Migratory encounters, common idiom, and the king: The relationship between two Roma groups from Poland in transnational social space

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Roma ethnicity presents scholars with plenty of conceptual and methodological challenges, which in the light of the increased mobility of that largest European minority after EU enlargements has additionally perplexed academics and policy-makers alike. This article presents our fieldwork data derived from encounters and conversations with Roma individuals in Poland and England. Our approach to this issue is rooted in the emic perspective, examining how Roma people navigate and cope with their own heterogeneity. By focusing on the relationship between two Roma groups from Poland, namely Polska Roma and Bergitka (or Carpathian) Roma, we shed light on Roma's practical approaches to their group identity. We explore what is at stake when boundaries are encountered, negotiated, and occasionally bridged, in particular when it comes to gender and conflict resolution strategies. In the article, we account for the two groups' interconnections through the history of migrations and current modes of transnational living. We show how, interestingly, nationality or common country of origin may become the binding factor.

Keywords: Polish Roma, transnational social space, migration, encounter, ethnicity

Introduction

After 1989, Roma mobility has generated significant interest among scholars, as noted by various researchers (Matras 2013; Roman 2018). A substantial number of papers, journals' special issues, books, and conference proceedings provides strong evidence for the heightened attention towards this ethnic group. With the accession of new member states to the European Union in 2004 and 2007, a significant number of Roma individuals exercised their

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rights as EU citizens, leading to substantial migration flows. This particular phenomenon has ignited considerable interest among EU politicians, member states, NGOs, and the academic community. However, it is not surprising that such interest often leads to oversimplified, reductive, and one-dimensional portrayals, not only of the lives of migrating Roma but also of the diverse range of groups encompassed within this category. As Raluca Bianca Roman (2018) observes, the majority of analyses in this fast-growing body of knowledge focus on the broader, top-down implications of cross-border mobility, such as the economic, social, and political consequences within the context of freedom of movement, welfare state limitations, and mobility regime politics, with only a small number of studies devoted to "Roma subjective and politicized experience of mobility" (Roman 2018: 38), where complex layers of interests, subjectivities, ideas, practices of institutions, NGOs, Roma activists, and Roma transnational migrants produce a multi-faced, dynamic social reality. One of the factors of that complexity is that Roma themselves constitute a unique non-territorial ethnic group (Matras 2013) with the level of internal diversity problematizing the notion of ethnicity, especially in the primordialist sense of the term (for this discussion, see Stewart 2013). In these discourses, the status of Roma mobilization, transnationalism, or diasporic ethnicization is often raised (Fosztó 2003; Bunescu 2014), and there are vital discussions revolving around our current understanding of the development of Roma identity. Nonetheless, it is important to note that such broad academic debates often lead to a loss of fine ethnographic details and a sense of what kind of diversification we talk about. Crucially, they fail to explore how and when Roma individuals themselves actively participate in the social construction of their group, ethnic, or national identity in their everyday lives and interactions with new significant others.

This article offers a departure from these generalized debates and focuses on the dynamics and negotiations of Roma identity in a migratory, transnational context. It discusses the relationships, discourses, politics, and resulting cultural practices stemming from interactions between two groups of Roma in Poland – called Polska Roma and Bergitka (or Carpathian) Roma. Prior to the onset of Roma migrations after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in the early 1990s (Matras 2013), of which the Polish Roma were a relatively small part, these two groups led relatively isolated lives in Poland (Kowarska 2010; Mirga and Mróz 1994), even though in certain instances and social spaces, interactions did occur, albeit sporadically, and rare occurrences of intermarriages were documented (Kamiński 1980; Koper 2018). However, the rapid increase in the international mobility of both groups, first to Germany, then to Great Britain, has brought them closely together – through the sharing of migratory social capital, participation in the same migration networks, information exchange,

engagement with similar NGOs, and a noticeable increase in intermarriage. These changes have fostered mutual cultural exchange, but they have also given rise to tensions in power relations, particularly concerning gender and class dynamics. The aim of this article is to make sense anthropologically of the story of different Roma groups connected through common nationality encounters in a migratory context and explain what this means for the emerging – or non-emerging – Roma identity, sense of belonging, adaptability to new contexts and social praxis, but also what Michael Stewart has carefully called a "sense of emotional commonality …, an idiom of commonality as opposed to identity or corporate interest [which] lies at the foundation of Romany sociality" (Stewart 2013: 422).

In our analysis, we adopt a perspective that views group boundaries not as fixed and rigid demarcations dividing groups, but rather as a fluid, negotiable, and subjective social resource which emerges out of interactions and strategic decisions people make in changing contexts. Due to their internal diversity, the Roma present a problem for classifications based on an "ethnic lens" that notoriously muddies the waters of migration research (Glick Schiller, Çaglar, and Guldbrandsen 2006). Furthermore, as Stewart reminds us, "one of the things the anthropology of Roma and Gypsies has taught is how much of an ideological notion the very notion of ethnicity itself is" (Stewart 2013: 418).

But as we account for, analyse, and interpret our Roma respondents' encounters, reactions to other Roma, and complex practices of distancing themselves and maintaining the "common idiom," we observe that, in the "demotic" (Baumann 1996) Roma discourse of everyday life, layers of different categories are used depending on the context, need, and type of interactions – with whom, when, why, and how. In the case we describe, Polish Roma, with whom we spoke frequently, jumped from talking about themselves as members of a particular group (Polska Roma or Bergitka) or as members of a particular settlement, kinship group, or regional identity, which are all important units of the social organization of the Roma (Mirga and Mróz, 1994; Mirga 1987; Kowarska 2010; Koper 2018; Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2014). Indeed, it takes careful attention to these types of interactions and labels to decode the complex, multi-sided ways with which an ethnic or group category is used and maintained. In that sense, we follow the call of the anthropologist studying migrating Slovakian Roma, Jan Grill (2018), and assess the "myriad relations embedded within the movement of Roma" (Roman 2018: 38). One of the most important for the people we studied, we argue, is the relationship with the other group they know well from the Polish context (even if contact with them was minimal). Since these groups share a common political and economic past in one nation state (Poland) and subsequent familiarity with Polishness and in some cases a clear identification with it, this brings a certain

"nationalization" of the Roma idiom of commonality in transnational social space. This phenomenon reveals an additional dimension of the migratory encounters in which Roma are currently embedded.

The authors of this article have two broad goals in mind: first, to discuss the migration microhistory of Roma from Poland of which little is known; second, to ethnographically present the consequences of the growing frequency of personal and family encounters that gradually brought Roma groups together in the migratory context. Until recently, very little has been written about migration of the Polish Roma, so this article additionally fills an important gap in both migration and Romani studies. The ethnographic gap, or silence, in relation to Polish Roma is quite intriguing, as discussed by Fiałkowska, Garapich, and Mirga-Wójtowicz (2019; 2020), who show how Polish academia, in a neo-colonial manner, has "immobilized" the Roma in order to maintain their status of "outsider" from our ostensibly uniform and homogenous society. This tendency stems from much deeper structures of anti-Gypsyism, still legitimized in Polish academia, which assumes that Roma share homogenous, essentialist traits which distinguish them from the non-Roma rest (Huub van Bar 2014). Thus, in the Polish academic context, this article brings the Roma worldview to the front, departing from the still dominant way in which Polish scholarship treats that group, with articles often discussing Roma but without actually hearing their voices (see, for example, Nowicka and Witkowski 2020).

In her critique of academic scholarship on the Roma, Mirga-Kruszelnicka argues that "[p]art of the efforts aiming at dismantling notions of antigypsyism must therefore focus on disrupting and challenging essentialized discourses by providing plural narratives of diverse and intersecting identities, which more accurately reflect the social reality of Romani lives" (2018: 12). Therefore, the broader aim of this paper is to contextualize and ethnographically ground the way in which Roma negotiate their own group cohesiveness, while at the same time being able to adapt to new, changing environments, in particular the world of the Gadje where "migrating racialisations" (Grill 2018) work in practice.

Methodological approach and data

In this article, we adapt a bottom-up anthropological approach to identity constructions following the emic perspective our respondents use when they talk about the notion of the Roma in the context of their heterogeneity, in particular when talking about "other" Roma. We do not engage in what we believe to be a fruitless discussion of whether the Roma constitute an ethnic group or not (Stewart 2013). After all, it is clear that the very ambiguity

regarding their status relates to how the Roma themselves respond to hegemonic discourses of nationalism seen as a natural state of human groups equating culture, territory, and social structure. In a way, the very ambiguity and fluidity of group boundaries corresponds with difficulties in framing the Roma into a conceptual straightjacket (see for discussion Kovats 2003; Surdu and Kovats 2015; Surdu 2016). Roma identity – as any other for that matter – constantly evolves, being dynamically negotiated and adapted in fast-changing conditions affecting their cultural ways of sense making, and at the same time maintaining the ontological security of cultural continuity. Michael Stewart rightly points out this fact, noting that "rich and honest analysis of Romany lives demands that authors transcend the 'ethnic' frame of reference" (Stewart 2013: 2), while at the same time calling for a relational model of cultural meaning production. Culture in that perspective is "not an intractable social force imposed on members, but it is continuously recreated by their interpretative prowess" (Cohen 1994: 135), which corresponds with the weight Clifford Geertz puts on the *meanings* of actions, rituals, and symbols that individuals activate in a given social context in order to maintain forms of social and cultural autonomy and political agency (Geertz 1983). This actor-centred approach fits perfectly with what has been recently argued by Sławomir Kapralski in his analysis of the politics of memory in which Roma in Poland are currently engaged (2008; 2012; 2014). Kapralski calls for an understanding of the complexity of Roma identity and history through a synthesis of theoretical frameworks treating Roma identity construction processes as substantive, relational, or dynamic, in which Roma respond consciously and actively, both through the elites and "grassroots" actions (of which migrations can be an example) related to changing political, cultural, and structural landscapes. In his critique of Michael Stewart's (1997) relational model of the Roma identity (Kapralski 2008: 228), Kapralski argues that besides essentialist and relational approaches to Romani culture and identity, we need to take into account linear and processual conscious attitudes to history and identity that are produced and negotiated by Roma themselves in diverse and fast-changing circumstances – local, national, European – but also in relation to a growing diversity of actors in everyday interactions, in particular in global urban centres of economic and political power like London where a growing number of Roma meet, talk, and choose to act, or not to act, together. In the context of recent migrations from Poland, these meaning-making practices are articulated to an increasingly wider and diverse audience, but they serve a similar cultural purpose – to make sense of the world and the changes it undergoes, to assert their own group identity, and to create new frameworks with which Roma can define their presence in given urban, social, and political contexts. In other words, in the

new migratory context, the Roma need to reaffirm and activate their "idiom" to new partners of interactions. After all, migrating Roma meet Roma from other countries and groups, so the obvious question would be when and how they emphasize or de-emphasize, act upon, perform, and negotiate their Roma background, ideas, and different traditions, and how this legitimizes their social action. Surprisingly, despite the considerable amount of research, not a lot has been written about this, with the majority of studies focusing on one specific group, although we review some instances of recent scholarship about the issue in the next section. And, as we argue in this paper, most meaningful for the Roma from Poland is to reassert and reflexively relate to their new place while interacting with the groups they know best, with whom they shared the political and economic sphere of the nation state and memory of large structural events, like economic and political transformation in the aftermath of the collapse of the Berlin Wall. This is why the relationship between the two largest groups of Polish Roma in the migratory context is of great theoretical interest. The everyday, linear, or circular emic life and family stories our respondents told us very often go to the heart of the matter, how Polish Roma culture adapts, changes, and strategically positions itself against other partners in migratory encounters, i.e. other Roma, other Polish migrants, or other ethnic groups.

This article is the result of several years of extensive ethnographic research conducted among the Roma communities in Poland and England. The primary objective of this research was to explore the history, migration patterns, adaptations, and current dimension of Polish Roma migrations to Great Britain. Using multi-sited ethnographic research methods, the study looks at two of the largest and distinct groups of Polish Roma – Polska Roma and Bergitka – in several locations in Poland and two locations in England. We investigated transnational networks developed among the Bergitka between Czarna Góra (a small village in the Tatra mountains in the south of Poland), London, and Southend, but also Nowa Huta near Kraków, where members of this group have also lived since the establishment of this industrial town in late 1940s. Furthermore, we explored the community of Polska Roma living in Mława, around 100 km north of Warsaw, and talked to members of that group living in other places in Poland. The fieldwork experience encompassed a wide range of immersive encounters, with interviews serving as just one component among many, with a serious consideration of Judith Okely's call for "ethnography without notes" (2008) where, among other things, a rapport of trust and understanding between research participants and researchers is key and multiple, repeated visits and casual conversations enable the ethnographer to understand their respondents' point of view. Classical anthropological methods were employed with long periods of participant

observations. The research involved conducting oral history interviews with elder members of Roma communities, engaging in unstructured conversations, and sometimes conducting these interactions in a family group setting around the kitchen table. Additionally, individual interviews were conducted in more private settings, away from the disciplining atmosphere of Roma households, allowing for a deeper exchange of experiences and perspectives. Throughout several periods of intensive ethnographic research, we closely followed transnationally dispersed families, participating in important family events such as christenings or funerals, engaging in daily conversations, whether in person or through modern means of communication, or listening to gossip, stories, and comments regarding Roma migrations.

The discussions, interviews, and observations enabled us to reconstruct the migration histories from the locations in question and to observe the functioning of the migration networks, spanning across two or more countries. In line with the transnational lens and methodology, our fieldwork locations were connected by the life of transnational families (cf. Amelina and Faist 2012). The methodological relational perspective is perfectly suited to capturing and making sense of the everyday ways with which Roma relate to other Roma, in particular when it comes to living in a migratory or transnational context. Furthermore, the research team consisted of both Polish Roma and non-Roma researchers. This inclusive composition not only fostered an additional level of trust among our respondents but also, importantly, responded to the call for greater representation of Roma origin researchers in the production of knowledge concerning contemporary Roma communities (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2018).

It is important to highlight that the individuals we interviewed and spent significant time with are not passive actors in terms of making sense of their own status within society, particularly regarding migration. Far from it; the high levels of agency and reflections of Polish Roma are manifested in their vast experiences of international migration since the late 1980s, passed on to next generations in the form of localized social praxis. Navigating the complex and changing web of immigration restrictions between the East and West since at least half a century ago makes them experts in detecting structural shifts, legal ways, administrative issues, and changing immigration law and was only possible by virtue of highly developed social networks structuring their migration patterns, stimulating the specific collectivism of migration culture, and becoming a major driver of social change among some groups. Echoing the findings of Kamiński's study on the migration of Polish Kelderasha in the 1970s (1980), which highlighted the significance of connections with Polska Roma and Bergitka as sources of social capital, our research revealed that the social networks we examined transcended these

two groups, uniting them in their collective pursuit of migration. The agency is then manifested in various ways and negotiations involved in activating, acting upon, or resisting the idiom of commonality.

Relations between different Roma groups

The frequently described encounter between two unfamiliar Roma individuals attempting to establish a family connection can be interpreted as a real-life manifestation of the unequal position in understanding how the "idiom of commonality" is maintained, challenged, or shared. Many ethnographies document Roma's awareness of "other Roma/Gypsies" and highlight how this awareness plays a significant role in creating boundaries, demarcations, and fostering group cohesion within the Roma community. But with the increase of EU mobility and amplified state attention to the Roma within European migration regimes, resulting in their "racialisation" (Grill 2011), Roma themselves inevitably encounter an increasing number of the Roma from other, unfamiliar groups or sub-groups and need to make sense of it.

Marco Solimene offers valuable insights into the encounter between two Roma groups in a migratory context, namely the Romanian Roma and Xoraxana Roma from Bosnia, living in the Magliana suburbs of the Italian capital city (Solimene 2011). As a result of occupying distinct yet occasionally overlapping economic niches, employing complex strategies to evade authorities' scrutiny, and having different statuses within the framework of mobility regimes, the two groups maintained a very delicate relationship in which "competition and collaboration, distance and vicinity, otherness and identity seemed to coexist as two sides of the same coin" (Solimene 2011: 648), at times despising and regarding each other as uncivilized and backward. In particular, the Xoraxa seemed to operationalize their identity labels to the point of putting the *Rumuni* in the domain of the Gadje, the non-Roma world. Still, on a personal level, there were also instances of maintaining friendships and providing mutual assistance, even to the extent of intermarriage between the two groups (Solimene 2011: 646). According to Solimene's account, it becomes evident that for the Bosnian Roma, a significant concern was that the actions and misbehaviour of the Romanian Roma would attract the attention of authorities, ultimately resulting in the enforcement of stricter anti-Roma policies by the Italian state, which did, in fact, happen. The need to stress distance, even depriving them of being called Roma, stemmed from the fact of being put in the same category by the state.

An additional perspective on the mobility aspects of encounters between various Roma groups is presented in a study on the Finnish Roma Pentecostalists' humanitarian migration to Romania (Roman 2018). Within the

rapidly evolving landscape of Roma mobility, this particular case of Roma migration from the West to East, influenced by the pan-ethnic Pentecostal message of giving and receiving, sheds light on the attitudes of affluent Roma individuals when encountering their less privileged counterparts, highlighting the complex dilemmas that arise in such encounters. Most importantly, these accounts provide valuable insights into our understanding of what constitutes help, what is Roma solidarity, and how the West–East boundaries are negotiated.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that, in both of the cases described, we are examining encounters between individuals who share merely an abstract sense of Roma identity, unlike the Polish Roma community discussed here, which has the historical and political context of a shared nation-state.

Reflections concerning the political dimension of various Roma groups' cooperation has grown into a rich body of literature. The key argument by Yaron Matras is that one of the key points of commonality that united the Roma was the struggle against hostile mobility regimes, as he explains in his analysis of the politicization of the Roma movement in Germany in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when diverse groups of Roma from Central and Eastern Europe came together in a collective struggle for recognition, and to fight against the hostile mobility regime and reparations for Nazi crimes (Matras 2013). In the context of international Romani politics, Thomas Acton's contributions are undeniably invaluable. His extensive accounts illuminate the responses of multiple Roma groups to anti-Gypsy policies, offering essential insights for understanding these phenomena. Interestingly, Acton also wrote about the political and social activism of the Polish Roma in the 1990s and the emergence of one of most active Roma NGOs in Great Britain, the Roma Support Group (RSG) (Acton and Ingmire 2011). This is probably the best example of Romani activism on British soil, bringing together various groups, both of migration origin and local – as the RSG cooperated early on with the Gypsy Council – and other organizations. As Acton and Ingmire note (2011), Polish Roma have inserted a considerable amount of energy, expertise, and activism in bringing together various Roma groups, English Gypsies, and sympathetic Gadje, and several issues make the "Polish Roma stand out" (2011: 2; see also next section). Notably, the Bergitka group is not mentioned in this article. The group of Polish Roma activists who fought deportations, aided asylum seekers in immigration matters, and raised awareness about Roma issues primarily consisted of individuals from Polska Roma, along with a few members from the Lovari and Kalderash communities (Acton and Ingmire 2011: 3).

A more detailed and anthropologically situated analysis of the dynamics, reasons, tensions, and cultural issues at stake, while forging the sense

of commonality in the migration context, can also be found in other cases looking at Roma from Poland. Kamiński's (1980) work delves into the intricate and challenging migration trajectory of several Kalderasha families from Poland to Sweden. The study also explores the Swedish Kalderasha's response to their arrival, which consisted of a mixture of approval and concern. The prevailing of the former attitude was dependent on the recognition of the migrating families' superior power position within the kinship group. Overall, however, there has been limited research investigating the encounters of specific Roma groups within a single country, particularly regarding the examination of their shared history encompassing mutual awareness, practices of maintaining distance, and occasional discreet interactions and cooperation. The anthropological account of the two groups of Polish Roma in a migratory context provides such an opportunity.

Polska Roma and Bergitka Roma are two major Roma groups in Poland, having quite distinct and dissimilar histories (Ficowski 1986; Bartosz 2004 [1994]; Mróz and Mirga 1994; Koper 2018). The former came to Poland in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries from Germany, and they linguistically resemble Roma in Germany and Sinti. Leading a nomadic or semi-nomadic life until the late 1970s, they were usually engaged in petty trade, music services, horse trading, and seasonal manual labour. Bergitka Roma, in turn, sometimes referred to as Carpathian Roma, and self-describing as *Amare Roma* ('our Roma' – this self-ascription is suggested by Koper 2018), were settled by Austrian authorities by the late eighteenth century, in what is today the southern tip of Poland, around the Tatra mountains. They are sedentary, sometimes occupying exactly the same plots given to them by the Habsburg authorities, traditionally engaged in seasonal labour but mostly renowned for their skilled blacksmith work and music. In terms of language and culture, they are closely related to Roma living on the other side of the Tatra mountains in Slovakia (Ficowski 1986; Bartosz 2004 [1994]; Mróz and Mirga 1994; Koper 2018; Mirga-Wójtowicz and Szewczyk 2020). Diverse histories lead to distinct codes of behaviour, traditions, and sets of norms and values making one a Roma – *romanipen* (Mirga 1987). In that context, scholars note that a specific hierarchy is set between these groups, with Polska Roma regarding Bergitka as "less" traditional and not adhering to certain Roma customs, in particular with regard to maintaining norms of purity and taboos related to gender and food (Mróz and Mirga 1994; Koper 2018). For Tomasz Koper, an ethnographer from the Bergitka Roma, these distinctions are set in longer historical processes, but they still set power relations between the two groups, with Polska Roma labelling the Carpathian Roma as polluted (Koper 2018: 198), often using the term "labance" [the Polonized version is *łabańce*, see Koper 2018: 46], which is a derogatory name for Bergitka referring to an

alleged practice of consuming dog meat. From a more critical perspective, it is clear that the early ethnographers themselves have reinforced this hierarchy by referring to Bergitka as members of the "Gypsy proletariat." Jerzy Ficowski even mentions that, in effect, the mountain-dwelling Roma are "de-gypsizied" (Ficowski 1986: 6), a term which raises a lot of eyebrows among today's Roma from that group. It is clear that, in his account of what constitutes "Roma," Ficowski himself has followed a rather romanticized and highly essentialist idea.

The importance of these group boundaries for the Roma and for ethnographers alike results in their reification and simplification, making some scholars claim that until "recently contacts between groups were impossible" (Kowarska 2010). As Kowarska writes: "These attitudes are present among very conservative Roma who also cannot accept mixed marriages, changes in customs, ways of dressing, or participating in formal education" (2010: 6). We would contest this claim. Of course, these groups' boundaries were important for the Roma, but they were never unbridgeable, and both groups had a general awareness about Roma who were "not like us." Our data shows that contacts existed, although they were carefully disciplined. What is more, in a migratory context, these contacts are increasingly intensifying, bringing the two groups together. Regardless of the impact of ethnographers, mutual categorization of different Roma groups is a social fact that sets not only internal hierarchies but also conditions of mutual relationships, terms of interactions, and conditions on which to enter matrimonial arrangements or business endeavours. What remains important in the context of our study is that both groups have distinct systems of conflict resolution and custom law implementation; Bergitka has a loose assemblage of elderly authorities, whereas Polska Roma has a more hierarchical system with the Shero Rom (Šero Rom, Siero Rom, Szero Rom) – also known as the king to this particular Roma group – settling disputes and giving advice (Ficowski 1986; Mirga and Mróz 1994). As we shall see, this institution comes into sharp focus in a migratory context.

Two migrations, two groups

Based on our fieldwork in Czarna Góra, Nowa Huta, and Mława, it becomes evident that the groups residing in these areas have a notable recent migratory history. In later stages, these groups merged into one, thereby influencing the relationships between Polska Roma and Bergitka in the destination countries. Additionally, as in transnational social remittances, these migration patterns and interactions have impacted the perception of both groups among those who have not migrated (cf. Grabowska et al.

2017). Essentially, the brief story is that the Polska Roma group, along with smaller ones such as Lovari and Kalderasha – although with this group there are early accounts of migration (see Kaminski 1980) – began to make their move first in the 1980s or early 1990s. In the case of Mława, it is important to highlight that Roma settlements had pre-existing networks, as they were known for their used-car dealership business, which involved cars brought from Germany. This was a lucrative business in times of shortages in the socialist economy, and the Roma quickly gained a reputation as skilled businesspeople, able to arrange a lot of things. During the prosperity of the 1980s, several huge, baroque-type houses were built, which are still standing today, although in decay. At the end of the 1980s, some of the Roma families in Mława were a relatively wealthy and influential group in the town. With the collapse of communism and subsequent economic shock therapy, their fate was reversed. In 1991, after a local Roma caused a car accident in which a local Gadjo was killed, the local impoverished Gadje population organized an anti-Roma riot, targeting the affluent Roma in the town and inflicting huge damage to property (Giza-Poleszczuk and Poleszczuk 2001; Kapralski 2016). In the aftermath of the anti-Roma pogrom, as a result of increased international attention and the ease of travel to Western countries, a significant number of Roma individuals sought asylum in the UK, Sweden, Germany, and Canada (Matras 2000). Most importantly, the first large group went to Germany. In the early 1990s, asylum restrictions and the system of readmissions from Germany was implemented (Sobotka 2003), and as a result it became increasingly difficult for the Roma to ask for asylum there. The flow of the mid-1990s then shifts to Great Britain, where it continued with some fluctuations until the early 2000s (Fiałkowska, Mirga-Wójtowicz, and Garapich 2022).

Our research findings and the literature highlight multiple ways in which Roma individuals accessed Western countries, either through seeking asylum (whether successful or not) leading to temporary irregular stays, or by joining family networks already present in those countries. In her article, Eva Sobotka (2003) illustrates the ways of entering Germany by the Polish Roma – either using the *Aussiedler* scheme (people of German citizenship prior to the war, who remained on Polish territories after the border change), as asylum seekers, or as irregular migrants in the late decades of the socialist regime in Poland. This combination of strategies was evident in the story of one of our interview partners from Polska Roma about their brother's escape from Poland, who eventually got asylum in Germany and settled in Hamburg. From their account, it becomes evident that the family has had interactions with other Roma individuals in Germany, be it the *Aussiedler* or post-war refugees:

He was picked on the border, he said that he escaped, that he cannot live here any more, so he went there, to get asylum …. Him, his wife and all their children …. [**Interviewer:** With eight children? It must have been difficult to organize it?] I don't even know how he did it because they were not telling us anything, perhaps they were afraid to tell. [B. and E., female, Polska Roma, aged >70]

They joined the family of their brother several times, working in the shadow economy, and witnessing the collapse of the Berlin Wall:

And we went too, it was I think 1990, the wall collapsed [**Interviewer:** Did you ask for asylum?] No, no, but we were living with some people. [B., male, Polska Roma, aged 80]

Despite the encouragement of the brother to stay in Germany, the siblings wanted to return to Poland, where they have invested money into the construction of the house. Circulation and work in the shadow economy with the help of a family member residing in the destination country made this possible. Such opportunities was also frequently exploited by the non-Roma Poles in the early 1990s (see Morawska 2001).

Over the course of more than two decades of migration, a significant depopulation of Roma has occurred in numerous small towns in Poland, such as Mława. According to local Roma leaders, the current situation indicates that over three-quarters of the Roma population has departed from these areas. The 2004 EU enlargement had some impact, with the increase in temporary migration, mainly to London. We also met several families who seem to move back and forth frequently, engaging in "liquid migration" (Engbersen et al. 2010: 21–4), and lots of cases of transnational childcare, where a grandmother would take care of her grandchild while the mother and father worked in London. But compared to 30 years ago, the Roma community in that town seems to be in decline – from around 400 people to around 50–80 today (assessment of leaders as well as local officials). We found that many other towns across Poland have witnessed a similar massive outflow of its Roma populations, which have been supported by Polish Roma NGOs. The pattern of post-1989 ethnic turbulence, hostility from Poles, asylum claims to Germany, then to Britain, and an additional outflow after 2004 seems quite widespread in Poland among Polska Roma.

At the same time, however, Roma from the Bergitka group we studied have a slightly different trajectory, although at some point merging with Polska Roma. The settlement of Czarna Góra saw a very small number of families and individuals flow out prior to 2004. This settlement of around 200 people was quite poor, and the main change in the 1990s and early 2000s was the improvement in living conditions implemented by the Polish

government's special assistance program (Kwadrans 2013; Mirga-Wójtowicz 2013). The small number of families that migrated to Britain or temporarily to Sweden was the outcome of low levels of migratory social capital and support structure abroad. The importance of migratory social capital is also evident in the fact that the settlement is located in an area where, since the late nineteenth century, people were traditionally migrating to the US in search of work (Walaszek 2007), but as in many other areas of the economic and social activity of the majority population, the Roma access to these resources was limited. The real outflow, resulting in – as some local Roma estimate – almost a third of the Roma families leaving the country, began in 2004 with the lifting of access to the labour market in Britain and later in other EU member states. Similarly to Mława, some families move back and forth and maintain transnational households in both countries. Nonetheless, as a result of economic crisis, social welfare cuts in Britain, the uncertainties around the consequences of the Brexit referendum, and the rise in child benefits payments in Poland, there is a noticeable number of returns.

The increased connectivity: Migration networks

Our ethnographic fieldwork also took place in Nowa Huta, an industrial town near Kraków built in the 1950s, which has a predominantly Bergitka Roma community. The location attracted a considerable number of internal migrants, including a significant population of the Bergitka Roma (Ficowski 1986; Mirga and Mróz 1994; Szewczyk 2019). The Roma here are clustered around a few blocks of flats, and in most of our respondents' narratives, they identify this period as the happiest time of their lives. The steelwork industry in Nowa Huta offered employment opportunities, while the state provided housing for the residents. The arrangement of multiple families residing in close proximity within a few blocks of flats not only fostered a network of support and a sense of security but also contributed to cohesion among the community. This nostalgic picture of the past was disrupted by the collapse of socialism and the subsequent downfall of state-subsidized industries. As elsewhere, Roma were the first to lose their jobs. As in the case of Mława, the period of political-economic transition was followed by the rise of anti-Gypsyism in Nowa Huta. The ensuing local conflicts and ethnic tensions led many Roma to seek asylum in the West (Matras 2000: 38). The instances of beatings by far-right groups, anti-Roma graffiti, and threats were on the increase.

So when one person went, then another, and the words were spread that in Hamburg is this and that, so they started helping one another and it was easier to manage.

[**Interviewer:** It was in the eighties?] Late eighties, nineties …. One was helping another, so I went, I got two sisters there, two cousins, some other cousins, some friends, Roma friends, not family but Roma, all went to Hamburg. [**I:** But how, with passports and there you asked for asylum or with visas or how?] No, with passports, it was like smuggling. [**I:** What do you mean?]. Like smuggling, I mean you go and either you make it and go forward or not, and you would be returned, we could enter the West Berlin, and once you reached there you could ask for asylum. [S., female, Bergitka Roma, aged 50]

During our data collection in Nowa Huta, we obtained multiple independent accounts from at least four sources, all pointing to a significant connection between the increase in mobility from Nowa Huta in the early 1990s and efforts aimed at facilitating the migration of the Polska Roma. In our ethnographic accounts, the point of connection was a man called Sergio, now a respected member of the elders, who comes from the Bergitka Roma group but is married to a woman from the Polska Roma, thus having relatives from both. Claiming that he knew a local official who was able to help him, he began acting as a migration facilitator, being able to acquire the "one-way" passports. These were also given to Roma during communist times in order to diffuse ethnic tensions with the Poles (as in the case of Oświęcim, Kapralski 2016; Fiałkowska, Mirga-Wójtowicz, and Garapich 2022). Sergio spent considerable time in Germany where he established contact with Roma from other groups and nationalities. He was acutely aware of the political activism of the Roma and Sinti in Germany at that time (Matras 2013) and took part in some political events then, getting to know some well-known activists. Then, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, he began personally helping families to migrate to Germany, either smuggling them by car or offering a go-between. Among his kin in the Bergitka group, he is perceived as the pioneer migrant, the one who went first and then helped others migrate. During this group interview with two Roma women in Nowa Huta, they realized that they used the same method and the same contact to go to Germany in the early 1990s.

S: So I went – like a gamble… on… this *przerzut* [Polish word meaning to toss across]. If they would stop me… because they just waved through the cars [through the border] but had some spot checks too. So they showed us to go. No? So I went through with kids.
M: I went through in a car on German number plates, so.
S: Me too on car with German number plates.
M: So it was same as me.

The car was provided by Sergio or his Polska Roma kin. There were diverse ways of payment for his services – favours, cash, or simply respect. He was

the go-to person if you needed advice, information, or help in reaching Germany. Clearly, it is thanks to his unique position as a person bridging several layers of Roma networks and the non-Roma world that he was able to act as a migration broker, who was keen on spreading the information on new opportunities. As for his Bergitka Roma kin, it was evident that his marriage and association with the Polska Roma community played a crucial role in obtaining his status. For many of our Bergitka respondents, the Polska Roma are much more entrepreneurial and aware of how to navigate and negotiate hostile migration regimes[1] ("they are much more cunning, they know how to operate in the Gadje world, we were like you know in small villages," as one of our respondents said), so Sergio's role here was vital but at the same time sustained a hierarchy between the groups – Polska Roma imposing their superior position in terms of social capital facilitating mobility, but also in terms of their claim to be a more "true" Roma. Apart from the point of our discussion about the role of inter-group conections in developing a migratory chain in the case of Roma, which is quite common in literature on Roma mobility, Sergio's case also points to the crucial importance of human agency in these proceses. Currently, he holds a highly esteemed position as an elder member within the Roma community owing to his extensive involvement in transnational Roma politics for over three decades. His contributions and activism have extended to various countries, including Poland, Germany, and Britain. It is hardly surprising that he was behind many migrations of his Bergitka relatives.

Power, traditions, and the complex encounters of Roma

Most of our respondents spontaneously mention the fact that their arrival to England from Poland brought them into close contact with other groups of Roma from other nationalities, which indicates again how important the diversity of Roma groups is for an individual worldview, and how the plurality of being Roma is the source of both pride and unease, as pinpointing what is a Rom becomes hard not only for scholars (Stewart 2013; Matras 2013) but also for individual Roma. These encounters may be talked about with exotic interest and almost pride when describing an encounter with an English Gypsy or Traveller ("they are so white, like a Gadjo, but they are sooo smart") with fear and a sense of inferiority; for example, when one of our respondents from Nowa Huta talks about how she was almost kidnapped by a group of very rich German Sinti, or with a sense of disdain and contempt when talking

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1. Sometimes, the Romani term Bergitka uses to describe Polska Roma is *phundrade*, meaning wandering, smart, cunning, or even cheating.

about e.g. the Romanian Roma who beg on the streets, "bringing shame on us all." In all cases, the complex and multi-layered dynamic of Roma identity is not just evident but acutely experienced by our respondents, who, regardless of the meanings of *what* connects them to other people regarded as Roma, experience it on the emotional level too, with a mixture of a sense of shame, pride, ambiguity, curiosity, and self-reflection.

Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, the encounters and their significance to our respondents were of secondary importance compared to the frequency and significance of encounters between the Polska Roma and Bergitka communities. First, most agree that the migration experience and settlement in London has led to an increase in interactions. These also lead to the increase in the number of intermarriages, as Eva, from Bergitka, emphasizes: "oh yes, in England they mix for sure, and this is the main experience that in England they mix a lot, but not in Poland, this is more rare… for example, my cousin has taken a husband from Polska Roma."

The smooth transition from stating that they interact to the fact that they also intermarry is typical but also unsurprising. One of the key aspects of intergroup relationships is the widening of the scope of matrimonial arrangements, thus striking an alliance and establishing bonds with different groups. An interesting comment comes from a Bergitka Roma musician named Marco. His profession in Poland as a violinist in several famous Roma bands meant that he met and interacted with many Roma from different groups, and he claimed it was never a problem. Admitting that there is an increase in intermarriages now, he says:

M: Sure there are a lot of mixed ones. Many, many. It doesn't matter, but every man, for example has to adapt to a situation. There are different traditions there [among Polska Roma]. So, for example, if one takes a wife or husband, one needs to adapt to everything of theirs, no…? [**Interviewer:** So kind of taking these traditions as one's own?] **M:** Taking as one's own, because he/she has to. If he/she wants this wife or this husband, he/she has to accept these traditions, of the wife or husband, no?

Throughout the exchange, it was clear that Marco has in mind only one way of "accepting traditions," that is, accepting the Polska Roma way of dealing with certain issues – related to gender, dress, blood taboo, or sanctions like *mageripen* (the sanction of temporary or life exclusion from the Roma community, a type of social death, see Mirga and Mróz 1994), and the superior position of the Shero Rom within the political and judicial structure of the Polish Roma (Kowarska 2010; Mirga and Mróz 1994; Koper 2018). It was never assumed that a member of the Polska Roma could "take" Bergitka traditions "as one's own," because that would mean dropping these

elements from his/her behaviour, leading certainly to shunning and exclusion from his/her own kinship or wider group. In fact, because for many Polska Roma, Bergitka have "forgotten" or have "no tradition," the very concept of tradition means the conservative and strict way of the Polska Roma (as noted above, this was also due to earlier ethnographies like Ficowski's essentialist idea of Polska Roma being the more "true" Roma). What Marco says applies in practice. We met numerous mixed couples, and it seems that the Bergitka Roma part of the couple always accepts certain traditions and notions from the other side – mainly related to women's dress codes, pollution taboos related to food, and the power structure placing the rulings of the Shero Rom as the ultimate word of Roma law. But in marital arrangements and mutual adaptations, the issue is sometimes complex, since to "take" a tradition "as one's own" is also to engage family members in the sphere of influence of the other side. This means that the Bergitka part of the family may also find themselves under pressure to succumb to the ways of Polska Roma or other traditional groups. This exchange with Olgierd and Monika, a mixed couple, illustrates this perfectly:

O: Because you know, there are many Gypsy races, right? As among the Poles where you have *górale*, *ślązaki*, *hanysi*.[2] [**Interviewer:** Of course.] So it is with us. [**I:** Yes.]
M: And I am another Gypsy. [**I:** From the mountains.] **M:** From the mountains; [**I:** Bergitka.] **M:** Bergitka, they are.
O [interrupts]: We have many rules… [**I:** And how do you negotiate these rules?]
M: He taught me these rules, yes, because for example…
O: As I took her, so she had to take on my rules.
M: I have to take on his rules.
O: I won't convince her parents for sure, they are too old for that.
M: But you convinced them to do many things anyway… [**I:** Like?] …Well, some things… There are things that he made my parents accept, but….
O: As in our house, how people dress right? Among other Gypsies you can walk in track suits, in everything, but among others you cannot, right? …Men cannot have tight trousers.
M: Women need to know how to pass next to a table, in order not to touch it.
O: In their house everything is… When I came, I was lost I had to cover my eyes, when I saw their women in these. [**M:** Leggings.] I was covering my eyes… Among our people this is impossible.

In the end, Monika said with joy that, in fact, when she goes to his family, she dresses according to their ways, but when she visits her own, she does what she wants, sometimes wearing dresses that would be seen as inappropriate to her husband. These shifts in behaviour, and the dress code for

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2. Vernacular terms for various ethnic regional groups in Poland.

women being the litmus test of "becoming like them," was a very frequent subject of gossip and surprise. One comment very often heard from members of Bergitka Roma, was that, in the words of a known activist: "these Gypsies completely went crazy over there. In Kraków, they walked in miniskirts and were relaxed, and they go there and they become like Polska Roma, long skirts, hairdo, all that stuff."

The issue takes on broader political significance when considering the position of the Shero Rom, commonly referred to as the "king" by the Roma community. This position is rather unique in the legal system of the Roma law in Central and Eastern Europe; it is mainly judicial but is also linked with kinship ties – close relatives of the king have substantial influence over Roma politics and decision-making. Logically, an increased interaction between the two groups means a raised potential not only for family alliances through marriage but also for dispute, conflict, and tension that requires diffusion through mediation and ultimately an authority figure whose rulings are accepted by everyone. But as Marushiakova and Popov show in their overview of Roma courts (2007), this institution is not widely recognized, and, in the Polish case, the Shero Rom is not a legitimate judge in the eyes of Bergitka Roma, which potentially means undermining his authority among his own kin. As the eldery Roma from the Bergitka group emphasize:

We never had a king and won't have. We respect the elders of course, and he is one of the elders, but not a king. No way.

Still, for some Bergitka Roma things are different, and the acceptance of the Shero Rom is a natural consequence of the progression of the Bergitka from being mainly rural, poor Roma "who didn't see the world" and now are able to experience the wider complexities of Roma internal hierarchies and structures. Marco, the musician who has experienced the diversity of Roma through his involvement in various Roma music groups, shared with us:

M: I mean, there is only one king, no? Gypsy one… So now, whether the mountain [Bergitka] Gypsies, or whatever, we belong to him. [**Interviewer:** Really?] M: Yes. [**I:** So you accept him as…?] M: Yes, I mean all Roma now, the mountain ones too, no? He took the Gypsies… For example, if he had a problem, I don't know, something would have happened between Gypsies [from different groups], for example, that couldn't be dealt with on its own… So there would not be any doubt, or something… So I call him, and he settles the matter. Whose truth it is, who is right… Before, among us, the mountain Gypsies, things weren't like that… […] Before, among us, some even did not know about him, they were very backwards, they lived in villages, they had no contact at all, with bigger cities, us, people… But now the world goes up [forward]. It is different now. And the Roma live differently now… They [see] the wider world, they go here or there.

Marco's perspective highlights that the social and economic changes among Bergitka Roma, driven by migration, have brought them into direct contact with the broader world, including the wider Roma community, rather than solely with the non-Roma (Gadje) world, and this essentially means approval of the older hierarchies of the Polish Roma, the hierarchies between Polska Roma and Bergitka. In that narrative, in the old days, the mountain Roma were "backward," but now, due to mobility, they experience and need to adjust to the complexities of Roma multiple groups, kinship, and regional diversity, which also means accepting the superiority of the Polska Roma. Furthermore, as Marco later claimed, the challenge with Bergitka Roma lies in the fact that their previous leadership structure, which consisted of a loose selection of elders, heads of families, and representatives from rural settlements, is no longer effective or functional. Therefore, as he went on to argue, there is a natural need for a new system of leadership to emerge.

Obviously, not everyone agrees with Marco, and a lot of Bergitka Roma with whom we spoke are strongly against any idea of an imposition of the authority of the Shero Rom over their affairs or to accept his judgment in disputes, in particular if this is a question of a dispute between them and members of Polska Roma ("so he is going to rule against his own? You're kidding. If a problem arises between us and them, who do you think he will listen to?", as the previously quoted elder from Bergitka rhetorically asked us). These tensions appear to have been escalating in recent years. In the spring of 2018, a highly regarded associate of the Shero Rom visited Nowa Huta with the purpose of organizing a meeting with the local Roma. One of the objectives of this gathering was to communicate a message from the Shero Rom, expressing his willingness to assume the role of their judge and ultimate authority in resolving disputes. Some welcomed this development; Sergio (mentioned earlier as the migration broker of the early 1990s) called it an "October revolution among the Gypsies," referring to a huge shift in political structure. But the reception was mixed, with some local Roma elders actively resisting it, seeing it as an imposition on the part of Polska Roma. Following the event, the widely used social media platforms within the Roma community became a hotbed of disagreement, marked by weeks of mutual accusations and contentious debates concerning this development. The issue of the status of the Shero Rom's authority and the reasons behind his outreach to Bergitka (which, according to our respondents, was unprecedented) is too complex to recount in this context. Undoubtedly, however, the relationships between Polska Roma and Bergitka have entered a new phase by virtue of their increased contact, which, we argue, resulted mainly from their migratory experience in England. As "the Gypsy court is essentially an active factor for the development of the community" (Marushiakova and Popov

2007: 98), it is clear that, in the light of its diminishing authority, we witness increased attempts to revitalize its authority. Aiming to bring Bergitka Roma under the Shero's authority, especially if they are new family members, is one strategy to achieve this.

One last layer of these increased interconnections between different groups of Polish Roma is that they bond together, and stay apart from Roma from other countries whom they meet in England. Apart from in the world of Roma NGOs, we did not encounter dense relations between, say, Slovak, Romanian, and Polish Roma. In fact, animosity and mistrust was often voiced. In addition to the internal politics of the Roma community in Poland and the ongoing struggle for control over representation and benefits, this dimension means that the connection between Polska Roma and Bergitka Roma lies in their shared Polish origin, as well as the family, economic, political, and cultural ties that they maintain within their respective localities of origin. Hence, we may argue that Polish Roma become more Polish when they are living abroad.

Gender and diversity

A large part of the discussions and interviews with our Roma respondents about the relationship between the two groups focused on the impact of increased contact on gender, and especially on the position of women. The subject raised most often was the fact that in England, many Bergitka women begin to dress and behave like women from Polska Roma. As this Bergitka Roma woman in Southend observes:

P: It was kind of strange that you know someone so well, and know that in Poland she was wearing trousers or miniskirts, and suddenly here, these long dresses; it was a shock for me when I came here. [**Interviewer:** So why is this happening?] **P:** I don't know but I think that you change due to the company you keep… [**I:** So they become more conservative?] **P:** I think so… Become harsher…

During our conversations with another Roma woman, she openly challenged the conservatism exhibited by certain Roma women. She linked this shift in women's attitudes towards a more conservative dress code to their migration trajectory, specifically as a means of reciprocation for the assistance received during the challenging initial period after their arrival in Britain. Importantly, this reciprocal aid occurred between Bergitka and Polska Roma, supporting our argument:

R: His [her ex-boyfriend's] mother told me that in [town's name in the Polish mountains], there was none of these dresses. His mum told when she was still ok

with me, that before it was different and that when they came over [to England] so as a sign of respect that they were given a roof over their heads, they [began to wear long dresses]. [They have now] a mentality where you have to, to be a Gypsy you have to wear a skirt, to be a Gypsy you have to. [**Interviewer:** A woman of course?] Yeah, to be a Gypsy woman you have to wear a skirt, you have to stay at home and look after your husband, you have to be nice and polite; can't argue back.

The position of women in the new context, under increased family and group social control through more dense family interconnections between two Roma groups, means that they potentially fall under a system of sanctions for misbehaviour, breaking taboos, or violating the norms of endogamy through liaising with men outside the Roma world, especially if it happens with men regarded as "black." We heard numerous stories about women from Polska Roma who started a relationship with "black" men, and who were made *magerdzi* [shunned] and permanently excluded from the Roma community. Regardless of whether these stories were actually true or made up as a warning, falling under this sanction raises particular resistance from many of our Roma women interviewees. In one instance during our ethnographic research, upon a visit to a friend's home, we found the women very agitated. It turned out that some male figure of authority from a Polska Roma group has made an appeal on the internet to Roma men to restrict their women's activities on Facebook, as this potentially means they may come into contact with other men, or because they post pictures of themselves that are seen as not proper. He used the threat of *mageripen* in his appeal. In that particular household, women from several groups of Roma from Poland – Bergitka, Lovari, and Chaładytka – were present, and they all voiced their loud opposition (peppered with very strong vocabulary) to the idea: "Who the f… is this guy to tell us what to do on Facebook?" Although here, the resistance was collective, the women from Bergitka in the group were very keen to stress that they did not care whether they would be made *magerde* or not, because this did not apply to them, as they did not recognize the validity of the sanction coming from the associates of the Shero Rom.

Lastly, one of our key respondents, Danuta, a woman in her sixties from the Tatra mountains who is raising her grandchildren, provides a highly personal perspective on the concepts of the control of women, endogamy, and *mageripen* within the context of living in ethnically diverse England. She acknowledges that her grandchildren will inevitably come into contact with the non-Roma world, including the possibility of marriage, which adds further complexity to the discussion. This is what happened to one of her granddaughters, who was pregnant by her boyfriend of Somali origin. This is what Danuta said:

Interviewer: But you do not recognize *mageripen*? **D:** What? You're joking? So my granddaughter lives with a Somali and she will be made *magerde*? You stupid? [**I:** She would be made *magerde*?] **D:** Yes, and she would not be allowed to come to other Gypsies' homes.

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we have presented the multi-layered and dynamic ways with which Roma decide on group membership, using their own demotic approaches and strategies to group boundary-making. In all of the presented cases, examples, and ethnographic illustrations, we are witnessing a bumpy, contradictory, and multi-layered process of forging a sense of being and constant questioning, negotiating, and making sense of what it means to be a Roma, i.e. the forging of the "demotic" common idiom linking diverse groups. It is evident that these groups, despite historically experiencing relative isolation until more recent times, share more similarities than previously believed. This is largely attributed to their experiences within the specific social context of post-war and post-1989 Poland – experiences that have more in common than we have previously thought. First, they were subject to the same processes of the socialist system of social control, education, and "productivization," with various results. Second, they all became subjects and sometimes victims of the time of the great trauma (Sztompka 2000) of economic transition from socialism to capitalism, which led to the exclusion of substantial sections of Polish society (Rakowski 2009), among them also Roma. Some dealt with it as many other Polish citizens did, through immigration, work in the shadow economy in the West (Morawska 2001), or pendulum migration to Western labour markets (Jaźwińska and Okólski 2001). That structurally determined process of international mobility within Polish society had a significant impact on the Roma community, resulting in an increase in intergroup relationships between the two largest groups of Polish Roma.

This led to two seemingly contradictory developments – from one perspective, we may say that the relational dimension of these encounters for Bergitka Roma results in group members becoming more aware of their own history and distinct aspects of their lives, which makes them different from Polska Roma, hence strengthening their sense of cohesion, but also agency in the face of attempts to control them. One dimension relates to the sense of pride, for example in their educational achievements. Others have more to do with the family dynamics in mixed households. Danuta's reaction is rooted in her concern for her granddaughter's status within the Roma community.

She fears that if her daughter was to accept the sanction of *mageripen* imposed by Polska Roma against women who marry outside the racially defined notion of an acceptable partner, it could jeopardize the cohesion of their family. Kapralski (2016) calls for more attention to the personal and historical dimension of Roma identity as constructed in new fields of interactions, and this is precisely what we are seeing – the rejection of certain taboos and systems of sanctions by Bergitka becomes part of *their tradition* instead of being a sign of lacking one. At the same time, however, an increase in the number of intermarriages and kinship group affiliations means that both groups are forced to decrease the importance of differences in order to emphasize their common Roma identity. Here, the structural forces of the "racialisation of the Roma," seeking to find essentialist features of the group, which is stimulated by the wider forces of the states' mobility regimes, multi-cultural British policies of cultural politics, the EU, the transnational presence of Romani activists, and so on (Grill 2018), also play a part. Still, in our view, we should not overestimate these structural determinants. In the everyday discussions, the Roma we met expressed their constant engagement in a complex navigation strategy between various forms of social organization, of which the categories of Polska Roma and Bergitka are not the only ones – kinship groups, sub-groups, and regional diversification also have significant repercussions. In fact, the increased number of mixed marriages means that Roma themselves recognize their older affiliation as sometimes irrelevant, as one activist told us that many Roma are now *mieszańcy* [mixed] and that these things may not matter any more. The locus of these relationships is immersed in power relations, gender, and increasing contacts with the other Roma and non-Roma groups. Interestingly, in that identity maze, we must note that the Polish origin, shared national belonging, and common migration trajectory brings these two groups much closer to each other than we have previously thought.

In the light of the discussion on Roma relational identity constructions between the two groups described above, the case of Polish Roma provides evidence that the sense of emotional commonality needs to be adjusted and adapted to new conditions. This is an ongoing process embedded in engendered values of personal relations within the family, which also politicizes the matrimonial encounters and their consequences. Once again, we are reminded that Roma "have found a solution to the double challenge of preserving cultural continuity in a situation of immersion in and dispersal among a more powerful and richer majority world and have done so by constructing a conception of social value that places the social beyond the reach of dominant society" (Stewart 2013: 425). In "conceptually opening-up of the notion of Romani ethnicity" by providing empirically "a more nuanced

and context-sensitive perspective" (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2018: 16), we believe that we have shown how Roma operationalize their own heterogeneity. The continuity mentioned by Stewart is achieved through a Roma approach to boundary-making and dealing with their group heterogeneity – which maintains a sense of fluidity of Roma identity and the "idiom" of commonality across time and space, where flexible boundaries are vital between the Gadje and Roma worlds, as well as between different "types" of Roma within.

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