger, perhaps becoming insurmountable, as in examples 1 and 2, versus

that same chasm being overcome or at least reduced in the rest of the cases. The difference seems to reside in very small reactions on behalf of the non-Roma at the moment of provocation. A courageous word, a smile and a moment of kindness go a long way. Yet while these momentary reactions are small, their effective histories loom large. In some cases, apologies for past instances of historical racism are in order even if the non-Roma involved do not understand everything they are apologising for – and this can bring healing. Conversely, defensiveness and guilt can be seen as momentary yet at the same time they are structural. Oftentimes, because of the silence or ignorance of non-Roma when confronted with their role in structural antigypsyism, their conflicts with Roma can remain unresolved and fester. The ability to engage or disengage, to allow or disallow provocation, or to graciously accept responsibility or disappear in a cloud of guilt are informed by extensive preparation and the exercise of critical whiteness. Thus, dialogue becomes possible when some preparation has gone into dealing with white fragility. I will discuss this preparation and the forms of dialogue it makes possible in the next chapter, but not before taking one additional and important detour.

**Where do white people's tears go? Can non-Roma survive being notified of antigypsyism?**

I hope that it is clear by now that one of the biggest barriers to Roma/non-Roma dialogue are the unresolved feelings of non-Roma. I have described above the guilt, defensiveness, animosity, stupidity and bewilderment that non-Roma feel when, perhaps for the first time in their lives, they encounter racial stress. On the one hand, non-Roma, just as white people in general, need an opportunity to usefully deal with this turmoil. On the other hand, if these feelings are expressed in cross-racial settings, they can easily destroy communication with Roma. While not the responsibility of Romani people, the feelings of non-Roma can easily rebound onto them if not processed in a workable way.

For DiAngelo, the term 'white tears' has almost exclusively negative connotations (2018, pp. 129-138). As mentioned before, in her experience, white tears and in particular white women's tears are



highly problematic as they imply white people feeling wronged and assuming the victim role. Just as in the case of Bianca described above, white (in this case non-Roma) women's tears can result in Roma being reprimanded, ostracised or even harmed. I have myself observed such instances many times in my work, and I have encountered great difficulties in protecting Roma colleagues from the ensuing backlash. The problem, says DiAngelo (2018), is that especially tears 'shed by white women in cross-racial settings' (p. 131) have historically resulted in the torture and murder of people targeted by racism or, at the very least, in an impulse by white society to protect the white person presumably wronged rather than look at the racism in the situation. It is important not to ignore the throwiness involved in this history. It has landed us in a contemporary situation where negative feelings expressed by non-Roma can trigger a backlash directed towards Roma. Typically, as in Bianca's case above, when Romani people challenge antigypsyism, non-Roma defensiveness, guilt or even well-meaning contrition are apt to draw all the attention and derail the situation. The group rushes to comfort the person (often a woman) whose emotions are showing so openly, and the non-white people are often 'left alone to watch her receive comfort' (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 133).

Yet dismissing tears, and especially women's tears, is also problematic for several reasons. First, it feeds into the gender-biased notion that women are weaker or less able to handle situations. White women's tears may indeed trigger men's need to comfort them, but this too is part of a paradigm of oppression. It pays to untangle the overall structures of patriarchy that underpin this dynamic. DiAngelo (2018) contends that men show white fragility differently, through 'varying forms of dominance and intimidation' (p. 134). However, she does not go further to explain that the more hidden version of male white fragility has done a lot more damage to black people than women's crying. Second, as scholars working on research in education and parenting have shown (Cohen, 2008, pp. 223-225), crying and releasing emotions is a human way of processing information and restores people to more flexible and cooperative ways of relating to each other. In fact, when discussing how to understand and overcome white fragility, DiAngelo (2018) recommends taking 'the time to process your feelings' (p. 148). She readily admits to taking that time herself before

returning to the situation where she enacted white racism and putting it right (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 145).

My proposal, already described in chapter 6, is to process the feelings of white (non-Romani) people away from cross-racial settings in all-white (or all-non-Roma) protected spaces. In this way, non-Roma are not required to deal with the feelings of non-Roma, but at the same time, they know that those feelings will be dealt with and that their interlocutors will return to the problematic encounter having learned more about antigypsyism and be willing to make amends.

As shown above, it is helpful to Roma if their perceptions that racism is present are validated and if at the point of crisis, the non-Roma is able to apologise sincerely and/or 'park' their own suffering to be dealt with later. Removing the added burden of non-Romas' negative feelings from the encounter can literally create space for Romani people to show how they have been wronged. Obviously, for this to happen well, non-Roma need the exercise of being able to handle the feelings of Romani people about antigypsyism and the exercise of giving the space to Roma while at the same time not disappearing altogether from the situation. But,

because it's so new, it's very hard, [...] and I'm saying this even about situations that are friendly, when you are surrounded by non-Roma who have good intentions and it's still hard to stand up and say, 'actually no, from my perspective it's this'. But because I don't have this exercise and they don't have this exercise, it's challenging.' (Bianca, field interview, 2017)

In other words, it would be difficult but not impossible to turn scenarios 1 and 2 above into scenarios 3, 4 or 5. In my experience, to do so allows non-Roma to stand firm with Roma not only when relationships are good and in support of common projects but also in situations of crisis, when overt antigypsyism is present. I argue that the background work that non-Roma need to do to build up their racial stamina is that which I have described in chapters 4 through 7. To summarise again, this work encompasses continuous *Bildung* (exercise in continual openness); an understanding of history and the mechanisms of structural oppression; cultivating the ability to feel the pain of racism and act against antigypsyism; and in addition, being open and solid enough to allow open communication about specific instances of antigypsyism.

In the next chapter, I will show how this preparation can become the basis for intersecting processes of hermeneutic dialogue: between Roma and non-Roma, but more importantly, separately between non-Roma as a preparation for hermeneutic encounters. All of these are long-term processes through which we can slowly change our course in life (like an ocean liner) from being either a negative influence or a positive bystander, to becoming an active influence for good. In the next chapter I describe three participatory action inquiries that I initiated and was involved in from 2015-2019. All of these are works in progress and will hopefully continue to unfold in years to come. Therefore the case studies that follow are a snapshot of where these participatory projects had arrived at in the Summer of 2019.

## **Chapter 8 Dialogue: moving forward in our understanding**

I have argued that non-Romani people and communities might want to reach back into history to question and prepare themselves for the encounter with Roma by engaging in a process of *Bildung*; by facing their position of privilege deriving from their socialisation in the paradigm of whiteness; and by engaging in the exercise required to live with a progressive or *gebildete* non-Romani identity. I have also explained that it serves non-Roma well to understand and confront their prejudices and position in the system of antigypsyism, since by doing so their lives become fuller and more meaningful (even though, as we confront white fragility, considerably more uncomfortable).

While ad hoc encounter and provocation can happen at any time, a deliberate process of dialogue can help a deeper understanding. In this case, it can be set up as the intentional consolidation of the process of *Bildung*. In the current chapter I will illustrate how such an articulated understanding can occur when people are primed to undertake it, how I have found it to work and where it may take us, Roma and non-Roma together, towards deeper understanding of each other. As already mentioned in chapter 2, hermeneutic dialogue has a few ground rules that ensure it becomes a meaningful process: those involved must share power and space in the conversation; it has to be about something that deeply matters to all involved; conversation partners should be prepared to accept the truth of the other; and the dialogue has to include mechanisms that deal with feelings, since, as Kyle observed, otherwise it becomes a mechanical repetition of rehearsed positions. Ultimately, such dialogue has the potential to bring new insights into the lives of all those involved while ensuring that the encounter remains suffused with integrity and coherence.

### **Openness as a basis for sharing power and space**

The lengthy groundwork involved in the process of *Bildung* includes developing a willingness to engage, and a willingness to listen and to understand. These are the first preconditions of hermeneutic dialogue. With the best intentions of making equal space for each other, as we will

see in the next sections of this chapter, that openness is not always a foregone conclusion because prejudices and fore-meanings constantly threaten to derail the level playing field.

What I hope I have also shown is that putting the stamina afforded us by *Bildung* into practice and operationalising a non-Romani identity help to address the power in the relationship between Roma and non-Roma. *Gebildete* non-Roma who are able to engage with their history of power and dominance, allow themselves to be unguarded and open (rather than fragile), pursue long-term honest relationships with Roma and are willing to look at the structural nature of antigypsyism can put down a good foundation for meaningful dialogue. This list of activities echoes that suggested by DiAngelo (2018, pp. 138-154). But power relations are not so easily overcome and cross-racial dialogue is riven with pitfalls; the next three ground rules of hermeneutic dialogue can help with some of the challenges that come with unequal power relations.

### **Dialogue with historical depth**

Whenever I brought up the question of communication between Roma and non-Roma, virtually all my Roma participants took issue with the idea of simply engaging in cultural exchanges or dialogues. ‘We usually present this [false image of ourselves], music and dancing and colours’ (Karina, field interview, 2019), said Karina. She made it clear that she was not satisfied with a level of communication that focused only on cultural differences, just as she was not satisfied with policy changes aiming at the level of Roma inclusion instead of going further into challenging antigypsyism.

Alina was even more incisive and makes a point in her play, *The Great Shame*, of painting a caricature of those young people for whom intercultural communication is synonymous with appropriating Romani culture (Şerban, 2018). Her work is a constant effort to go beyond simply celebrating cultural diversity: ‘I completely didn’t want to go to the exotism, and to show “I’m a Roma woman, let me show a skirt”, no, that’s not me’ (Alina, field interview, 2017).

Dialogue, for the Romani activists I spoke to, has to be about something more; it has to address structural racism, in the same way that artistic production in Alina's case grapples with the history of that racism rather than just with present-time relationships between Roma and non-Roma.

I return here to the already mentioned key difference between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*. Dialogue can start and be initiated by one-time experiences (*Erlebnisse*) such as noticing cultural differences. However, meaningful dialogue leads to a deeper body of experience (*Erfahrung*) that engages with history, contributes to *Bildung* and allows discomfort. Conversely, if not guided or entered into in an opportunistic or even coerced way, dialogue can miss the chance to result in *Erfahrung* and become a one-time experience (*Erlebnis*), not always a positive one. The difference between the two is considerable. Going back to the ideas introduced in chapter 4, not only does it matter where we are thrown and how we deal with that thrownness, but it also matters how we use the possibilities at our disposal to add to the arc of effective history. An awareness of being historically situated results in a different experience of history. *Erlebnisse* are the experiences we happen to have with others when we are not aware of the prejudices and fore-meanings that have brought us into contact with them. *Erfahrung*, on the other hand, is the experience we acquire when those prejudices and fore-meanings are understood and processed.

Examples abound of white people who set out to get closer to people targeted by racism but did not perceive the difference between these two forms of experience. In this way, white people can end up in blind alleys and accused of 'erasing the identities of those who cannot choose', as happened in the much-publicised case of Rachel Dolezal (McFadden, 2015). In that case, Rachel Dolezal decided, based on her own individual *Erlebnisse*, that she was entitled to leave behind the white identity she grew up with and join another where she felt she more rightly belonged, identifying as black and taking up a highly respected position in a national organisation focused on the rights of African Americans in the USA. By doing so, she chose to ignore the weight of historical background, the views of others who belong to the group she wanted to be part of and the political context that surrounded her actions. As she placed herself out of reach of *Erfahrung*, Dolezal

operated on the basis of individual preference and wishes (*Erlebnis*) and, hermeneutically speaking, came to the wrong conclusions that did not fit into the totality of information and understanding available to her on that subject.

Without the kind of deep understanding that takes into account effective history, dialogue becomes meaningless or frustrated by unresolved prejudices on either side. These kinds of tensions come up again and again in my field interviews, where mainly Roma but also non-Roma participants complain that they had tried dialogue, but it was unsatisfactory. Karina says:

I even had an argument [about racism] with my very good friend. My friend she was really really angry and wrote to me suggesting that they had washed my brain at university [where we learned about racism]. (Karina, field interview, 2019)

In this example, it is clear to see how debates on weighty issues such as racism can quickly go astray on Facebook, without much preparation of the dialogue process and with people – even close friends – talking across each other and basing their communication on one-time experiences. In spite of Karina being a highly experienced advocacy professional and the close connection with her friend, she could not overcome the lack of preparation for this kind of dialogue. Instead, Karina and her friend stopped talking for a year, whereupon they resumed their relationship but agreed not to mention subjects such as racism in order to preserve their connection.

### **Dealing with white fragility – the hidden landmine in dialogue**

In her interview, Karina described as follows the seminars on antigypsyism that she delivers as part of her work: ‘Sometimes it’s nice, I’m more relaxed, but most of the time I’m very stressed, because most of the time there is at least one racist in the room, you know?’ (Karina, field interview, 2019).

White fragility born of white privilege can be like a landmine that springs up to wreck the best-prepared dialogues. It is a topic that is best faced and handled explicitly ahead of time, since as we have seen again and again, it shuts people down and derails them and it puts a huge burden on Roma, who are faced with a repeated backlash for daring to speak out against antigypsyism.

Yet labelling white fragility (as DiAngelo (2019) does so eloquently), only partly solves the problem. The bigger goal is to set up spaces for dialogue that can process non-Roma feelings of guilt and/or defensiveness before they spill over and wreck attempts at communication with Roma. Learning can happen when people can talk about what is important to them without getting stuck in or disappearing in trenches. Yet how can white fragility be overcome? I argue that non-Roma-only safe spaces are crucial in this respect.

### **Not listening to white fears**

Several times during my interviews with them, my Romani participants made the point that they neither wanted to, nor did they feel obligated to, listen to the feelings, experiences and challenges that non-Roma have when encountering Roma ('this is white people's fears' – Bianca, field interview, 2017).

However, they all did sometimes choose to engage with non-Roma for the purposes of educating them. Bianca insisted that this had to be on her terms and in the company of people she trusted and she felt could defend her. In Alina's case using art shifted the power relationships and made a space where non-Roma were willing and able to listen for long enough to Alina's description of antigypsyism to understand the fullness of her message:

There were so many in the audience, it was incredibly beautiful. There were many children, Roma and non-Roma. Teachers brought whole classes of non-Roma children; it was awesome. (Alina, field interview, 2018)

Karina made a similar point when she described how she took a decision to keep communicating her full thinking to non-Roma in spite of the pain it brought her:

And then I was putting myself again into the painful situation, over time more and more because I had to react you know, but it was not less painful it was just different. And at least it was some kind of a satisfaction after that. (Karina, field interview, 2019)

Karina was willing to put herself through the discomfort of facing antigypsyism from non-Roma because she had discovered that it offered her a more powerful position – that she could change something if she faced antigypsyism and engaged in conversations about it. In her experience, the



pain was similar whether or not she addressed antigypsyism when she saw it. Yet there was satisfaction in having done something about it.

In spite of the courage and determination that people employ to engage with each other, however, white fragility often threatens to overwhelm and exhaust both Roma and non-Roma, with the result that sometimes people find it easier to give up on each other than go on with the struggle. In particular, the strain is often inordinately high for Roma. In my experience, setting up safe spaces for both Roma and non-Roma was often the answer to this difficulty, and in particular served to protect Roma from non-Roma fragility and backlash.

### **A place for feelings and vulnerability**

Kyle found out through bitter personal experience that it is sometimes too hard to try to learn from people who are not white about racism. By the time we started to work together, he had formulated his need for a safe space with other white people where he could go to talk about his own challenges concerning racism. He said that as non-Roma we ‘need a space where people are actually open to talking about their feelings... like you need that kind of intimacy and vulnerability’ (Kyle, field interview, 2018). Yet that space had not been available to him because ‘I think a lot of us [white people] have built up this wall, like the anti-racist warrior and it’s without any kind of real discussion of the vulnerable position that that puts you in’ (Kyle, field interview, 2018).

As already explained in chapter 7, safe white spaces can allow non-Roma the chance to be open with each other without the worry of hurting non-Roma. In Kyle’s words:

I mean I personally would love that. If I could have a space where I could go and be honest and open about, you know, the difficulties I’m having in understanding race or racism, with people that are going to be willing to listen to me and help me talk through it and think through it. With the aim obviously that you get through it so you can be more present in, you know, in the struggle against racism, right? If you could have a space like that I mean it would be I think invaluable, you know? (Kyle, field interview, 2018)

While allowing the space for emotional healing, the goal of such safe spaces would not be simply to provide a place in which to complain about the pain of being non-Roma; instead, they would have to be focused on ending structural antigypsyism.

I mean it would take a lot to be in that space, like from the white people. You would all have to have the same kind of general outlook that you're not here to feel better about being a white person, that's not what you're here for. What you're here to do is to process your whiteness so you can help end racism, right? (Kyle, field interview, 2018)

Yet admittedly this was a 'hard line to walk, a hard balance' (Kyle, field interview, 2018). Kyle and I came to the conclusion that it takes skill, dedication and time to set up and keep those spaces going.

Moreover, it is important that such safe spaces exist for both Roma and non-Roma. Roma appreciate being able to speak to each other about their experiences of racism – indeed, often it is the key that allows them to gather strength and create solidarity (Daróczy et al., 2018). But they strongly feel that they prefer to do so at first with other Roma, before having to deal with non-Roma experiences through a process of dialogue.

Romani activists and academics have indicated repeatedly that they would welcome a dialogue with non-Roma who are willing to move beyond the walls of exclusions that have been foisted upon them by a history of oppression (Kóczé, 2011, p. 70). So when non-Roma embark on the project of preparing themselves to meet their Roma counterparts, they can be heartened by the fact that although they are doing their own work separately, they are doing so with the encouragement of Romani activists.

### **Creating spaces of solidarity through participatory action research**

As shown in chapter 5, *Bildung* has a further drawback or advantage, depending on how one looks at it. Once people have acquired a certain openness towards others, they may at first find it difficult to communicate their understanding to people who have not engaged in such a process of opening up and are not engaged in the same way. For people to be able to preserve and nurture that openness, they need spaces where they feel solidarity with and acceptance from others who have had similar experiences. *Bildung* is a striking out beyond our limits and it throws us beyond familiar relationships and understandings – we are provoked into understanding more and that provocation can be felt as isolation from our peers, but it can also bring us closer with people different from ourselves.

Werner explicitly uses this insight to create solidarity between Roma and non-Roma – a new in-group that can find a new solidarity:

One of the things I do, and I think it's more successful than talking about white privilege is talking about 'us and them'. But when I say 'us' I don't say 'us' Romani people and 'them' non-Romani people. I say 'us' the people that think different, the mutants, the outsiders, the free thinkers, the people who don't conform to national narratives. (Werner, field interview, 2019)

My efforts at bringing together Roma and non-Roma over the years and the participatory action research included in my inquiry were inspired by a wish to create that 'us'. I tried both to bring about safe spaces for non-Roma and to reach out to individual Roma. I also tried to communicate the efforts I was making to Roma, so that they could make use of the knowledge that there was a body of non-Roma out there fighting for *Bildung*. I put a lot of effort into explaining and exploring antigypsyism with non-Roma groups that were experienced in dealing with white racism. I also embarked on journeys of *Bildung* and understanding in solidarity with Romani women, on the assumption that our shared commitment to feminism would connect us enough so that we could help each other in our respective struggles against antigypsyism. Below is a short description of my efforts over the years at creating safe spaces for non-Roma and articulating this work in dialogue with Roma. This participatory action process taught me and many of the participants a lot of useful lessons and is a work in progress.

#### **1. Critical whiteness in Romani Studies – participatory research**

Between 2015 and 2019, wanting to test whether individual *Bildung* would be enhanced by groups of non-Roma colleagues working together, I had the opportunity to do so over the course of several interconnected action research projects involving first one group of Roma and non-Roma scattered across Europe and then another such group that was based in Budapest, Hungary.

The first group met at a conference organised by one of our employers, whose stated aim was to create learning environments for their staff. Those working in the field of Roma inclusion were invited to join what we termed learning trajectories (Howard & Vajda, 2016) on different topics

related to their work. Four of us joined the learning trajectory on discrimination – as it happened, we were all female and non-Roma; hence, we naturally formed a homogeneous group from the point of view of two of our main identities. Over the next three years, we met every one or two months via Skype with the goal of learning about discrimination against Roma and to better understand what we could do about it through our work.

As a moderator of the learning trajectory, I chose to follow a framework borrowed from anti-racism educator, academic and activist Barbara Love, which includes four steps that she describes as awareness-raising, analysis, action and accountability (Love 2000). Over the course of our meetings, although we continued to focus on discrimination in general, we slowly moved from simply considering Roma inclusion to a deeper engagement with the concept of antigypsyism and/or Romaphobia. In the interests of raising our awareness of anti-Roma discrimination, we read and discussed a series of articles related to the history of antigypsyism and the framework for action mentioned above. I drew on and explained to the group the hermeneutic concept of effective history and its importance when seeking to understanding groups targeted by oppression. We discussed how an awareness of Romani history and the part played by our ancestors in that history is important when trying to engage with that group through our work. We used presentations and research such as that by Baumgartner (n.d.), the Alliance against Antigypsyism (2017) and McGarry (2017) to inform ourselves. We invited Romani and non-Romani guests who had researched antigypsyism and Romaphobia to discuss their findings with us. We also analysed our own personal experiences of working with Romani people and communities by comparing and contrasting these to the literature we read and the conversations we had with specialists on the subject of anti-Roma racism. Through examples from our own work where we had noticed discrimination and where we tried to do something about it, we reflected on how we could become accountable for our role in anti-Roma racism.

As a way of taking action, we thought about strategies we had tried to counter the discrimination we saw. We discussed how we could introduce these strategies more widely to our workplaces. For

example, Erika, a Romanian non-Roma, talked about a personal initiative she took on a monitoring visit she was mandated to undertake as part of her job:

When I went to the visit I had this specific idea in mind to look from the perspective of the beneficiaries, whether they see themselves as discriminated against. So I asked questions about discrimination. In one location people did feel discriminated against in the beginning, the teachers [in the children's school] were racist, but then the teachers were replaced, and it seems it has now been solved in those locations in regards to teachers. (Learning trajectory field notes, 2015)

During one of the individual interviews I conducted with Erika later, she talked at length about similar initiatives she had taken – working with Roma communities and asking unpopular questions – when she was a teenager. When asked what had made her decide to do so, against the advice of friends and school, she said that it was an inner determination to test for herself a set of assumptions and prejudices she was handed down by society (though in this case, not by her family). Recognising that we shared this curiosity and desire to understand (key components of *Bildung*), was a strong bonding experience for the four non-Roma involved in the group.

After one year of regular learning and engagement, the group of non-Roma decided that we were ready for our next step and decided to reach out to Romani colleagues. During a follow-up conference we invited a group of Romani activists to join our learning trajectory. They were a strong, experienced and united group and at the conference, demanded that they be allowed to create a safe Roma-only space. They challenged the non-Romani conference participants to face a number of ways in which they had discriminated against Roma in their work and used their safe space to draw up a number of recommendations for the organisation's work. After the conference, two of the Romani activists responded to our invitation to join the learning trajectory on discrimination and remained part of it until its completion in spring 2018.

This staged approach was a conscious decision to allow the group of non-Roma the opportunity and the time to engage with each other and prepare before we invited Roma into our discussions.

During the second phase of this learning trajectory involving both Roma and non-Roma, we developed the ground rule that Roma voices should have priority. Thus, the non-Roma spent much

time listening to their Romani activist colleagues about the personal experiences of discrimination the latter had experienced. It was in this context that both of the Roma described how antigypsyism is designed to keep them subservient:

It is typically expected of a Rom to work on the local Serb farm or household all day for no money at all. Instead he/she would depend on the mercy of the farmer or Serb family – how much to give them at the end of the day was up to the farmer. I started to realise that the Serbs were treating the Roma with no dignity, considering them to be people of second rate, not worthy of time or attention. Even now in my small village the best Roma in the village is one guy who still works for these Serbs from morning to evening for whatever they give him. The Serbs consider him ‘the best Roma in the village’ the rest who don’t want to work for the Serbs are ‘bad Roma’, they are seen as rebellious/traitors. You are not regarded as a good person if you don’t work as a servant. (Janek, learning trajectory field notes, 2017)

My two Romani colleagues and I later wrote an article that was published on a widely read internet portal in which we articulated our insights from that particular meeting. I will not reproduce or reference this article here for reasons of confidentiality. Yet the argument we made was that far from being purely excluded, Romani people have always been part of the fabric of European societies but have been allowed to remain on condition that they fulfil the role of the least favoured in society, lower than serfs and, in some instances, legally enslaved. In this way, we explained, the exploitation of Romani labour has been at the heart of building European societies and nations.

In 2019, I decided to initiate a repeat experiment involving a learning trajectory, this time with a group of people who were able to meet regularly in person for up to six months. I invited one of the Romani women who had worked with me on the first iteration to join me in designing and delivering this next phase. We were joined by another Romani woman and a non-Romani man in what we called the ‘critical whiteness project’. Although the aim of the project was to create a group of critically white non-Roma, we made a decision to open the group to any Roma who wanted to engage with the subject. The four of us discussed all the stages of the project as a group and decided to facilitate the meetings together, while agreeing that to mitigate the dangers of white fragility, we would not request the Roma to listen to non-Roma feelings about antigypsyism. Consequently, we set a number of ground rules designed to allow a meaningful dialogue: we asked participants to

preserve the confidentiality of our discussions; we provided careful facilitation and moderation to keep our meetings focused on antigypsyism and its manifestations; we closed the membership of the group after the first two occasions so that participants could develop trust between each other; we gave priority to Roma voices on each subject discussed; and we frequently split into separate Roma and non-Roma safe spaces where each group could have honest discussions about antigypsyism. Our meetings included discussions of the concept of critical whiteness, learning about the history of antigypsyism and how it influences us today; ways in which antigypsyism appears in housing, employment, education and healthcare; the role that non-Roma can play in addressing antigypsyism; and strategies for processing our emotions and discomfort related to these topics. After the first two meetings, some of the Roma participants were emboldened to be more proud of their identity or to stand up against an instance of workplace antigypsyism. One of the non-Roma participants who had previously been challenged by her Roma colleagues (they had called her racist) said that she had been glad of the opportunity to process that experience in our workshops and that she had realised 'she had work to do' to understand Roma. After our third meeting one of the Roma participants said: 'until now, I thought I only knew one non-Roma person who likes Roma. Now I have a very small hope that there are others out there.'

The guiding principle during the learning trajectories was that, as I have shown above, dialogue between Roma and non-Roma should be a well-prepared event, but this is not without risk. We learned in these groups that if handled well, such dialogue can open up our horizon of understanding of a subject, a people or a situation we find ourselves in. Conversely, it can be a missed opportunity and can leave people with difficult feelings of failure and a wider distance from those we encounter. This is an important point and one that I was keenly aware of when deciding to invite Romani activists into our workshops. It was important in both iterations of the learning trajectories that there was a core of facilitators (both Roma and non-Roma) who had long and trusting relationships with each other. In particular, I made sure to include in the facilitator group of each of the two learning trajectories at least one other non-Roma in each case who had a similar

understanding of critical whiteness as I did, so we could provide a framework for processing non-Romaniness. Together, we communicated to our Romani friends that we were ready and willing to learn from them; that we genuinely wanted to engage with antigypsyism; and that we were willing to change our plans and follow their lead. For this reason, we put a lot of effort into getting to know each other well before embarking on the dialogue itself. The second learning trajectory is a work in progress and it is too early to know its impact. Yet these experiments point to the possibility of non-Roma working together over the long term to engage with and keep learning about antigypsyism; as well as providing a visible presence that allows Roma to take on challenges they had not embarked on previously.

The following two case studies will illustrate two other dialogue formats that I set up: one focused on addressing antigypsyism in academia; and the second comprising an extended and ongoing participatory action research with the aim of directly tackling antigypsyism within a network of activists committed to ending racism.

## **2. *Using academic research as dialogue to change discourses around antigypsyism***

In 2017, following a suggestion that came out of an individual interview with Lena, I was inspired to gather several academic colleagues and initiate a process we called ‘queer(y)ing Romani Studies’. In our interview in 2017, Lena said that she felt non-Roma had no space in Romani Studies to talk about their position in the new academic structures focused on Critical Romani Studies (promoted, for example, by the Central European University’s series of Critical Approaches to Romani Studies Conferences and the *Critical Romani Studies* journal). While she understood and agreed that Romani Studies had been dominated by non-Roma outsiders, and supported the struggle of Romani academics to claim their space within the discipline, she did not see a chance for non-Roma to have the discussions that would allow them to develop an understanding of the contributions they could make in this context. This theme was an older one in our conversations. I reminded Lena that she had already, back in 2015, hinted at a solution to the same dilemma when she said:



I think it's all a puzzle, this is how I think about research, it's all one giant puzzle that we'll never really put together but we're trying. And everybody offers a piece, you know, this is my piece from my perspective, this is their piece from their perspective, and maybe it'll amount to a picture. Unfortunately we think about research [by Roma and non-Roma] as somehow mutually exclusive. If I say this and this is right, then what you're saying is not right. (Lena, field interview, 2015).

In 2017, I asked Lena what she felt we could do together to address the situation where well-meaning non-Roma felt marginalised and may end up believing they had nothing to contribute. At first, Lena replied that she did not know, but after about 10 or 20 minutes of me listening patiently, she said that we could create a public platform where we would be able to have conversations about the role of non-Romani vis-a-vis Romani academics. About six months later, in early 2018, a couple of colleagues and I noticed such an opportunity and invited Lena to join us in thinking through a possible panel on critically reimagining – queer(y)ing – Romani Studies. For the purposes of confidentiality, I will not disclose here whether Lena did or did not participate in writing a paper or attending the conference. In the end, three of us proposed and hosted a panel at the Gypsy Lore Society Conference (Dunajeva, Fremlova, & Vajda, 2018). Through this panel, entitled 'Queer(y)ing Romani Studies: from deconstruction to solidarity', we sought to question a number of assumptions in Romani Studies, which included discussing the role of non-Roma in Romani-focused research. We wrote that we understood the dominance of the field by non-Romani (white), often male scholars, as problematic and that we felt Romani Studies was in thrall to a certain type of conservatism born of researchers not examining their positionalities. We felt that there was a lack of diverse voices, especially those of 'constituencies traditionally marginalized or not "normally" at home in the Roma rights movement, Romani Studies and Roma communities such as LGBTIQ, feminists, post-colonialists and activists' (Dunajeva et al., 2018). We opined that this was a direct result of researchers with dominant identities – white, male and/or heterosexual – holding back more robust discussions about power and antigypsyism. We were keen to offer an academic space for debates between people who were interested in a critical view of Romani Studies with the aim of creating a wider platform of solidarity between researchers of different constituencies. We thought that there was a chance for academics with different identities who subscribed to

reimagining power and looking ‘critically at – or queer(y)ing – Romani Studies without excluding Romani scholars’ (Dunajeva et al., 2018) to create a new paradigm. We wanted to create that new community of ‘us’ that Werner was talking about. The criterion for inclusion was not our ascribed identities but instead a willingness to question our own position vis-a-vis antigypsyism. We specifically stated that our panel was not exclusionary; instead, we wanted it to open up the space for debate to a multiplicity of voices. Our conclusion read as follows:

researchers in traditionally dominant and/or oppressor roles towards Roma do not necessarily have to be Romani to be included in knowledge production on Romani communities; however, it is helpful if they can examine their own privilege and challenge it accordingly not only academically, but also politically and socially. (By the same token, a ‘queer’ researcher does not necessarily have to be LGBTIQ; however, if they are straight, they need to be able to critically examine their own straight/heteronormative/cis-normative privilege and challenge it accordingly at all levels: academically, politically and socially.) Our panel opens up a space for all those scholars who work on deconstructing, queer(y)ing and reclaiming identities in relation to Romani Studies. (Dunajeva et al., 2018).

In this context, we conceptualised ‘critical whiteness [as] “queer”’ (Fremlova, 2017, p. 137), or in other words, not part of the status quo. This was an important addition, since it stated openly that non-Romani-identified researchers also have a place at the table if they challenge, deconstruct and reclaim their identities. To paraphrase Werner, non-Romani researchers who were able and willing to face their role in the context of antigypsyism no longer had to scurry away and feel guilty about this role. They could join with the growing number of Romani scholars who were asking questions, reimagining the field of Romani Studies and deconstructing and reconstructing power relations within the field. We set out our stall as a conceptual home for non-Romani academics who wanted to contribute to, in particular, the debate about critical whiteness.

In our discussions, we formulated several goals for our panel. First we wanted it to be a signal for Romani researchers willing to critique what they saw as a colonially minded field that they were welcome in the spaces of white power. At this particular conference, this colonial mindset was exemplified by the insistence of the conference organisers on calling themselves by an outdated name (Gypsy Lore), which had already been criticised as structurally racist by one of their own board members (Acton, 2016). We were pleased, therefore, when a prominent Romani activist chose

to present a paper as part of our panel entitled 'White academia is looking for the next thing to say, when it should be listening' (Bila, 2018, conference abstract).

Second, we wanted the panel to make clear that we did not exclude non-Romani researchers and that we welcomed them to contribute their thinking, such as a paper included in the panel by Dr Carol Silverman describing her changing roles as a non-Romani advocate and scholar and her personal journey towards critical whiteness (Silverman, 2019).

Finally, we wanted to make clear that our critique was aimed not at individuals but at the idea of scientific objectivity and neutrality that had plagued Romani Studies for a number of years. In a presentation entitled 'Beyond scientific objectivity in Romani Studies', we argued that

what is sometimes portrayed in Romani Studies as scientific objectivity is often beholden to the historical emergence of the field which inherently ignores the positionality of the researcher, and with it, the background, prejudice and degree of power brought by those participating in knowledge production. (Dunajeva & Vajda, 2018, conference abstract)

The panel was particularly well received by the Romani scholars and activists who attended, one of whom said that 'this is the essential argument we need' (Charlie, field interview, 2018). They were glad to find a space within the conference that was questioning non-Roma who had for centuries spoken in the name of Roma. This gave some of the Romani participants at the conference the opportunity to have several discussions with the conference organisers around the need for the Gypsy Lore Society to change some of its policies, such as where they located their events, the inclusion of political advocacy on behalf of Roma regarding their goals, and, most importantly, their outdated name. Charlie was clear that the project of addressing antigypsyism was a work in progress but that through actions such as this panel, while 'they [non-Roma] might still have some prejudice, it opens the door to further dialogue and I think if people are willing to listen, it starts there' (Charlie, field interview, 2018).

Our initiative at this conference was part of a number of strands of inquiry that had been coming together in Romani Studies over the previous 3 to 4 years. One of these was led by Romani and feminist scholars who talked about having a place at the table and solidarity between groups

traditionally excluded from the field (Bogdan et al., 2015; Kóczé et al., 2018). Another was the willingness of LGBTIQ researchers such as Fremlova (2017) to ask questions around normativity and dominant identities in the context of Roma-related research. Yet another was the growing recognition of antigypsyism as described in chapter 1. These intersecting research and action initiatives are gradually building a context that is shifting not only debates but also power relationships in this field of research. I later used the experience gained from attending this conference to advocate with other colleagues for a permanent section on critical whiteness at the CEU's Critical Approaches to Romani Studies Conference (CEU, 2019). Meanwhile, those of us that came together to propose the panel described in this section are still in contact and have strengthened our relationships through our participation in the conference. We have widened our circles, are continuing our debates and are already thinking about more ambitious projects focused on critical whiteness.

### ***3. Shifting power to the grassroots: Romani and non-Romani women in dialogue***

The new critical engagement within Romani Studies described in the section above has been called by many names, including 'Roma Awakening' (Ryder, 2017, p. 124). One of the criticisms it frequently receives is that it is creating a group of elite researchers who are divorced from the realities of grassroots Romani communities. Many observers think that the movement has been too influenced by, in particular, European-level decision-makers who, through a series of affirmative measures and large-scale funding, have skewed the process towards supporting a small number of Romani and non-Romani actors so that, 'rather than becoming a platform to help articulate community aspirations, there is a danger of being tokenistic or merely providing a platform for a Roma activist elite' (Ryder, 2017, p. 124).

This was certainly a view echoed by some of my participants:

in most of traditional Roma communities, a lot of the intellectual academics who would use critical studies theories, in most of the grassroots communities they would not even be considered Romani. And they would be accused of [making] exactly the same [mistake] as non-Romani people who are in the field. (Werner, field interview, 2019)

Hence, not only non-Roma but also educated Roma are often seen as too far removed or even segregated from the everyday lives of Romani communities to be able to effect changes in the circumstances of those still living in poverty. The subtext is that it is the realities and voices of Roma who live in poverty, often in the rural countryside or in veritable ghettos in big European cities, that are often not heard.

However, this gloomy picture is not complete since there is a growing number of Roma-led organisations that have made it their business not only to involve Romani educated middle-class elites but also to build a wide movement of diverse individuals and organisations that come together with the aim of countering antigypsyism. One such group is the movement that organises the Budapest Roma Pride, an annual event that, according to an observer is 'large, inclusive and highly heterogeneous' (McGarry, 2017, p. 198). In particular,

like all movements, Roma Pride is derived from a heterogeneous population that includes different Roma groups and non-Roma. Jenő [Setét, the key organiser of the Roma Pride March] clarifies: 'We don't choose our friends depending on their background and we have lots of non-Roma friends. Many other people have to work very hard for this. For us it's absolutely natural that we have non-Roma as part of the organising team because we have non-Roma allies and non-Roma friends. (McGarry, 2017, p. 203)

As one of the non-Roma allies and friends that this quote refers to, I have been part of the Budapest Roma Pride organising committee for several years. In particular, I have been closely involved with a group of eight Romani women who are also part of this group. Our relationships are close and complex and span many different projects and programmes.

For purposes of confidentiality, I will not disclose the group's name or the projects we have been involved in as they rely largely on the anonymity of participants. Instead I describe some of our relationships and activities since they are a good example of hermeneutic dialogue in practice that processes Romani and non-Romani identities at a deeper level than that which usually happens through 'niceness [as] the answer to racial inequality' (DiAngelo, 2019). I start with explaining how this group of Romani and non-Romani women built the robust relationships that have allowed to us deal head-on with antigypsyism in different settings and what we learned from this process. Key

elements have been using participatory action research as a method of inquiry; an awareness of the power dynamics within the group and our positionality within that context; a shared commitment to feminism; and being part of a wider network of activists who use the tools of mutual support and engaged listening to address the effects of structural oppression at a personal level.

### **Togetherness**

Late in 2017, this group of eight Hungarian Romani women activists held a strategy meeting regarding which research projects to take on in the coming year and how to relate to the opportunities that presented themselves to the group from donors, international development partners and other people eager about and interested in getting involved in their work. The Romani activists were joined by two non-Romani women, including myself, who both had long-standing close relationships with several of the activists. The Romani women had planned for and organised a meeting and made sure it included highly skilled facilitators, both Roma and non-Roma. They wanted to take stock of their successes and challenges and make sure that whatever work they took on in the future, they would do it together, with everyone involved and that their activities would not be dictated by outsiders. A younger Romani member of the group was heavily pregnant and in a uniquely prescient remark, one of us joked that the unborn baby would surely be born into activism. By the next morning, as if on cue, we heard that the young mother had gone into labour in the middle of the night and given birth to a baby girl. In the course of the next year, our predictions came true, as the little one has now been present at every one of the group's activities, with her father and brother providing childcare so that the mother could develop her work as a community organiser.

I tell this story as a vivid reminder of how research and life intertwine; how in spite of Roma and non-Roma segregation, in spite of generational, economic and other divisions, researcher-activists can find a way to reach each other, especially when feminism is a binding principle; and how conflict, illness, birth and dying are ever-present elements in community activism and research. In

participatory action research, as already discussed in chapter 3, personal relationships surface as powerful drivers for decolonising solidarity and addressing antigypsyism, and an openness about these relationships and the dynamics involved can set a tone of integrity for a whole research process, or forfeit that integrity, as the case may be.

Land (2015) provides a vivid example of this primacy of personal connections. Right at the start of her book (p. 4), she makes manifest her personal connections to Indigenous people, as well as subtly undermining the usual context of power inherent in non-Indigenous/Indigenous encounters. She says: 'Indigenous people have created and nurtured relationships with [non-Indigenous] supporters [...] I am one such supporter,' (Land, 2015, p. 4) before going on to explain that she took guidance and direction for her work from Indigenous activists whom she regards as her mentors. In the space of a few sentences, she clarifies who had the agency, the power and the initiative in the relationship and manages to contradict a context of oppression dominated by the white coloniser.

It is in the course of this process of opening up and making manifest who we are as researchers that relationships of power can be challenged and reconfigured. As already noted in previous chapters, a willingness to engage with our roles in antigypsyism and the relationship of each party to the power differentials inherent in an inquiry team can greatly enhance or even allow for a make-or-break of genuinely participatory research.

My relationship with the group of Romani women activists that I will refer to as RCAG (Roma community action group) began in early 2015, through a work assignment that involved training Romani activists in evidence-based local community advocacy. I was a researcher committed to participatory methodologies, while the key women's rights activist in the Romani group (Andi) had considerable understanding and experience of community research through her studies in adult education and community mediation. The RCAG had been formed through a previous project designed to change power dynamics in the Romani settlement:

the point was to get in contact and listen to those whom nobody else had ever given a voice to. Because in our locality [as well as in many others] we know the usual suspects that

always get to speak. Within minutes we could pull together 20 people who don't have anything useful to say, just like the sound of their own voice. But what we wanted was to reach those whom nobody had ever asked questions of, neither the local politicians, nor anybody else. (Andi, field interview, 2018)

There were subsequently three separate actors involved in these action research processes: the group members who were very new to both advocacy and research and living in the Romani settlement (whom I will continue to call RCAG); the leader of the RCAG, who was raised as a poor working-class Romani woman, living locally yet highly trained in community organising and mediation (Andi); and myself, a non-Romani, academically qualified outsider tasked with implementing a regional advocacy programme. All of us were aware that our positionalities were different and complementary vis-a-vis the work we were doing. Our advocacy program began with a community survey that resulted in the group choosing the key advocacy issue that most Roma citizens in their segregated settlement could get behind – solving the problem of garbage collection. The RCAG did this by 'going around and asking people about the most important issue for them' (RCAG member, field interview, 2018).

Two elements contributed to the group being successful in its work and increasingly able to attract outside resources. First, Andi, the group leader was aware that to be successful in its advocacy, the group would need a solid grounding in research. However, she also knew that it already had a solid background and understanding of research in the widest sense:

I later found out that these were the basic steps in community organising, but they call it 'interviewing', they don't call it research but in effect it comes down to the same thing. (Andi, fieldwork interview, 2018)

Second, the RCAG proactively went after outside allies and made an early decision that it would only work with organisations and individuals of their choice, which gave it a sense of solidarity and equality with outsiders, including non-Roma:

we tried to go to as many personal development courses as possible, not only to learn ourselves but also to share our own experiences, both negative and positive with those who were there, and to make connections. (Andi, fieldwork interview, 2018)

For example, Andi came up to me during the very first presentation of the 2015 advocacy programme to a group of Roma mediators, made a personal connection and said, 'we want to be



part of this program, bring it to our community' (fieldwork observation, 2015). At this point I began my collaboration with the RCAG. It was the beginning of a long-term complex relationship in the course of which we jointly conducted multiple action-focused inquiries in the community where the members of the group live in. These looked at public services such as the already mentioned environmental policies of the local authority, as well as barriers to employment, education and health care in their segregated Romani settlement.

By 2018, on the basis of this research, the RCAG had run successful advocacy campaigns for effective garbage collection, against fly-tipping and for a more visible local authority presence in the Romani segregate; they had been instrumental in making sure that local investors employed Romani people and established mentoring programmes for local workers; they worked towards re-introducing adult education for Romani school leavers; and were in the process of conducting research on the incidence of serious respiratory diseases and cancer in the segregated Romani settlement. My role during these years was to accompany these action inquiries through providing mentoring and advice and conducting formal research with the group to allow them its members to reflect on their successes and challenges.

It would have been easy in these circumstances for me (a non-Romani researcher and professional) to believe that I had more knowledge, experience and understanding of inquiry processes than the communities I worked with. Yet from the outset, the group did the lion's share of the research and I as the outside researcher only helped where necessary. While tacitly acknowledged right at the start of our collaboration, over the years, these positionalities were more and more explicitly addressed by the research collective. The steps we took to do so are described below.

### **Acknowledging and processing identities and power**

The group, Andi and I had long and involved discussions about our identities as Roma/non-Roma and about the differences between those more and less educated. At every training course and meeting with the group, we talked about antigypsyism as an important factor and something we

collectively tried to address in our personal relationships and in our work. We discussed the nature of structural antigypsyism as the specific form of racism affecting Roma. We were fully aware that Roma and non-Roma alliances 'require that one reflects on their identity as a Roma or non-Roma, and is aware of the consequences because that affects the dynamics and the outcomes of a relationship and a project' (Daróczy et al., 2019, p. 347).

From the outset and during all our subsequent inquiry processes, Andi led the way in noticing and pointing out power differentials within the group and between the group and outsiders, such as racism between Roma and non-Roma; discrimination between more and less educated Roma, between Romani women and men, and between older and younger people. She worked tirelessly to restore the level playing field distorted by these power differentials, through openly talking about these or subtly shifting the balance of power to favour those less advantaged by them. Below, I give a few examples of Andi's strategies for doing so.

At every meeting of the RCAG, to minimise the influence of her higher level of education, Andi made sure that she spoke as little as possible and never first, giving the chance to the less experienced members of the group to tell their stories. On one memorable occasion when the RCAG, with the help of an outside consultant, was grappling with a participatory process designed to result in a new strategy for the group, Andi physically removed both myself and herself from this process (we went on an extended shopping trip) so that neither of us would overshadow the thinking of the RCAG. On the shopping trip, she confided that she felt that even when she was silent in meetings, the others still looked to her for ideas and guidance.

Over the years, we all took many steps, both explicit and implicit, to reverse and address the power differentials within the RCAG by creating personal bonds of solidarity and friendship. For example, I reflected both privately and openly in discussions with the RCAG on my non-Romani identity and made sure everyone knew I was committed to reconfiguring the role of the colonising 'whitely' (Land, 2015) lone researcher. On another occasion, while planning the visit of a group of Romani

female activists from a neighbouring community to the RCAG, Andi observed that this group's thinking was overshadowed by their non-Romani professional advisers. To address this, she and I made a plan to allow the Romani women to meet separately without the 'gadjos' so that they could have a safe space for discussions without non-Romani influence. Again, as on the previous occasion, I invited the non-Romani professionals to leave the site of the meeting for an hour or so. This was not easy as the non-Roma did not like being excluded from the discussions. However, the resulting Roma-only safe space allowed the Romani women to challenge what they saw as non-participatory and non-transparent budgeting processes in the project we were working on and sparked a process of reconfiguring some of the power relationships in that group.

As a more experienced researcher, I made sure to always explain the research processes and the roles involved in them, making clear that the RCAG knew it had complete power to make decision about the community issues they chose to research and the goals of that research. We discussed and agreed that the place of the outsiders was not to take over but to support them to make connections with academic institutions; to write up the research in ways that would make it into publications; and to bring in other resources such as participatory action research trainers and consultants who would help the members of the RCAG get their voices heard in a wider setting.

Over the years, the group members opened up about most aspects of their professional and private life in the context of the RCAG, to the point where they feel it is more like a family than an activist group. They frequently say that what they disclose in RCAG meetings they don't even tell their blood relatives. Much time was spent with all of us laughing at one or other aspect of our slightly dysfunctional home lives: 'sometimes we just get together to talk as women, it's really important on occasion to just do that without any specific agenda' (fieldwork notes, August 2018). Going even further, Andi and I introduced the group to a process of mutual support involving a deep (and fully confidential) listening practice, with the result that everyone in the group came to know not just surface information about each other's lives, but also gained an insight into each other's feelings, hopes and fears. We learned to process difficult and intractable issues such as sexism, antigypsyism

and oppression in general through listening to each other about these issues, providing opportunities for emotional release and supporting each other to take on specific instances of discrimination.

While the group ended up as female only by accident – men did not choose to become community activists – this was one of its strengths and unique contributions to the Hungarian Romani liberation movement.

For a long while our group was a rarity. We did not know any other community activist groups in our circles that consisted solely of Romani women, especially not such women who are committed to activism and advocacy. We knew of other associations led by Romani women, but none that are specifically focused on evidence-based advocacy. (Andi, field interview, 2018)

As a result of this accidentally created female-only space, feminism and a commitment to women's rights became a strong and abiding basic unifier between the group, its leader and the non-Romani outsiders who supported it, including some prominent male Romani leaders.

This solidarity was based on the whole group (including myself as an outsider) consciously and intentionally building personal relationships of trust that went beyond the work context and meant that members of the group got to know and supported each other's families and became close friends as well as fellow researchers. These were instrumental in supporting the RCAG through many internal conflicts and challenges, including on the occasion when the lead group member became seriously ill while at the same time, tensions between group members tended to undermine their common goals.

On several occasions, we were on the verge of splitting up the group. Several times I called group meetings to ask what we should do. Should we continue or give up? [...] And so far, every every time, the group decided no, let's stick together. [...] Even people who said they would leave, but later returned, because they missed the group. (Andi, field interview, 2018)

In turn, these close relationships allowed for even more detailed discussions around healing divisions. For example, they allowed us to address the notoriously difficult dynamics in Romani activist circles between generations of older and younger females. The result was that by 2018, the group, whose members were mainly were women over 40, accepted and supported the leadership

of a much younger group member (who was 23). Leading up to this change in leadership, there had been big conflicts in the group of activists and researchers. We had fought, cried and argued together until almost miraculously, during late 2017, we managed to resolve the majority of the conflicts with no hard feelings. At this point, we found out that virtually all the group members either had or currently suffered from serious illnesses themselves or had family members who were dying, and our energies became focused on caring for the well-being of the group members while continuing our activism.

These very human problems, conditions, worries and difficulties in the end united us in our struggle right at the end of that year. During the meeting described at the beginning of this case study, over two days, we skilfully combined grieving for past and future difficulties with planning and organising our activism. We talked about death and dying, illness, family grievances, antigypsyism and racism in the wider world. We had a stormy discussion about whether the group would publicly stand up in solidarity with LGBTIQ rights. We decided to start a new research project about environmental health and the role of chemical pollutants in the local segregated Romani settlement. It was a uniquely productive weekend. We knew we were Roma and non-Roma separated by antigypsyism, yet we frequently talked about the fact that we were also feminists and that our commitment to women's emancipation was a powerful uniting factor.

In fact, illness, health care, death and dying not only became issues the group was able to prepare for and address internally but also, as already indicated above, these very weighty community issues influenced the RCAG's inquiry agenda. The result is that the RCAG has decided to do research on and place in the wider context of public health provision so-called problems that its members had previously experienced as individuals. Yet by doing surveys in the community on these topics, the RCAG noticed that almost all Roma in the segregated community faced ill-health and especially respiratory diseases and cancer to a degree that seemed more pronounced than in the non-Roma communities living in the same town. In this way, processing our personal experiences with antigypsyism led to an expansion of the reach of the RCAG's research and advocacy.

### **Taking on antigypsyism in an activist network**

In parallel to being involved in this internal process of dialogue, our group became known in the wider community of activists involved in project M. This network reaches across the globe and is committed to ending racism, having developed many of the tools Andi and I used in our work with the RCAG. However, like many other international organisations, the wider network had never had Romani members and was not aware of the specifics of antigypsyism as described in chapter 1. My involvement with project M and my commitment to teaching its members about antigypsyism preceded my involvement with Andi and the RCAG. Starting in about 2012, I began to offer information sessions about antigypsyism at the various conferences organised by the international project. These included information-sharing and practical activities designed to deal with the effects of antigypsyism on non-Roma involved. The format of the sessions was simple and did not vary much over the intervening years, although the information I chose to share reflected my own growing understanding of antigypsyism as separate from Roma and affecting non-Roma minds, as well as its structural nature. It is important to note that at first I ran these antigypsyism sessions mainly for non-Roma participants in the network. On the occasions that Roma were present with us, the format changed and I will describe this below.

### **Non-Roma white groups**

Following some of the principles I also later employed in the learning trajectories, I usually started these groups by giving people a potted history of antigypsyism, with examples of how past elements of it may arise in our current lives in the manner of the iceberg effect described in chapter 4. Then I talked about the links between the arc of history and our own personal histories. The ways our ancestors have bequeathed us ways of thinking and behaviour through our lineage was a principle already accepted and understood by this particular group of activists. For this reason, it was easy to explain to them that it is useful to look at what we learned about Roma/Gypsies/Travellers growing up. At this point we each shared our early memories of either hearing messages about Roma/Gypsies/Travellers and our personal childhood experiences of meeting people from these

groups. We did this with an understanding that we were exploring the content of antigypsyism, which is a construct that lives in our minds, rather than talking about the realities of Roma lives. Some of the participants in this activist network have attended several of these meetings. Over the years, this simple process has worked really well to move some non-Roma activists within this network from a situation where they knew next to nothing about Roma towards establishing meaningful and respectful relationships with Roma individuals and communities. Once people had established those meaningful relationships we used some of our time to talk about our connections with Roma. At the same time, we reflected back on how our present-day challenges in these relationships are still linked to the antigypsyist content we learned when growing up. In general, we have not found it useful to comment in these meetings on political developments regarding Roma, such as recent atrocities. We found that this commentary tends to reinforce the antigypsyist messages in groups of people who are largely ignorant of how Roma live or are physically segregated from Romani communities. In all these sessions on antigypsyism, as well as in the wider work of the network, emotions were welcome and encouraged. Beyond the safe space provided by these groups, since many participants were activists, they used the insights from our groups on antigypsyism in their work as part of other projects and organisations.

Internally, within the project M network, as in the case of the learning trajectories, the advanced preparation of non-Roma for meeting with Romani colleagues has paid off. Before we started this awareness-raising work, the very few Roma/Gypsy/Traveller (RGT) members of project M were largely quiet about their heritage. However, from around 2015, the network started to include new RGT members, including the RCAG. At the same time, some of the existing RGT members (many of whom were already influential in project M) started to explore their identities and meet in separate RGT groups. There was then a shift in perception and practice at our conferences. The network started to pay attention to organising special events where panels of RGT members could speak to the wider network about their background and life experiences. This brought a lot of new knowledge of the realities of RGT lives into project M. A delegation of project M comprising non-

Roma and RGT members wrote a position paper and organised a workshop about antigypsyism for a United National conference.

Meanwhile, the group led by Andi started to meet separately and also with me and other non-Roma involved in project M for the specific purpose of talking about how antigypsyism has affected all of us. This work culminated in a seminal workshop of project M held in Central Europe, where Andi and the RCAG had a leading role. They decided that it was time to challenge the latent antigypsyism of the non-Roma present, and in a carefully designed meeting, asked each non-Roma to speak up and tell everyone what they knew about Roma – both negative and positive. Four members of the RCAG were present and understood that what they would hear from the non-Roma would be suffused with antigypsyist messages. After patiently listening to what each of the non-Roma had to say, the RCAG members held a passionate speak-out about how their lives had been hurt by anti-Roma racism. Such was the trust that had been built in this group of people that not only did this format work, but the next day each of us had the chance to process what we had learned in smaller groups. Importantly, there was no backlash against the Roma, and they left feeling that they had had the chance to hear people speak the truth and speak the truth to people they knew had their best interests at heart.

I have argued in this chapter that even entrenched positions of domination and power, such as those between Roma and non-Roma, can be addressed, made manifest and upended by participatory action research and hermeneutic dialogue. Openness and discussions about the positionality of those involved, whether professionals or grassroots activists, are key elements in doing so. At the same time, in my experience, it helps if there is one overarching, binding identity that brings participatory research collectives together. In my case studies, these shared identities were development professionals committed to Roma inclusion; Romani Studies researchers queer(y)ing and critically appraising the field that we worked in; being female and committed to feminism; and the experience of motherhood in my last case study. Those elements of positionality, often addressed and referred back to, acted as a platform that allowed all our other divisions and



differences to be held safely in one unifying web of connections. It permitted other identities (young and old; professional and grassroots activists; Roma and non-Roma; family and friendships) to come into conflict yet be resolved.

Underscoring all this was a commitment of the participants to being honest and admitting to prejudices, as well as, in the third example, to addressing every division and conflict in the group instead of hoping these would go away. In the first and last case studies, well-designed and commonly agreed processes of working through and resolving emotional difficulties were important to keeping the inquiry as a live process where everyone could contribute. In the last chapter, I will build on the learning that I have gained from my inquiry to describe some of the new spaces and opportunities critical whiteness can open for Roma and non-Roma. Drawing on specific examples from my fieldwork, I will also offer some reflections on how these opportunities can lead not only to better understanding between Roma and non-Roma, but also to changes in antigypsyist attitudes, behaviours and policies.

## **Chapter 9 Conclusions Why bother with a critically white approach?**

Much of my inquiry has dealt with the details of how to construct and conduct a dialogue between Roma and non-Roma that is based on preparation, honesty and commitment. I started this thesis in chapter 1 by giving an overview of antigypsyism and some of the movements that have sought to articulate and address it in the past 10 years. I argued that recognising antigypsyism as an historic and systematic form of white racism has led to a paradigm shift in approaching not only the well-being and inclusion of Roma people in societies, but also the way non-Roma think about their identities and ways of organising. In chapter 2, I laid out some of the key theories and concepts that I used throughout my research to make my case for arriving at critically white non-Romani identities: philosophical hermeneutics, critical race theory, feminism and queer approaches. I also explained in this chapter how understanding the wider discourses around ethnicities, race, racism and history are pertinent to approaching and dealing with antigypsyism. Chapter 3 described my research design, and my choice of methodology and methods, including critical anthropology and participatory action research which were the basis for my fieldwork. I also explained how hermeneutics, critical race theory and feminism influenced the kind of research I undertook and my activities throughout the inquiry. I then turned to the results of my field research, describing four elements of understanding that I found were important for non-Roma to acquire critically white identities. The first of these, detailed in chapter 4, is the unrecognised and rarely noticed ways in which effective history influences present-day realities. I see this as one of the main entry points for non-Roma wishing to start reclaiming and unravelling what is otherwise a normalised and invisible white identity. In chapter 5 I argued that this historical awareness builds on and is accompanied by a capacity to continuously open up to new understandings (*Bildung*). Both of these are helpful to acquire a practical understanding of non-Romaniness (as described in chapter 6) and to navigate the instances where Roma and non-Roma horizons of understanding differ to a point where they can no longer be reconciled (chapter 7). I showed that if these conditions are in place, then hermeneutic dialogue (chapter 8) can lead to a deep, politically engaged and long-term

process where the identities of participants are examined, deconstructed and eventually (hopefully) reconstructed in a way that expands the understanding of those involved. All these steps in my experience can lead to non-Roma reclaiming an identity that is progressive, ever-expanding and that can address antigypsyism. I argued that this takes a lot more work and dedication than most non-Roma have so far been able to comprehend and apply themselves to.

Two elements of dialogue stand out as crucially important and I conclude this research by showing some of the results they can lead to. On the one hand, sustained solidarity and honest communication between, and increasing action initiated by non-Roma individually and collectively is key to developing and owning a progressive, critically white non-Romani identity.

On the other hand, I argue that living out a *gebildete* non-Romani identity would require engaging in constant hermeneutic dialogue with Roma and being able to process the racial discomfort of being challenged on our antigypsyism on a regular basis. Beyond a long-term commitment to reclaiming non-Romani identity, this way of living requires non-Roma to be ready for honest and open communication with Roma and with each other whenever the opportunity arises. These opportunities may come upon us suddenly (as in those intuitive Eureka moments that I have described in chapter 7), but only as a result of long years of learning and focus can non-Roma rise to the occasion without being undermined by white fragility.

Furthermore, hermeneutic dialogue is a continuous process that keeps unfolding and bringing new insights. It owes a lot to paying attention, listening and building clarity between people and, more often than not, does not have an ultimate agenda (Scott-Villiers, 2009, p. 179). As we have seen, hermeneutics is not a method but a state of mind of openness and continuous questioning, 'a posture [requiring] that one always be prepared that the other may be right' (Dostal, 2002, p. 32). In this sense, hermeneutic understanding seeks to inform and guide method, such as intercultural or interethnic dialogue, aiming to rescue it from being blithe, superficial and over-eager to reach agreement, ignoring the gulf between the self and the Other.

I have shown that deconstructing and reclaiming new patterns of identity is not a mechanical operation. Similarly to living out the being-in-motion required of *Bildung*, deconstruction and reconstruction are not 'a method and cannot be transformed into one' (Derrida, 1988, p. 3). Furthermore, deconstruction is not an operations under the control or volition of the one who chooses to deconstruct. As Derrida (1988) puts it, 'following a Heideggerian schema, we are in an "epoch" of being-in-deconstruction' (p. 4). In the same way, neither can the process of *Bildung* be reduced to a schematic set of instructions, nor can the obstacles that arise in dialogue, such as white fragility, be regarded as just differences of viewpoint. In this respect, my participant Bella's dilemmas are real and noteworthy, when she remarks that there are no easy and immediate solutions to antigypsyism (Bella, field interviews, 2015, 2017, 2018). Just as she correctly observes that non-Roma cannot change their minds (hermeneutically speaking, they cannot acquire *Bildung*) through participation in a training course on cultural differences; she also remarks in her insightful reflections that it is easy to bring up the discomfort associated with antigypsyism but much more difficult to deal with it. In other words, the obstacles in understanding between Roma and non-Roma cannot be settled through simply talking them through. They are literal discontinuities in horizons of meaning, born of centuries of divergent effective histories that Roma and non-Roma have lived through and carry within them.

True hermeneutic dialogue can contribute to the effort required to undo a history of discrimination, yet it is a considerable undertaking. It is 'a way of being and behaving, which changes with experience and attention' (Scott-Villiers, 2009, p. 25). As has hopefully become clear in chapters 6 and 7, it requires an effort that has much more to do with confrontation than a comfortable fusion of ideas. It goes beyond superficial engagement or political correctness to personal engagement with the deeper meanings and truths of people separated by 'gulfs of incomprehension' (Scott-Villiers, 2009, p. 70). It can be a process fraught with many pitfalls and potential conflicts, since even the words 'ethnic' or 'racial' or 'identity' immediately conjure up deeply held emotional beliefs that can jeopardise communication. It is fraught with emotions and prejudices that if dressed up

as part of the dialogical process are able to move it forward without becoming mired in resentment and silence. Whether it moves us towards greater openness rather than greater entrenchment or resentment (Wijeyesinghe et al., 1997, pp. 1-3) can be a litmus test of the temporary success of such dialogue. At the same time, neither retrenchment nor resentment are permanent nor necessarily negative, and they may even be signs that a bigger discontinuity is at play than previously envisaged. Just as *Bildung* (individual and collective) has a way of calling into question previous understanding, it can in time, lead to wider and wider circles of dialogue and resolve some obstacles to it while bringing up new ones.

So, with the caveat that these are but temporary insights, I conclude my thesis with a series of testimonials recounted by my participants, in the hope that they will inspire others. These strike me as good examples of hermeneutic understanding born out of dialogical processes. showing powerful yet non-dominant ways in which non-Roma reach new understandings that can underpin Roma efforts at combating antigypsyism. They range from coming to terms with the truth about antigypsyism to being open to being challenged about it to standing with Roma against the oppression.

#### **‘Knowing and not knowing at the same time’<sup>6</sup>**

Through the workshops I described in chapter 8, I learned that when non-Roma profess ignorance of the contributions of Roma to our lives and societies, this is not an entirely honest position. Once we start telling our stories of Roma, many of us find that we and our families have been in complex symbiotic relationships with Romani communities, as I describe repeatedly throughout this inquiry. Yet not paying attention to those relationships and to Roma contributions to our well-being has resulted in us looking away when we or our fellow non-Roma have persecuted them, as happens on an everyday basis.

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<sup>6</sup> Stephan Steiner, field interview, 2018

Speaking as a historian who has researched forgotten instances of ethnic cleansing and genocide, Stephan Steiner talked about an undercurrent of 'knowing and not knowing that impregnates the society. It brings a special type of tension in the society as if you are sitting on explosive material, in many forms' (Stephan, field interview, 2018). He went on to describe his own ignorance about historical deportations of Roma that happened in the village where he grew up. Through his honesty, he illustrated the state of white fragility in which many non-Roma find themselves before they embark on the journey towards *Bildung*. Conversely, we agreed during our conversations that paying attention to antigypsyism means not only being horrified by the atrocities committed against Roma periodically but also by the myriad of ways in which they have been hurt throughout history and that continue to project their legacy into the present. By understanding and owning up to these micro and macro aggressions, non-Roma can lay the groundwork for relationships with Roma that can address the more dramatic effects of antigypsyism as and when they happen, as highlighted below.

**Becoming trusted enough to be put forward as an intermediary in situations where racism is present**

Sometimes, as in the example below, non-Roma find themselves in positions where their *Bildung* and awareness of antigypsyism place them in positions where they are able to stand shoulder to shoulder with Roma and speak out against antigypsyism when they notice it. There is a valuable role for non-Roma in these situations, where they can validate and support the perception of Roma who may not be able to stand up against instances of racism without additional backing. This was the experience of Bianca when she found herself targeted with open antigypsyism:

And that situation was so beautiful and so sad. Because my friendship with my female friend, became so strong, she didn't let go my hand. It brings tears, because oppression is very real [crying] and it's so beautiful that a Roma becomes a complete sister to someone that is not a Roma and can speak truth to power. So my friendship with these girls helped me develop so much as a human being and to really have the vocabulary I have and to speak my mind and they with their friendship are not teaching me, no just in daily life telling me 'B, actually you don't need to explain to people, you are not there to educate, if you want to speak, you speak, if you don't, no. You don't owe people your energy and moreover when they maybe hurt you and they again ask you to put yourself in the situation

to explain what they did wrong, no, you don't need to explain that, you don't need to pamper adults'. (Bianca, field interview, 2017)

These are precious positions for non-Roma to find themselves in, usually arrived at through years of friendships with Roma. It is from those places that non-Roma can move against institutional antigypsyism, as in the example below where a Roma asks a non-Roma friend to become her trusted intermediary:

So I do have a friend who I work with. I met him by accident and I asked him to help me in my work. And we were in so many situations when my voice would simply not be heard, even though I was the person responsible, they would look at him. It's so stupid and funny. So sometimes I would be like 'S, can you please say this because they will not listen to me?' So I'm using his privilege in so many situations, which is so funny and so sad at the same time, but you would have to laugh because if not you would lose your mind. So that's what I do sometimes and then I recover. But that's the situation, and what is funny is that I call him 'mire pheni' which is 'my sister' in Roma. We two make a very good team in this way: he understands his privilege [laughs] and he facilitates things in order for my voice to be heard. (Bianca, field interview 2017)

The non-Roma who do the work that allows them to play these roles become the lynchpins of a new way of relating to Roma and show the way towards groups of non-Roma playing similar roles, either individually or collectively. These are the positions (humble and almost invisible proximity to Romani friends) that allow non-Roma to contribute to addressing long-standing patterns of inequality created by antigypsyism.

### **Giving up white privilege; making space for Roma**

At other times, non-Roma can go even further by changing antigypsyist structures and policies and openly giving up their privileges to benefit Roma colleagues and friends. This could be called 'affirmative action', which all too often invites a huge amount of backlash. But done well, in partnership and respecting each other, it can be helpful for non-Roma to support Roma as they move into positions of power. Janos thinks that there is a space for non-Roma to work with Roma and build their capacity in a range of skills, and that there are many Roma who need this support to become competitive:

So you cannot take someone on just because they are Roma. But you can invest in those who are Roma and have the motivation to learn. Sometimes it doesn't work out and then you take on someone else, just like in any other job you may replace someone who doesn't

work out, they are not the right person, who then leave and you hire another person. (Janos, field interview, 2015)

The point that Janos was making had to do with foregrounding the values involved in fighting antigypsyism above pure efficiency and expediency, and thus making allowances for white privilege. In my own organisation, I have had to fight to employ Roma staff who had excellent skills but were not deemed to be suitable because of language skills. Yet one of my colleagues went even further by giving up her own job when she noticed that a Roma colleague could do it better. While it was not a comfortable change on either side, the relationships between my two staff have grown to where they can continue to support each other. The added benefit is that our Romani colleague feels respected to a point that he is able to regularly call us out on our antigypsyism whenever he notices it. We have had many passionate discussions on this subject, for example when he pointed out that we did not fight to include Roma participants at conferences and other professional opportunities. So far, I and my non-Roma colleagues have been able to listen, say sorry and make amends to the extent that he is willing to continue sharing his legitimate criticisms.

### **Building an independent non-Romani movement**

As I have shown in chapter 1, many Romani and some non-Romani activists have undergone a process of understanding and confronting antigypsyism personally and collectively. However, in chapter 7 we have seen how starting discussions about antigypsyism can often rebound on Roma because of the fragility of individual non-Romas' sense of their identity and the lack of a non-Roma critically white movement.

Yet the idea of white people taking action against racism has been coming up more frequently in academia (DiAngelo, 2019) and in my discussions with non-Roma colleagues: '[Y]ou see this a lot in the discourse coming around, you know Facebook is just great these days if you're kind of tapped into this kind of anti-racist stuff' (Kyle, field interview, 2018). This is an indication that a movement of non-Roma committed to ending racism is an idea whose time has come. I have argued throughout this inquiry that we now have the beginnings of a group of non-Romani activists and



academics that are willing to come together and work towards critical whiteness. As highlighted in chapter 5, it is all too easy for antigypsyism to separate non-Roma families and friends because they think that critically white Roma are, to use a phrase from my interview with Werner (2019), ‘the mutants, the outsiders’. The task I have set myself and that I see as essential in fighting antigypsyism, is to unite those who have embarked on this journey of critical whiteness in solidarity with each other and our Roma colleagues and friends. But one question remains: is there a role for non-Roma in the fight against antigypsyism?

The answer from all of my participants, whether Roma or non-Roma, is an unequivocal yes.

The non-Roma have a fundamental role for social change. But this cannot happen without generating another type of discourse about Roma and without, sorry I have to say this in English, *shaping the institutions*, yeah? The role of non-Roma in this respect is fundamental. And there is a huge space for them here. As I already said, I want to see these things happen, but I want to see that they are based on values. That circle, I want it to be a lot wider. Society cannot change if non-Roma don’t get involved. Roma need to be in the lead, yeah, but they have to have non-Roma amongst them, otherwise you cannot make the change. (Janos, interview, 2015)

### **Squaring the hermeneutic circle**

I hope that I have shown how the depth of engagement necessary to understand and overcome racism and the role of white people within that is neither comfortable nor easy. Some of my participants think it is almost impossible, while others believe it can be done. Either way, it requires what Spivak (2008) has called ‘pedagogic attention, to learn to weave the torn fabric in unexpected ways’ (p. 40). The problem that Spivak alludes to is that of recovering subaltern knowledge, which has been colonised and twisted in ways that are Eurocentric yet now cannot be abandoned since they are imbued with the historic reality of oppression. To this Spivak offers no easy solutions beyond an understanding that teaching Humanities can reclaim a way of thinking that does not automatically reach for righting wrongs. It is a pedagogy that imparts a sense of responsibility that is not synonymous with duty but goes beyond that into a way of relating to others. The responsibility she speaks of is not the Churchillian version ‘that comes from the consciousness of

superiority lodged in the self' (Spivak, 2008, p. 26), but rather a commitment to undermine the received wisdom of the coloniser being better than the colonised. Spivak speaks about a commitment to undermine the binary nature of superior and inferior and such is the undermining that I have reached for in this research, for and on behalf of my fellow non-Roma.

Perhaps the more important insight that I have gained from my research is that we are all, Roma and non-Roma alike, party to the universal process of historical change alluded to by Spivak above. We find ourselves, consciously or unconsciously, participants in the effective history of ethnicity and race as that arose as cultural boundaries and morphed into politicised constructs used for instrumental and exploitative purposes that cast a veil of blackness over society. My claim is that hermeneutic attention to these phenomena; as well as the attitude and practice of critical whiteness can influence our actions and thus help puncture that veil of blackness. In time, I believe that these ideas can be translated into attitudes, behaviours and policies that result in antigypsyism becoming an interesting historical fact with no immediate practical relevance or effect on the lives of Roma or non-Roma alike.

However, while the practical applications of the theoretical approach described above are multiple and may have a demonstrable effect on policy, 'wisdom continues to make its contribution to the lives we all live today' (Scott-Villiers, 2009, p. 205) and hermeneutic consciousness once embarked upon is an open-ended journey. That is perhaps its most precious gift – that a journey of understanding, once embarked on, can have a transformative effect beyond the immediate and time-bound.

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