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Renewing Research and Romani Activism

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Unlearned Lessons

On 31 March 2017, the small Transylvanian town of Gheorgheni (in Hungarian, Gyergyószentmiklós) in county Harghita was the stage of a bitterly familiar scene: a mob of twenty to thirty men attacked Roma settlements, burned one house, and set ablaze straw bales in five different locations.[1] Those present inside the houses at the moment of the attack were dragged outside, and, in the middle of bystanders' applause, the women and children were beaten, while the men were forced to kneel in a line. The event, at first announced on online platforms by local journalists in Hungarian, appeared over the course of the next few days on several German-language blogs (Ecoleusti 2017; Parászka 2017; Pester Lloyd 2017), and only made its appearance in the Romanian news three days later (Ivașcu 2017).[2] The Romanian news site HotNews reported that, according to a trusted source, "several Hungarian citizens of the town wanted to teach the Roma a lesson," to put a halt to their alleged misdemeanors (Ivașcu 2017). The English-speaking community of (pro-) Roma activists learned about the events nearly one week after the facts, through an article published on the blog of the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) (Lee 2017). The next day, the article was circulated on the European Academic Network of Romani Studies (EANRS), where it seemed to pass unnoticed: there were no reactions to it. The event, fortunately, did not result in the loss of lives, and perhaps was therefore deemed too prosaic to wrest a reaction from the academic com-

munity. And yet, this silence signals the passing of such events in the sphere of the ordinary, the tacit acknowledgment of the normalization of violence against the Roma: nothing out of the ordinary, *just* another attack on Roma. The "lesson" is a persistent and recurrent trope in justifying anti-Roma violence, and a claim of moral and epistemological superiority, postulated from particular positions of power. It posits the non-Roma as invested with a pedagogical "white man's burden" aimed at civilizing the Roma, while infantilizing them as unruly and in need of punishment. Yet, many of those advocating for "teaching the Roma a lesson" would also, undoubtedly, in the same neoracist breath, claim that the Roma cannot be "civilized" due to their unalterable otherness (Čada 2012: 76). In turn, on the ERRC's blog written in reaction to the event, Jonathan Lee (2017) claims that "the lessons of Harghita's history of pogroms against Roma have been conveniently forgotten," reversing the blame onto lax authorities, the tacit condoning of such acts by the police, and institutionalized racism writ large.

We felt it necessary to start our volume by recounting this episode of violence to make the point that in the context of increasing violence against the Roma across Europe, the pursuit of knowledge only for the sake of knowledge seems at best indecent. However, acting on such developments without reflecting on the wider politics of activism, its own blind spots and fallouts, is at best irresponsible. Two other violent events, running on very similar scripts, are closely and critically analyzed in this volume, together with the activist responses articulated at the time (see the chapters by Chirițoiu and Fosztó). They span a period of a quarter century, which has seen antigypsyism erupt at numerous locations and following various events, but always according to the same script, involving, invariably, arson, humiliation, violence, and the leitmotif of "teaching them a lesson." Yet, as Lee (2017) underlines, but also as the chapters in this volume claim in many different ways, Roma-related research and activism seem to have their own "unlearned lessons."

This volume focuses on blind spots in Roma-related research and activism and is a search for spaces for dialogue, past the unilateral sense of "teaching" each other from positions of epistemic—or moral—superiority. Indeed, framing past missteps and yet unattained goals of activism in terms of "learning experiences" enables a space in which plural voices may articulate their views building on previous attempts by critical founders of Romani activism such as Nicolae Gheorghe (Acton and Ryder 2015: 5), whose lessons we attempt to explore in this volume. Thus, the volume is not merely about Romani activism, and does not seek to offer a comprehensive view of its historical development or of all of its contemporary forms and their varied locations; this, in itself, would be an enormous task requiring years of research.[3] Rather, the reader will discover forms of Romani activism in a piecemeal

fashion, through several of the volume's chapters that offer contextualized analyses of Romani activism embedded in particular social and political dynamics. The volume is also not only about Roma-related research, or about research on activism. Rather, it is situated precisely at the confluence between research and activism, seeking to create a space for reflexivity in both.

Far from being specific to the Roma, the reflections cultivated by this collection of essays can be productively applied to the problematic of many other subaltern groups involved in forms of activism, and which, simultaneously, have been the focus of social research and policy interventions. Our volume speaks to the need to defamiliarize known forms of research and activism by embedding a recurrent practice of reflexivity in both, incessantly questioning and renewing intellectual and political commitments. Our volume is an exercise in questioning the knowledge thus far yielded and the ways in which it was produced, as well as renewing familiar forms of activism and exploring future possibilities opened by reflection.

The general context of the volume is spanned by the rise of antigypsyism (Stewart 2012); the increase of xenophobic sentiment and far-right ideologies across the Western world; the uncertainties related to the EU project after Brexit and to how this potentially paradigmatic shift will impact insecurities, mobilities, and processes of othering, including of Romani groups; the fallout of the financial crisis related to contemporary forms of predatory capitalism, violently pushing many into growing hardship and spurring competition on increasingly scarce public resources; and the hegemonic expansion of the discourse on "security" as the supreme goal to be pursued. Indeed, since roughly the nineties, Western societies have entered an era marked by the disquieting productivity of "risk" and "security" as enablers of repressive policies and structuring principles of a sociality marked by waning solidarity. This accompanied the demise of the welfare state, progressively replaced by a repressive state keen to defend rather the interests of powerful capital than of its most destitute citizens, increasingly precaritized and criminalized (Lorey 2015). In parallel, neoliberal governmentalities have colonized public discourse on—and state policies for—the poor, pathologizing and stigmatizing them while producing their undeservingness (Haney 2002). In the case of the Roma, this led to forms of "reasonable antigypsyism" (van Baar 2014), coalesced in increasingly frequent episodes of violence such as the ones described above.

Contemporaneous to these worrisome developments are discernible reconfigurations of the Romani movement. In part, such shifts follow the rejuvenation of its membership base, with emerging trends in a bottom-up youth movement with the power to reform its own discourses and practices (see Mirga-Kruszelnicka, this volume). But some of the reconfigurations of the Romani transnational movement espouse powerful top-down advocacy

initiatives, which have recently materialized in the creation of a European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC), aimed at promoting a positive (self-)image of Roma by the Roma themselves, in order to tackle what is perceived to be the "root cause" of the exclusion and discrimination of Roma: ignorance, hatred, and mistrust. The establishment of the ERIAC, one of the most debated forms of activism at the moment, has spurred fierce confrontational discussions across activist and scholarly communities, spanning a range of concerns reflected in our volume. On the one hand, on the dimension of activism, the question emerged as to how this sort of identity politics can be reconciled, and possibly articulated, with a politics of redistribution beyond mere cultural(ist) frames (Magazzini 2016: 54). Critics of the initiative have argued that the neoliberal cultural(ist) framing of the root causes of exclusion as "matters of the mind" ignores wider political stakes and the materiality of structural racism resting rather on misdistribution than misrecognition, echoing earlier criticism to the particular forms of identity politics in which the Romani movement is vested (Kovats 2003). The creation of the ERIAC—which remains a contested initiative among Roma actors themselves—signals the institutionalization and solidification of a culturalist European Romani identity politics where Romani elites are given (have taken?) a space to produce forms of cultural "authenticity," deemed a valid tool for combating socioeconomic and political exclusion. Yet, given the politically and financially powerful support invested in the initiative by the Council of Europe and George Soros's Open Society Foundation, coinciding with the discontinuation of European funding to the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF), it can be predicted that the establishment of such an institution is likely to foreclose alternative paths for an activism grounded in a politics of redistribution, rather than recognition.

On the other hand, on the dimension of knowledge production, the prominent place of Romani intellectuals in the ERIAC spurred another set of debates. There is a discernible shift in what some scholars call the "Roma Awakening": the increasing strength of Romani actors' voices in multiplying debates concerning Roma lives, including on practices within academia itself (Acton and Ryder 2015). Institutionally, this veritable critical turn was marked, in the summer of 2017, by the launch of the Romani Studies Program at Central European University, led by two prominent Romani scholars, and by the establishment of its journal, *Critical Romani Studies.* The growing numbers of Romani scholars and the way they disrupt, with increasing visibility, the narratives produced by the established core of Romani studies scholars have already started to influence academic debates by eliciting reactions (see, for instance, Stewart 2017). Partly, the current volume speaks to this shift, identifying those dynamics through which Romani academics contribute to renewing scholarship by unsettling not only

discourses, but also the power mechanisms and structures underlying them. This move echoes the critique of epistemic privilege and the paramount emphasis on decolonizing anthropology (Harrison 1991), or methodologies of research with subaltern peoples more generally (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999).

The project of the ERIAC has received criticism from scholars pertaining to the EANRS, too, on basis of concerns related to the lack of legitimacy of knowledge produced outside established university and research structures, which derive their legitimacy from quality control protocols defined as scientific. The opponents of these arguments have deemed this position conservative and scientist, critiquing it for being oblivious to issues of power and epistemic privilege. Yet their arguments have often resorted to ethnic essentialism or "epistemological insiderism" (Brubaker 2016): the belief that one's perceived identity may function as to (dis)qualify the production of knowledge on particular topics from external positions. In the subtext of claims that Roma scholars are uniquely legitimate producers of knowledge on the Roma looms large the contestable idea that non-Roma scholars are less able—and in any case less legitimized—to do so, because of their "outsider" status (see also Stewart 2017). Both views construct and reify borders and the things they separate: the first between various forms and institutions of knowledge production (scientific versus nonscientific), and the second between particular identity formations seen as rigid and essential ethnic units (Roma versus non-Roma). A missing stance in this rather chunky, unsophisticated debate is what Rogers Brubaker (2016: 10) coins "a trans of beyond": "positioning oneself in a space that is not defined with reference to established categories. Such a move is characterized by the claim to transcend existing categories—or to transcend categorization altogether." The question of whether, and how, such a "trans" moment is possible in Romani-related scholarship and activism seems a timely one.

If "Romani studies" as a general topic area has been known to vest forms of scientific racism in the Gypsy Lore Society (Acton 2016), more recently, many scholars have taken up an active role in combating, through their knowledge, stereotypes against Romani groups (Tremlett 2009). But the growing interest in "the Roma" from outside Romani studies has subsequently delocalized knowledge production toward research institutions that do not necessarily have an ethnic focus. As a result, there has been an explosion of analyses of various facets of Romani lived experiences. Stewart (2013) renders an account of contemporary tendencies in Roma-related anthropological research, but the ever-increasing corpus of literature stemming from political science, cultural studies, geography, sociology, or international relations has not been structured in a similar account, and would be a near-impossible task to undertake, given the current prolific production of Roma-related research. The last decade in particular has seen the massive

expansion of policy-oriented and applied research on the Roma, with major stakeholders such as the World Bank, the European Commission, or the United Nations Development Program commissioning research aimed at understanding the challenges Roma face in different contexts in order to justify various policy responses. Smaller organizations have also profited from the funds thus made available for applied, policy-oriented research. Often, the authors of these reports pendulate between institutions carrying out research—be they purely academic, looser networks of advocacy think-tanks, or smaller but "professionalized" NGOs. Some of them declare themselves activists, while others claim a more neutral stance; but the knowledge they produce is shaped in crucial ways—to our sense not fully explored yet—by their position at the crossroads between academic, activist, and policy trajectories. Importantly, the knowledge thus generated is molded by the ways in which funds are made available for the production of specific types of discourses grounded in particular visions of the Roma as a population in need of intervention (Timmer 2010; Schneeweis 2014; see also Ivasiuc, this volume).

With funds made available for Roma-related research from the policy sector, there has been an undeniable "inflation of expertise," which, understandably, regularly raises concerns of quality (Matras 2015). Some of these debates have tended to dichotomize between "neutral" and "objective" knowledge, on the one hand, and knowledge "tainted" and disqualified by activism, on the other hand; yet these rigid categorizations foreclose a more nuanced reflection on the ways in which knowledge is being produced and shaped. The simplistic division between "scientific" and "activist" research misses a number of important points. The "quietistic dream of unsullied professionalism" (Heyman 2010) may obscure the ideological roots of seemingly neutral "expert" knowledge. The production of knowledge is a social process, taking place in particular historical contexts and through dynamics replete with power and subjected to cultural trends, social pressures, and political interests. Claiming the impartiality and neutrality of knowledge attests at best a form of unpardonable naïveté regarding the ways in which knowledge is being influenced by its embeddedness in power-laden contexts, including through the meta-epistemological question of who has the power and appropriate forms of capital—symbolic, social—to legitimize the validity of research itself. Knowledge and power, we know at least since Foucault (Foucault and Gordon 1980), are inseparable. This brings us to the second point that these dichotomies miss, forcefully articulated by advocates for a public anthropology (Beck 2009; Beck and Maida 2013 and 2015): the sources of legitimacy of engaged research are grounded elsewhere than in purely epistemological criteria, requiring *not a choice,* but a constant *move* between social and epistemological commitments (Hale 2006: 105). Rather

than positing engaged and disengaged forms of scholarship as antithetic, and advocating for one or the other, or superimposing critique and commitment in a single epistemological engagement, what emerges as unquestionably more productive is a dialectical move between them (Montesinos Coleman 2015), and also beyond them. This move allows for questioning the very categories and frames upon which both research and activism are predicated—again, a "trans of beyond" (Brubaker 2016). One of the meaningful messages which this collection of essays conveys is a call to move beyond simplistic dichotomies—"good" versus "bad" activism, "objective" versus "activist" research stemming from "Roma" versus "non-Roma" scholars—and to critically interrogate the contexts in which these debates and the constructed epistemological and political objects they criticize are produced, contested, and (de)legitimized, and how they further shape the assembling of knowledge. Far from being inconsequential and locked up in a putative ivory tower, the knowledge produced by scholars in positions of "experts" has the power to affect political and representational processes (Okely 1997; Willems 1997; van Baar 2011; Surdu 2015; Surdu and Kovats 2015; Law and Kovats 2018), making a compelling case for privileging reflexivity in scholarly writing.

Beyond the productivity of scholarly discomfort with prescribed categories, it is also worthwhile to reflect upon the emancipatory politics at the core of Romani activism, brimming with contradictions and identity double binds (Kovats 2003; Vermeersch 2006; Law and Kovats 2018). While some of these questions reemerge forcefully from the debates on the establishment of the ERIAC, some of the chapters in this volume directly engage with the contradictions of past and contemporary forms of activism. There is nothing of real simplicity and self-evidence in projects of emancipatory politics, and the often-ambivalent workings of activist politics should not be obscured by an uncritical taken-for-grantedness of empowerment projects' outcomes. The proliferation of the word "empowerment" itself has masked its ambiguities and the contradictory political projects in which it is embedded (Ivasiuc 2014; see also van Baar, this volume). Activism cannot do without a continuous and arduous "reflective practice" (Schon 1983), perpetually interrogating learned and unlearned lessons, and, more importantly, seeking other possible forms of being political.

Reflexivity as Practice: Arguments and Dialogues

The idea of this volume emerged during an exchange between the editors, in which an apparently simple question was posed: "How did you, as an activist, help the Roma through your research?" To this question, we found

that very few unambiguous and comfortable answers could be given before carefully deconstructing every word of it. In lieu of an answer, many more questions emerged: about the possibilities and ethics of activism, the ontology of research as a tool for change, and the pitfalls of being all too certain that as activists or researchers—or both—we are *really* making a difference. None of these questions could circumvent the analysis of the complexities and ambivalence of both activism and research. What was initially requested as a relatively short and straightforward answer became a set of questions ultimately leading to an entire book project in which we set out to explore the intersection between contemporary—but also past and possibly future forms of—activism, and research involving Romani groups. Thus, the question was transformed to explore the mechanisms and phenomena that produce ambivalence in the seemingly straightforward endeavor to work with the Roma from activist and academic perspectives. Rather than aiming at building consensus, the volume is intended to unsettle certainties, to provoke questions, and to throw a "working dissensus" (see Ryder, this volume) among activists, researchers, and policy practitioners and professionals who find themselves at any of the intersections between these roles or fluctuate between their porous boundaries. The book is an attempt at bridging reflexivity and practice, and simultaneously an argument for the development of reflexivity *as practice* within both Romani activism and the academic production of knowledge. The authors set out to critically analyze key practices and current issues in Romani activism and academia, scrutinizing both established and emerging dynamics of Romani activism and the processes of knowledge production stemming from applied and academic research, and feeding into interventions of both governmental and nongovernmental actors. We explore the ambiguous legacies and contradictions of certain forms of activism, as well as of certain ways of conducting research, framing it, or aiming at transposing research into policy. But we also consider it crucial to explore, from the margins, certain openings and promises, both within Romani activism and academic research. The book is structured in three parts, each comprising three chapters entering in dialogue with each other, and with arguments gaining in complexity across the sections.

Renewing Methods, Renewing Sites

Romani activism, as a complex object of research, demands nuanced, non-binary analyses, rooted in the historical and sociopolitical contexts in which it takes place, and critically aware of any underlying—explicit or implicit—normative or moral assumptions. In the first part, the authors make a case for in-depth ethnographies uniquely able to grasp the contradictions and ambiguities of activism and of the role of its protagonists. In this section,

some of the ways in which activism has been framed in research become contested as simplistic and binary, whereas ethnographic approaches to instances of activism reveal the ambivalences and contradictions of historically and politically embedded activist stances and undertakings. The "local" emerges clearly as a paramount site demanding a lucid analysis beyond the temptation to romanticize it as the unique, authentic place of mobilization, but also beyond the tendency of the vast majority of analyses on Romani activism to overlook the "local" in favor of national or transnational contexts.

We start our volume with a sober analysis by Huub van Baar of the nexus between activism and research through the lens of the development of the Romani social movement in Europe, contemporaneous to the emergence of the "nongovernmental" as a distinct category of rule and research. The chapter sketches the historical and political context for the volume's analyses, which focus mostly on post-1989 Europe. Van Baar systematizes the last thirty years of Roma-related activism and policy-making, as well as the ways in which Roma-related scholarship analyzed these developments, in a periodization comprising three phases. The first period, van Baar argues, was characterized by the emergence of civil society organizations (CSOs) funded and organized mostly through support from Western-based donors and international governing organizations (IGOs). Many Roma activists became attached to these initiatives, and the emergence of the civil society was largely applauded as a welcome development facilitating the exercise of democracy in postsocialist contexts. Subsequently, many organizations became professionalized and progressively occupied a niche of service provision between state structures and communities. In this process of governmentalization, these CSOs sometimes forfeited their independence and had to adapt to their new position and relationship to power by making compromises to their agendas, adhering to the goals of well-defined funding streams. Scholarly assessment reflects this development in different ways: while some saw the governmentalization of CSOs as the consequence of their professionalization and a way to exert power through government structures, others analyzed it in terms of the rise of a "Gypsy industry" (Trehan 2001 and 2009; Barany 2002; Kóczé and Trehan 2009; Rostas 2009) and deplored the deviation and downgrading of activism toward mere self-interested service provision under neoliberal conditions. Finally, the third and ongoing period is marked by the "ethnic turn" of policy-making, with the instatement, in 2011, of the "EU Roma Framework" and the obligation of member states (MS) to devise national "integration" strategies. In the process, while the slogan "Nothing for the Roma without the Roma" became a mantra repeated in official documents and declarations of European Commission representatives, the participation of Roma civil society organizations in policy-making was minimized to formal consultation, with little, if any, influence.

Van Baar contends that the post-1989 development of the category of nongovernmentalism needs to be analyzed in the larger historical context in which it operates. Shaped simultaneously by both a participatory democratic and a neoliberal project focusing on the same concepts of empowerment and rights—in opposite directions, however—the Romani movement is a heteroclite and ambiguous phenomenon embedded in contemporary global political dynamics. This sharp and nuanced analysis is a welcome reminder to engage critically with developments within Romani activism, for some forms of activism contribute to the depoliticization of Romani issues by translating political vocabularies of empowerment into technocratic advocacy for individual inclusion on the labor market, seen—in neoliberal guise—as the passe-partout solution for all ailments.

Van Baar critiques certain strands of research on Roma activism for their tendency to affect a binary opposition between, on the one hand, a localism praising forms of grassroots, bottom-up, "authentic" mobilization of Roma (such as Pentecostal mobilizations), and, on the other hand, a form of universalizing activism imposing frames, practices, and vocabularies foreign to Roma "culture." He insists that forms of activism and mobilization must be analyzed in the wider historical developments in which they occur, against naïve constructions of "good" versus "bad" activism. Echoing earlier calls for ethnographic research on activism (Juris and Khasnabish 2013: 8), he calls for an anthroposociology of Roma-related activism focusing on life histories of activists, often traveling between scales and sites and, in the process, blurring or shifting boundaries.

The second contribution in the volume—Ana Chiriţoiu's interrogation of the activist response to the 1993 Hădăreni conflict, in which mob violence led to the lynching of several Roma men and the burning of Roma houses—enters in dialogue with Huub van Baar's argument on several levels. Chiriţoiu's account of activism in the aftermath of the conflict constitutes a prime example of in-depth analysis of activism, critically revisited over two decades later by Nicolae Gheorghe, as one of the main actors shaping the activist agenda around the case. She mobilizes her ethnographic research on the Hădăreni conflict and shows the contradictions of early activism reinterpreted—and thereby placed in a larger historical and sociopolitical perspective—by Nicolae Gheorghe. She reads the Hădăreni case as a cautionary tale of early postsocialist Romani activism and uses a historicizing approach to underline the contradictions inherent in the early post-1989 Romani movement, locked in a double bind of state opposition and transnational activism, in which local understandings and experiences were consciously effaced in favor of universal notions of justice and rights. In the process, "local knowledge" was lost between transnational strategies of the Romani movement to put Roma issues on the European political agenda as a matter of secu-

rity, and to establish its own legitimacy by using universalizing human rights vocabularies. To some extent, this contributed to what Gheorghe himself (Gheorghe and Pulay 2013) characterized as a state of crisis of an activism largely estranged from "the local." Chirițoiu's analysis focuses on the process of truth-production deployed by the various actors involved in the postconflict intervention, and shows how the legitimizing use of repertoires pertaining to trauma and victimhood inhabits a "structural contradiction between humanitarian 'emotions' and strategic 'procedures.'" Through her refined, ethnographically informed analysis, "the local" reemerges, with clarity and in all its complexity, as a pertinent analytical site of research on political activism and its discomfitures.

Notwithstanding the multiplication, over the last thirty years, of ethnographic research sites—from multisited (Marcus 1995) to digital (Pink et al. 2015) ethnographies—"the local" remains for anthropologists a relevant site of research, a locus of knowledge production that deserves to stand central to scholarly investigation of forms of activist mobilization. "The local" features precisely at the core of László Fosztó's chapter. He focuses on the analysis of incongruities between activist agendas and local understandings of conflict, identity, and coexistence. Nicolae Gheorghe remains at the core of both activist mobilization and critical appraisal of the forms activism embodied, but moves on to a more scholarly reflection on the role of local knowledge in the process. Fosztó recounts his own experience of activism "from the margins" on two occasions, both involving Gheorghe and other activists and scholars, and both having at the core a conflict, either physical (the violent clashes and destruction of Roma property in Harghita county in 2009) or symbolic (the battles between proponents of "Rom" or *țigan*—in Romanian, "Gypsy"—as the "correct" ethnonym for the Roma). Analytically, Fosztó stresses the advantage of embedding inquiries on activism in the wider dynamics of state transformation, for, as he rightly claims, activism is almost always driven by attempts to transform the state. He also calls for nuanced understandings of both "state" and "activism," which seem all too often to be placed in the inescapable roles of the "good" activists versus a reified "bad" state.

By following closely the diverse threads of meaning woven in the case of the Harghita conflict, Fosztó shows how Nicolae Gheorghe, together with anthropologist Gergő Pulay, came to understand the various ways in which meanings became "lost in translation." The interpretation of the pro-Roma activist response as an anti-Hungarian, provocative manifestation, the refusal of the local communities to allow activists to meddle with the conflict, and the self-identification of the *Romungre* (Hungarian-speaking Roma residing in a predominantly Hungarian area of Transylvania) involved in the conflict as Hungarians, rather than Roma, unsettled simplistic and binary framings of the events in terms of "ethnic" conflict between Hungarian op-

pressors and Roma victims. While unveiling how local understandings differ in substantial ways from activist agendas, these misinterpretations also raised questions about the pertinence of activist discourses on Roma victimhood and universalistic human rights vocabularies, and signaled the need to call for an alternative discourse on "shared responsibility" and for a dialogue with local forms of knowledge (Gheorghe and Pulay 2009). As a result of a common, thorough reflection on the events by activists and scholars, new ways of engagement emerged as alternatives to contemporary forms of activism, and the role of critical scholars in the process was key to reaching nuanced understandings.

Fosztó advocates for nuanced understandings also in the second, symbolic, conflict recounted in his chapter, rejecting partisan positions on the necessity to impose one or another "correct" ethnonym. The reflexive encounters he narrates speak of the paramount meaning of local knowledge and the necessity, contra a "one-size-fits-all" approach, to allow for space for self-identification. Fosztó's analysis is a persuasive argument on the urgent need to permanently intersect scholarly reflexivity and activism, while allowing for researchers to shape their own posture either as fully engaged activists or as critical observers "from the margins," or, indeed, anywhere in between.

Renewing Epistemologies

The sober tone of the first part is followed in the second section by contributions with a clearly more engaged resonance, advocating for epistemological renewal within Romani studies. The three chapters of this part are critical of some of the current dominant dynamics in Roma-related research, and propose crucial shifts of perspective to enable and generate renewed kinds of scholarship better attuned with activist engagement. The contributions of this section take stock of scholarly literatures outside the narrow field of Romani studies and address wider issues of power relations within institutions producing knowledge.

Andrew Ryder explores the debates around the epistemological implications of conducting engaged forms of research, especially by Roma academics. In recent years, the EANRS, as the main forum of exchange among academics involved in researching Roma issues, has been the stage of telltale battles announcing a decisive transformation: power and the legitimacy of current hierarchies are being contested by Roma researchers increasingly joining the ranks of Romani studies academics and unsettling notions of objective, neutral knowledge. In many ways, this is a war already fought elsewhere and in earlier times: the birth of public anthropology as knowledge serving the aim of building a just world (Beck 2009; Beck and Maida 2015)

bears testimony to the force of the idea that the potential of research should be used for emancipatory goals. The antithetic argument maintains faith in the illusion of objectivity, claiming that engaged research necessarily implies biased premises on which it is judged improper to construct meaningful knowledge. At stake are, unmistakably, definitions of "meaningful": while for adepts of scientism, meaningful knowledge is objective, detached and neutral, for activist researchers, the meaningfulness of their knowledge is derived from its usefulness to bring about transformative change. Through a factional conversation creatively staged, Ryder reenacts the dialogues within the EANRS, deliberately polarizing the positions on this debate so as to render the fracture all the more striking. He comments on the opposition between scientism and critical research by stressing how the first favors the detachment of academics from the object of their inquiry, whereas the latter values embodied knowledge from the standpoint of the researched, blurring, in the process, the boundary between researchers and the people whose lives they investigate—and thus also between research and activism. Ryder emphasizes that research is shaped in crucial ways by institutional and economic factors, and comments on the example of EU-funded research, which, in the case of Roma-related knowledge production, risks reinforcing existing problematic power relations. On the one hand, while the participation of Roma in research is a trendy buzzword in applications for funding, it appears to be more often than not tokenistic; on the other hand, the bureaucracy inherent in the process of accessing EU funds acts as to favor professionalized NGOs above community-based organizations (CBOs), which might have a broader Roma participation. Yet the chapter ends on a more optimistic tone: while noting the recent motion proposed by Thomas Acton and Yaron Matras within the Gypsy Lore Society, recognizing that the institution has not been immune to prejudicial attitudes toward the Roma and committing itself to "promote knowledge of and engagement with Romani communities," Ryder is confident that the access of Romani scholars to the community of Romani studies will promote a paradigm shift toward more engaged forms of research, and predicates that diverging views should enter into a constructive dialogue.

Taking up the topic of the ingression of scholars of Romani background in academic circles, Angéla Kóczé's chapter uses autoethnography and accounts of other Roma women in academia to expand on the adversities they encounter in their attempts to build scientific and professional legitimacy among peers. The women she interviews emphasize the painstaking labor of shaping a space for themselves—as Roma and as women—and creating themselves "from scratch, in environments where one is not supposed to exist," for, until very recently, in the research equation, Roma were objectified as researched subjects, and never in the powerful position of those who

actively shape knowledge. Kóczé thus deeply unsettles a readership engaged in the ethnographic investigation of Roma lived experience, by contesting its position as research object solely and claiming the legitimacy to generate knowledge on its own terms.

To make sense of the struggles Roma women face in academic environments and to chart the hierarchies and the power relations imbued with racism and sexism, which their presence unsettles, Kóczé mobilizes feminist and critical race theory, emphasizing the intersectionality of the positions her interlocutors occupy, as women and as Roma. She delivers a poignant critique of mainstream Romani studies by building further on Romani and Black feminist scholars who pointed out racist and sexist epistemologies at work, as well as power imbalances in academia itself. She criticizes the choice of Romani studies to work with the analytical category of "ethnicity" instead of "race," showing how the emphasis on Roma as an "ethnic" group renders racism invisible, thus debilitating a critique of the hierarchies though which the Roma are constructed as an inferior "culture," in what Balibar (1991) termed "neo-racism." For Kóczé, as for her interlocutors, race is, to the contrary, a very practical issue: in academia, the racialization of Romani scholars amounts to their inferiorization and infantilization, often depriving them of the legitimacy to shape the way in which knowledge is created. She ponders on the pivotal role of these women in transgressing borders, a metaphor fitting at once the act of an insurgent trespassing of invisible but powerful boundaries into the headquarters where knowledge is assembled, and the permanent back-and-forth crossing of the porous—and often completely dissolved—border between academia and activism. In line with earlier arguments underlining the intrinsically dialogical character of Romani feminism (Kóczé 2008), she emphasizes the role of Roma women in academia as skillful "passers" between worlds, in a position from which they "seek to create a politics of possibility" not only by connecting them, but also by playing a paramount role as mentors of the emerging generation of Romani activist-scholars.

To a large extent, the contributions by Ryder and Kóczé can be read as reactions to the institutional debates in Romani studies about the engagement of Romani scholars, exemplifying marvelously how academic literature, rather than being produced by neutral actors in aseptic and "objective" environments devoid of power relations, is carved in crucial ways by debates and power struggles in the scientific community: as the locus where knowledge is generated is itself composed of a social fabric rife with power struggles, knowledge cannot be detached from the context of its production.

The interconnectedness between knowledge and the environment of its own genesis is also one of the arguments in the last chapter of this section. In line with the first section's emphasis on the usefulness of ethnographic

research methods, while continuing to question some of the strands of Romani activism, Ana Ivasiuc critiques the pervasive narrative of victimhood and entrapment transpiring from militant advocacy discourses and "gray literature" coproduced by certain NGOs and powerful donors, which sometimes also percolates through in academic writings. Using observations from her experience as research coordinator in a Roma NGO, Ivasiuc contextualizes the production of the victimhood narrative, by showing how and why this discourse is manufactured at the heart of the development apparatus in which CSOs, forced to compete for funds, are compelled to fabricate a discourse based on buzzwords and tropes of victimhood, which simultaneously constitutes a practice of accessing funds. This narrative impels a pessimistic bias, which sometimes bends the interpretation of research data, altering the process of selection of quantitative findings to stress the shortfalls and inadequacies of the Roma. She shows how the emphasis on the "lacks" and "deficits" of Roma, simultaneous to the neglect of their forms of agency, is a perverse form of Orientalism sustaining paternalistic policy interventions and feeding the wider discursive needs of the development apparatus. Building on her ethnographic study of the conflicts within the implementation of a World Bank–sponsored community development project, Ivasiuc discusses forms of agency in which Roma groups engage, suggesting a renewal of activist epistemologies within and through gray literature attentive to these forms of agency.

Renewing Activisms

The last section of the volume explores some of the promising "margins" potentially able to renew Romani activism.

   In her chapter, Margaret Greenfields argues that besides activism for the empowerment of Roma, and high quality research providing "moral and practical arguments for change," the third crucial element likely to bring about the betterment of Roma lives is appropriate policy. While the volume addresses the first two dimensions extensively, her contribution specifically deals with the underresearched nexus between Roma-related activism, research, and policy, with a marked emphasis on the latter. She emphasizes the need for pragmatism in channeling change through the institutional paths of policy-making, with clear rules defining which types of knowledge are relevant to policy makers and which are likely to be shelved as irrelevant. Greenfields uses quantitative data provided by the EANRS on its membership composition to show the unmistakable underrepresentation of policy as an area of expertise among researchers dealing with Roma issues. Noting the increase—in both demand and supply—of policy reports and advice on Roma-related issues throughout Europe, she suggests that although scholars

are involved in significant numbers in providing policy consultancy to various national and transnational bodies, many of them lack the training, experience, and insights into the policy-making machinery that would enhance the chances of their knowledge to be incorporated effectively into successful measures. She suggests that activist scholars should become familiar with policy environments in order to "translate their research into policy outcomes," and that the constraints of the policy-making process should be taken into account when imparting policy advice. While she acknowledges that pertinent criticism to policy-making has been formulated both within the anthropology of policy literature and by Romani studies scholars, she advocates for a pragmatic, closer association between activist research and policy-making, specifically on the latter's terms. Greenfields argues that there is a gap between academics and policy makers and contends that scholars can bridge this gap not only by attuning their recommendations to the requirements of policy makers in terms of theoretical models, terminology, and pragmatism, but also by attending to the "packaging" of their knowledge, for instance by refraining from expressing "too great a criticism of the administrative regime's actions," and also by using clear tools to showcase their recommendations, such as case studies. Greenfields makes the case for confronting policy makers with the concrete problems encountered by their "end-users," and provides a telling example of how she involved Gypsy and Traveller activists, as well as homeless activists, in a training she organized with policy makers in the United Kingdom, in which knowledge was coproduced and policy makers were practically confronted with the issues they had to solve through policy. Finally, advocating for "practice-based approaches to critical thinking" in policy advice, Greenfields warns against the dangers of "overthinking" and complexifying beyond measure the knowledge presented to policy makers, arguing that such approaches are likely to stall intervention or reduce it to substandard practice, and that the ethical choice of activist researchers should ultimately lie in opting for what "works" in policy toward the practical improvement of the living circumstances of its "end-users." For activist researchers to whom this is a paramount, immediate aim, Greenfields thus opens up the terrain of practical research activism through policy advice.

From Europe's margins, Danielle V. Schoon investigates in the next chapter the case of Turkish *Romanlar,* whose activism stands in stark opposition to universalizing, European-based forms of identity politics activism. Schoon's argument thus provincializes European Roma activism, questioning its universalistic assumptions and revealing the different logic at play in the formulation of collective identities and demands of Turkey's *Romanlar,* analyzed in its wider historical and political context. The chapter starts from the double observation that, on the one hand, representatives of the *Roman-*

lar were absent from the mass protest movement of Gezi Park in May 2013, yet that, on the other hand, their presence was assumed. Using this example, she explicates the theoretical and political challenges that the case of activists for the rights of the *Romanlar* in Turkey pose to European scholars and activists. To understand the dynamics of *Roman* activism in contemporary Turkey, Schoon embeds her analysis in the historical genealogy of the republican conception of difference and citizenship, in which commonness based on shared Islam overrode ethnic, linguistic, or cultural differences, constructed as illegitimate and threatening to nation building. It is within this framework that the *Romanlar* historically claimed their right to equality. In recent times, Turkey's republican conception of citizenship stood under tension, notably from pressures by the international community, and in particular the EU, to shift toward the framework of minority rights.

Yet *Roman* associations, indifferent or even hostile to international pressures for the recognition of minority rights, have opted for a different strategy, in which class, rather than cultural differences, is underscored, allowing them to formulate policy claims to address inequality in terms of poverty. Schoon argues that this strategy should compel both scholarship on Romani issues and Romani activism to rethink critically the categories upon which European Romani activism has built its identity politics, including, crucially, the category of "civil society," which works to merely reconfigure, rather than dissolve, existing power relations. The example of the Turkish *Romanlar,* who practice fluid, contextual identities in the idioms available to them in a "politics of the governed" (Chatterjee 2004), underscores their agency in the process of forging political subjectivities that contrast, in many ways, the ones largely prescribed by European Romani activism. In the subtext, the argument that a conscious renewal of scholarship and activism could not come into being without the scrutiny of the margins of "mainstream" possibilities is compelling.

We end our volume appropriately with the examination of an emerging form of militancy, at once challenging and rejuvenating current trends, namely Roma youth activism. In her chapter, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka illustrates how the emerging Roma youth movement shares common characteristics epitomizing a renewal of Romani activism, defying its established patterns while contesting it from the margins. She begins her argument by painting with large brushstrokes a current "panorama of Romani affairs" as background against (in both senses of the word) which youth activism takes shape. She contends that the increase of interest among international organizations to develop policies for the Roma, and the booming of both Roma and non-Roma civil society organizations incorporating Romani issues on their agenda, together with the availability of funding for related interventions, led to ambiguous dynamics. The inflation of "expertise" in Roma-related

policy dialogues, as well as the cooption of professionalized NGOs as deliverers of government services, have often worked to cement old hierarchies or create new ones—such as the subalternization of grassroots organizations (GRO) to professionalized organizations, and the former's subsequent diminished access to funding. Thus, despite the increased attention to Romani issues on political agendas nationally and supranationally, nongovernmental actors did not substantially challenge existing power imbalances. To the contrary: an overpopulated domain became rife with tensions over funding, expertise, and legitimacy, and the cooption of Roma NGOs has often signified in practice that the role of these organizations in mobilizing, organizing, and engaging with Roma communities has been neglected or squarely abandoned in favor of bureaucratic compliance with donors' demands for reports and grants applications.

Against this gridlock, Mirga-Kruszelnicka depicts the emergence of the Roma youth movement as a persuasive and energetic contender, capable to challenge existing dominant trends on a number of levels. Through the analysis of its identity discourses and practices of association, Mirga-Kruszelnicka argues that the Roma youth agenda marks a paradigm shift and a significant departure from current forms of activism. First, with regards to the particular configuration of a Romani identity uprooted from frames of stigmatization, victimhood, and subalternity, the Roma youth movement promotes a positive identity grounded in ethnic pride, and distinctly aims at constructing narratives of self-esteem and empowerment. Second, Roma youth activism engages with "the grassroots" to a significant extent, framing Roma communities as a resource and consciously challenging the gap between the established organizations and their constituencies. In the process, they forge new forms of activism away from service provision and tokenistic participation, toward robust frames of community engagement sustaining the development of political consciousness. Third, youth activism aims at broader, more inclusive coalition-building processes, in which not only Roma participate, but also non-Roma and actors with perceived common political interests, such as other minorities, thereby reconnecting and intersecting Roma activism with wider social movements in an attempt to build larger interest-based alliances. While Roma youth activism is exposed to a number of challenges, Mirga-Kruszelnicka contends that the paradigm shift signified by its emergence is paramount to understanding the future possibilities of a rejuvenation of Romani activism.

By bringing together all the various strands of debates both within research on Roma issues and within Romani activism, the volume lays bare the cracks and tensions of their intersection, pointing toward spaces of moderate renewal or radical ruptures in both. And to formulate our intent in the familiar language of the gift, the volume's impulse is to return the gift

to the people and the institutional nodes in the Romani movement that have allowed or encouraged the contributors to examine current developments through research, in the hope that activists and researchers will find it useful to reflect upon the legacies of Roma-related research and activism explored in the volume, and, by developing critical reflexivity, to be part of a meaningful renewal of both. Ultimately, the volume speaks of activism as a mode of research (Juris and Khasnabish 2013: 8), but also of research as a vital posture of engagement.

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Notes

1. A note on terminology is in order when writing about "the Roma" as if the label denoted a coherent and self-evident whole. Some of the contributions of the volume approach "the Roma" in their many identitary manifestations: Hungarian Roma, or *Romungre* from Transylvania; Turkish Muslim *Romanlar*; Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers from the United Kingdom, etc. Some others speak of "the Roma" as a more vague and general umbrella term. The editors' choice has been to let the authors use the term that they saw fit, in a bid to reflect the heterogeneity of "the Roma" under this single label. Whereas many scholarly works include a discussion on the preferred terminology and opt for various strategies of labeling, often concurring with political views on the (in)correctness of particular terms, we have preferred to leave out such discussions, treated more in detail in other works (among many others, Vermeersch 2005; Tremlett 2009; Agarin 2014; Law and Kovats 2018). Within the volume, Fosztó's chapter deals with the naming battles in the Romanian context, offering insights into the political stakes of such controversies. While being aware both of the heterogeneity of groups artificially brought under the label "Roma," and of the politics of labeling, on the one hand, and identity production, on the other hand, this discussion is beyond the scope of the volume. For linguistic parsimony, we will use "Roma" to mean the constellation of groups self-identifying as Roma, Gypsies, Sinti, Manouches, Kaale, Romanichals, etc., and Roma/Romani as the alternating forms of the corresponding adjective.

2. There are some inconsistencies in the different accounts of the events in the Hungarian, German, and Romanian press. I am grateful to László Fosztó for pointing this out to me.
3. For an overview of the politics of Roma in Europe and a sophisticated analysis of its complexities, see Law and Kovats 2018.

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