Negotiating Identity and Culture

A study of the Romanian Roma in Govanhill

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Romanian Roma in Govanhill

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Photographs courtesy of
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Figure 1.
Abstract

With Romania joining the European Union in 2007, a large number of Romanian immigrants, including a significant Roma population, arrived in the UK, creating new challenges for the host society. There is however, only a very limited amount of research on this group, and almost no studies look at processes of ‘assimilation’, or changes in culture or identity associated with migration. This study addresses this gap by discussing processes of ethnic identity construction amongst Romanian Roma in Govanhill, with a focus on the relationship between ethnicity, culture, and community. It also presents an alternative to the highly contested acculturation models, building on Frederick Barth’s (1969) ethnic boundary theory.

The empirical part of the research has involved qualitative investigation into people’s perceptions about ethnicity, identity, culture, and community, based on seven semi-structured interviews, complemented by participant observation in the community, and secondary analysis of existing data. The findings suggest that the Romanian Roma of Govanhill have engaged in active boundary maintenance and construction, particularly in relation to their new neighbours, Roma from Slovakia. Also, the data revealed a complex relationship between identity, community and culture, supporting Barth’s theories, and other constructivist approaches to ethnicity formation.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The high levels of international migration experienced around the globe make the study of migration and related processes increasingly relevant for social scientists, policy makers and practitioners. As individuals and groups cross the boundaries of nation states and cultures, they embark on complex processes, which shape their culture, their national and ethnic belonging, and their social identity. In recent years, social scientists have often embarked on the process of researching the field of migration (e.g. Castles and Miller, 2009; Oderth, 2002), and there have been numerous studies carried out addressing issues such as reasons behind migration, processes of ‘integration’ into the host society, or the more anthropological exploration of individual experiences of migration (see Bommes and Morawska, 2005 for an overview of this research).

Although migration is not a new process, European migration has been intensified in recent decades by the open borders policy of the European Union. Since 2007, when Romania became one of the newest members of the EU, many Romanian citizens have embraced the opportunity to live and work in other member states. Among these migrants there is a noticeable Roma population, who, due to their historical marginalisation, are often perceived as an outsider in their country of origin, as well as their new host society. The migration of the Roma to Western Europe, and the UK in particular, has created new social situations, characterised by the collision of different cultures, and increased economic and political pressures on the host society. This often results in misunderstandings and conflicts between the various groups involved, and created new challenges for policy makers and service providers (Poole, 2010).
Interestingly, research relating to Eastern European Roma immigrants in the UK is extremely limited, and there is almost no empirical work on the Romanian Roma. The small amount of existing literature focuses on the reasons behind migration (e.g. Kaneff and Pine, 2011) or policy implications (e.g. Poole, 2010). There is a clear gap in the literature when it comes to qualitatively oriented studies, focusing on culture, community, and ‘assimilation’, prioritizing the point of view of the migrants. (One notable exception is the work of anthropologist Jan Grill, who has addressed some of these issues, while researching Slovakian Roma in Glasgow.)

The aim of this study is to address this gap, by looking at one specific Romanian Roma community in Govanhill, Glasgow. In particular, this dissertation will address issues surrounding ethnicity, culture, and community, and the related processes of ethnic identity construction amongst the Roma from Romania. This study emphasises the personal views and perceived experiences of members of this group, and thus focuses on the internal processes leading to ethnic identification, while acknowledging the importance of external factors. Furthermore, this dissertation will also present an alternative to the highly contested acculturation theories, building on Frederick Barth’s (1969) ethnic boundary theory in researching aspects of migration, as suggested by social theorists, such as Wimmer (2007) and Alba and Nee (2003).

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- How have the ethnic, cultural and community boundaries of the Romanian Roma changed in the process of migration?
- What is the relationship between ethnic identity, culture and community?
- How is the Romanian Roma ethnic identity constructed and maintained in the Glaswegian context?
For the investigation of these questions a combination of literature review and empirical data analysis has been used. Given the limited nature of directly relevant theoretical and empirical studies, the focus of the literature review is twofold. First, the most important topics related to Roma identity from the literature will be presented, and second, a general overview of theories of ethnicity and migrant integration will be given. The empirical part of the study is based on a case study of the Romanian Roma community in Govanhill, an area of the city well known for its high proportion of ethnic minority population. The empirical part of the dissertation employs a qualitative research design, combining semi structured interviews with participant observation.

This dissertation is structured in five main parts, including the Introduction (chapter one). The Literature review (chapter two) contains an overview of the relevant literature, with two sub-sections, focusing on Roma ethnicity, and theoretical perspectives on ethnicity and migration, respectively. The Methodology chapter (chapter three) describes the research methods and the related practical, theoretical and ethical considerations. In the Findings chapter (chapter four) the results of the data are presented, together with a discussion, linking these findings to the existing literature. Finally, in the Conclusion (chapter five) the main results of the paper are presented, and implications for further research are discussed.
Chapter 2: Literature review

Before introducing the empirical part of the dissertation, first a review of the related literature will be presented, providing a general introduction to the research area. Given the limited nature of similar studies – as mentioned in the introduction – there is no directly relevant theoretical model or empirical precedence to be discussed. Consequently, the literature review has two separate foci. In the first part, Roma ethnicity, culture and migration will be discussed, while in the second part, the focus will be on various theoretical models of ethnicity and migrant assimilation.

2.1 The Roma

This presents an overview of the existing literature on Roma ethnicity, ethnic identity, culture, and community, as well as some of the key topics relating to contemporary migration. First, the historical context of Roma ethnicity will be presented, followed by a discussion on identification, and culture. Finally, the focus will be shifted towards the context of Roma migration, and the literature addressing the Romanian Roma in the UK.

2.1.1 Who are the Roma?

The names Roma, Gypsy, Tsigan (and other variations) are used more or less interchangeably to represent a relatively wide range of people, from English Travellers, to Eastern European Romani speaking groups. The Roma are Europe’s largest ethnic minority, and they are present throughout the continent, as well as outside it (Bancroft, 2005; Ringold, et al, 2005). The Roma are one of the most marginalised people in Europe, having faced severe racism throughout history (Bancroft, 2005:1). Also, the
fact that they have no ‘historical homeland’ sets them apart from other European minority groups (Ringold, et al, 2005:xiii).

Bancroft (2005:1) argues that “[t]he origins, history and contemporary identity of these groups are highly debated”. Based largely on linguistic studies (originating from Grellman, 1787), but also on anthropological and some genetic evidence, it is most often argued that the Roma are a separate ethnic group, being displaced from India in the 10\textsuperscript{th} century, migrating towards north-west and finally spreading throughout Europe (Fraser, 1995; Bancroft, 2005). However, it has been suggested that the evidence is very limited and in fact gypsies, as a cross-national group with distinct culture and identity, are to a great extent the creation of government officials and social scientists, like Grellman (Okely, 1994; Willems, 1997).

Furthermore, it is important to recognise that Roma people are “extremely diverse, with multiple subgroups based on language, history, religion and occupations” (Ringold et al, 2005:xiii). According to Liegeois (1994:61), “Gypsies and Travellers form a worldwide mosaic of diversified groups” (original emphasis). In this context it is important to ask: is it possible to talk about ‘Roma identity’ at all? And if yes, how is this identity formed and what does it consist of?

\subsection{Ethnic identity}

Throughout the literature, authors adopt two different perspectives when looking at Roma identity: the categorisation defined by the outsiders (or non-Roma), and Roma (or insider) self-identification. Empirical data from Eastern Europe shows that in a significant number of cases, those who are categorised as Roma by researchers or other non-Roma don’t identify themselves as Roma or Gypsy and vice-versa (Csepeli and
Simon, 2004; Ladanyi and Szelenyi, 2001). These differences can often be attributed to the variations in the necessary characteristics that Roma and non-Roma people attribute to the Roma.

Outsiders often describe Roma as a disadvantaged social group, without a culture of its own, but adopting the cultural patterns of the poor working class (Csepeli and Simon, 2004:132). They are also often viewed as a racialised outsider group (Bancroft, 2005:37). Even the majority of sociological works adopt a restricted view on Roma identity and culture, adopting a “homogenous image of the Gypsies created by the majority through its biased perceptions […]. The Gypsy image created this way is not the model of an ethnic identity but that of social status, the product of oppression.” (Csepeli and Simon, 2004:135)

Studies adopting an inside-out perspective, focusing on those who self-identify as Roma, generally find that Roma retain a strong cultural and community identity. Bancroft (2005) argues that their sense of separateness is maintained in part by internal processes, and in part by the sentiments of the gadjo (non-Roma) population they live amongst. Barth (1969) in turn has also pointed out that the Roma “operate internal border maintenance, and actively differentiate themselves from the gauje¹” (Bancroft, 2005:48).

According to Formoso (2000) the bases of Gypsy identity is not shared ancestry or common territory, but the active differentiation between Gypsies and non-Gypsies. It is this differentiation, which creates links between individual Gypsy communities that might otherwise have varied cultures of their own. Although Formoso talks about

¹ gauje – refers to non-Roma people. The term comes from British Romani. Throughout this paper I use its equivalent in Romanian Romani, gadjo
Western European Gyspies, similar observations have been made by Stewart as well (1994), in his ethnographic work about a Roma community in Hungary. He pointed out a series of structural oppositions between Hungarian peasants and Roma, such as labour Vs. dealing, diligence Vs. cleverness, or accumulation of wealth Vs. brotherly sharing (1994:237).

At the same time, there seems to be a tendency among Roma “to internalise the negative image perpetuated by the outgroup” (Csepeli and Simon, 2004:135). Peter Szuhaj’s scale (Table 1.) describing the varying forms of identity, ranging from self-denial to proud self-identification, supports this observation.

Table 1: Scale of self-identification, by Peter Szuhaj (in Vajda, 2000:45)
2.1.3 Roma culture

Even though the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that there is no uniform Roma or Gypsy culture which can be considered the bases of Roma ethnic identity, researchers have pointed out some specific values, characteristics and cultural elements, which tend to be similar across various Roma groups. In the following sections, some of these will be presented, and later, they will also be the focus of my own empirical investigations.

a. Family

“Every aspect of Gypsies’ and Travellers’ lives gravitates around the family” (Liegeois, 1994:43). Liegeois claims that the extended family often forms the basis of social organisation, is “simultaneously an economic unit in which work and solidarity are exercised and an educative unit which ensures social reproduction and security, as well as the protection of the individual” (1994:83). He also argues that the nuclear family is less important.

Generally families are formed at a young age, often young couples will be parents at late teens or early twenties, and Roma and Gypsy families will usually have slightly more children than gadjos (Clark and Greenfield, 2006). Also, sometimes couples regard themselves married without official marriage certificates, based on the families’ consent (Sabou, 2011).

b. Gender relationships

Men and women occupy different roles in the family. Even though in private they are often equal in decision making, in public the women are expected to be subservient to men. Also, at the majority of social gatherings, women and men are split into separate gendered groups (Clark and Greenfield, 2006).
c. **Language**

Romani, the language of Roma, has its origins close to Sanskrit. However, the large number of influences and borrowings from other languages it has come in contact with led to the development of a diverse range of dialects. Furthermore, Liegeois notes that this variety in language can also become “a practical way for recognising the shared elements and particularism separating the speakers. For the Gypsy, social position (membership of a given group or social category) and linguistic behaviour are always linked” (1994:53).

d. **Religion**

Gypsy and Roma tend to take on the religious practices of the wider community. They are predominantly Christian, but some groups, for example in Bulgaria, are Muslim. Levels of church attendance vary, similarly to the *gadjo* population. However, there is an increasing membership of the evangelical (‘born again Christian’) gypsy churches both in Britain and other countries (Clark and Greenfield, 2006).

e. **Work**

Clark and Greenfield (2006) point out that even though creating a home is often fundamental to Roma women’s identity, more and more women tend to participate in formalised work. However, men are usually the main earners, and it is considered to be their job to provide for the family. They are also often reluctant to take up the role of an employee, and prefer working for themselves.

Children are socialised in the various work related roles from an early age. Young girls help out in the household and with younger siblings, and boys learn the trades of their father, or “do business” with them from an early age. It is still common for young
people to leave formal education relatively early, often from the time they transfer to secondary school (Clark and Greenfield, 2006:51).

\[ f. \quad \textit{Music} \]

Music is the most important art form of Gypsies, recognised from early times. Liegeois (1994) argues that the great merit of Gypsies, and particularly those from Romania, is that they created fusions between the different musical strands of a given country, or different countries. Today Roma music is still prevalent, but people, especially younger ones are also influenced by contemporary music. Besides music, the related dance is also found to be important for Roma communities.

\[ 2.1.4 \quad \textit{Romanian Roma in the UK} \]

The Roma population in Romania is estimated at around 1.5 million (7% of the population). Although there are obvious similarities between the names of the name of the Roma ethnic groups, and the name of the country, these are not to be confused. Similarly, Romania’s national language is Romanian, which is different from Romani, the language spoken by many Roma.

Historically, the Roma in Romania have been marginalised, enslaved, and many were sent to concentration camps during the Second World War. During communism, they mostly abandoned their traditional crafts, and when the Communist Government broke down, the Roma were left with no jobs. Also, as opposed to many non-Roma peasants, who got their privately owned assets restituted after communism, the Roma, who rarely owned any such assets, often faced constant socio-economic difficulties as a result. As a way of coping, many Roma took advantage of agricultural working schemes, or other opportunities to earn money overseas, and some applied for asylum. (Sabou, 2011)
In 2007, when Romania became a member state of the European Union, citizens - including the Roma - were granted new rights, meaning that they could settle freely in the UK, but immediate access to public funds or labour markets was not allowed. Employment has been restricted to already existing schemes, with some exceptions, like those for highly skilled individuals, or students at higher education institutions. Romanian nationals are still free to start self-employment, but the bureaucratic nature of the processes involved often makes this particularly difficult. Furthermore, in order to be entitled to a limited range of social benefits, Romanian nationals have to prove that they have engaged in some of the above form of work while in the UK. (Poole, 2010; UK Border Agency, 2013)

Writing about Slovakian Roma, Grill argues that Roma migration has been shaped by migration policies, demands for cheap labour, and previously developed networks and transnational connections (Grill, 2011). Data from 2003 shows that the Romanian Roma who migrated to the UK were not the poorest groups, due to the costs associated with migration. There were certain groups, who selected the UK as their destination, mostly from the Transylvanian region, and young men were overrepresented among the migrants (Stevens, 2003).

Stevens (2003) found that most Roma came with the aim to work and make money. Many applied for asylum, and worked on the black market (since employment was not allowed), but besides the financial advantages, people also considered the UK to be a “nice country”. The majority however, still considered Romania as their home, and were planning to return there, but said that they might return to the UK if needed
The role of the extended family, as a facilitator and supporter of migration is emphasised in most studies (Grill, 2011; Sabou, 2011; Stevens, 2003). Grill (2011) also found that those who didn’t benefit from personal networks and the ease of regulations in the country of their destination had more difficulty improving their social and economic status.

2.1.5 Summary

Authors writing about Roma are often guilty of making over-generalised assumptions about Roma culture, and assume an objectively definable Roma identity. Furthermore, the literature on both Roma identity formation and Romanian Roma migration is relatively limited. Nonetheless, the overview of the literature revealed the following:

- The Roma are a diverse ethnic group, made up of a great number of sub-groups, with varying cultures.
- Nonetheless, Roma often have strong cultural and community identity.
- The separateness of Roma is achieved by a combination of internal and external boundary processes.
- Internally, separation is achieved by active differentiation from the gadjo. However, external – mostly negative – perceptions are also internalised.
- Although it is not possible to talk about a universal Roma culture, the literature has revealed some generally prevailing cultural aspects, such as the centrality of the family.

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2 Steven’s (2003) research was carried out before Romania Joining the European Union in 2007, at a time when Romanian nationals’ labour rights and free movement in the UK was highly restricted.
Migration to the UK is motivated for primarily economic reasons, and existing kinship networks play an important role in the migration processes of the Eastern European Roma.

2.2 Ethnicity and migration – a theoretical approach

Having presented the literature addressing the questions of Roma identity and migration, the limited nature of theoretical underpinnings became evident. Consequently, in this section I will present and critically evaluate some of the most relevant sociological and anthropological models dealing with ethnicity and migrant assimilation, with the aim of building on them during the analysis of my data. These two concepts are closely interrelated and dependent on each other, and this relationship will be at the heart of the discussions in this chapter.

2.2.1 Classic assimilation theory

One of the earliest definitions of social assimilation describes it as

*the name given to the process or processes by which peoples of diverse racial origins and different cultural heritages, occupying a common territory, achieve a cultural solidarity sufficient at least to sustain a national existence* (Park, 1930:281).

The concept of social assimilation originates from the Chicago School, in the 1920’s. They put forward a basic view of migrant ‘assimilation’, today often referred to as the ‘classic assimilation theory’ (Alba & Nee, 1997). This early approach has been criticised on many levels, most notably for its assumption that assimilation is a linear process with one clear outcome (Rumbaut, 1997) - that of immigrants blending into the host society (Alba & Nee, 1997). This theory assumes that every group will assimilate
in the mainstream by loosening its community ties, changing its identity and taking up the host society’s culture (Wimmer, 2007).

Revised versions of the theory, such as that of Gordon (1964) or a more modern take by Porthes & Zhou (1993) acknowledge differences between cultural and social assimilation, and break away from the concept of linearity (Alba & Nee, 1997). Distinguishing between culture and identity and allowing for different assimilation ‘strategies’, Berry’s (1980) socio-psychological analysis suggests four possible outcomes for migrants: Assimilation, Separation, Integration and Marginalisation (Berry, 1997).

According to Wimmer (2007), all the theoretical models presented above are guilty of forcing a Herderian worldview on their basic assumptions. Herder (1784) argued that ethnic groups are defined by a community, a common identity, a shared culture, and quite often a shared geographical location. Similarly, the classic assimilation theories assume that ethnic groups have a “bounded and coherent character during the first stages of the process” (Wimmer, 2007:4) and that they are characterised by “a unique culture, and at least initially, a separate social universe” (2007:5).

Furthermore, the multiculturalist approach, which argues that cultural and ethnic traits and communities are and should be maintained over generations, assumes an absolute Herdenistic position, by seeing ethnic groups as “natural”, and requiring preservation against assimilation (Wimmer, 2007).

In conclusion, it can be argued that the assimilation theories aimed at explaining the identity and cultural processes happening during migration are mistaken on their basic assumptions about ethnicity. Thus, in order to create a sociologically correct analysis of
these processes, we first have to identify a more accurate model linking ethnicity to culture and identity.

### 2.2.2 Ethnicity and the Boundary Perspective

In common sense understanding, ethnicity is often considered to be the result of objective cultural difference, in line with the Herderian view discussed above. According to Erikson (1995:250), this would suggest that ethnicity is more important when the cultural differences are greater, and also, that ethnicity is created by the relative isolation in which groups live. He argues however, that rather than this being the case, research suggests that ethnicity is made relevant through interaction (Erikson, 1995:251). As Cohen (1985:69) put it:

> People become aware of their culture, when they stand at its boundaries: when they encounter other cultures, or when they become aware of other ways of doing things, or merely of contradictions to their own culture.

Even though Cohen talks about culture in this quote, several authors argue that ethnicity is constructed from a combination of cultural, identity, and sometimes community related factors (e.g. Nagel, 1994).

Frederick Barth’s (1969) anthropological approach presents ethnicity in the context of boundaries. Barth (1998) states that ethnic distinction is created by marking and maintaining a boundary, irrespective of cultural differences as observed. He argues against the assumption that ethnic groups are culture bearing units, and instead puts forward a view, which argues that ethnicity depends on how actors perceive cultural differences.
Barth recognises that cultural elements are closely related to the idea of ethnicity, nonetheless he argues that the continuity of ethnic groups depends on maintaining a boundary around them. “The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of members may likewise be transformed” (Barth, 1998: 14).

This is possible, since only those aspects of culture, which are deemed to be ‘socially relevant’, will be the bases of classification and identification. These can include language, dialect, dress, family structure, house type, skin colour and others, however often these don’t equate to the objective sum of the overall cultural characteristics of the group (Wimmer, 2007). Thus ethnicity is a matter of social classification and identification, not a feature of the social world. This idea is clearly illustrated by the graph created by Wimmer (2007:9), where the boundaries are used to delimit ethnicities, based on Herder’s (left) and Barth’s (right) understandings of ethnicity.

![Herderian and Barthian worlds](image)

Figure 2. Herderian and Barthian worlds

Besides identity and culture, the third aspect related to the notions of integration and ethnicity, is community. Common sense understandings often associate ethnic groups with clear-cut ethnic communities. However, Okamura (1981), a representative of the “situationalist schools” of ethnicity, points out that this is not necessarily the case.
Talking about “social situations”, by which he understands “a level of social organization lower than that of the overall society” (1981:453), he argues that while there are cases when ethnicity shapes these situations, often ethnicity is not a completely limiting factor. Ethnicity might be an important influencer in some situations, while in others, other attributes are more important (e.g. class, religion, occupation etc.). Okamura draws the conclusion that ethnicity has an “essentially variable significance […] as an organising principle of social relations”. Ethnic communities are not homogenous aspects of social reality, and they need to be distinguished from identities (Wimmer 2007:13).

Furthermore, even though ethnic groups “shape and reshape their self-definition and culture” through structure and agency, they are also influenced by external forces, such as social, economic, and political processes and actors (Nagel, 1994:152).

2.2.3 Boundary processes in migration

As the shortcomings of various “classic” assimilation or non-assimilation theories have been pointed out above, there is an obvious need to present an alternative understanding of the individual and group processes related to ethnicity, identity, and culture, happening in relation to migration. Building on the boundary theories of ethnicity, several authors argue that assimilation should be treated as a boundary related process (see Zoldberg and Woon, 1999; Alba and Nee, 2003). According to Alba and Nee (2005:59), “a key to assimilation […] is boundary spanning and altering”.

Following this perspective allows us to recognise the political, and socially constructed nature of assimilation, rather than assuming it to be a “quasi-natural outcome of decreasing cultural difference and social distance” (Wimmer, 2007:16). In order for a
group to become integrated into the host society, existing forms of social closure have to be overcome, often just as much from the (more powerful) host society’s side, as from the migrant’s side. These processes of opening and closure are the ones determining where the boundaries are drawn.

This is not to say that cultural aspects are to be completely disregarded when analysing migrant assimilation. Immigrants wanting to fit in “may aim at selectively acquiring those traits that signal full membership” (Wimmer, 2007:18). What exactly these traits are differs from situation to situation. For example, Zolberg and Woon (1999) point out the varying expectations that prevail about keeping one’s religion and ethnicity, or learning the host language in different contexts, and argue this is the result of the adoption of different cultural features as boundary makers (Zolberg and Woon, 1999).

Wimmer thus argues that

>[s]een from [the boundary-making] perspective, “assimilation” and “integration” appear as reversible, power-driven processes of boundary shifting, rather than the result of overcoming cultural difference and social distance’ (Wimmer, 2007:2)

### 2.2.4 Summary

The overview of the literature on ethnicity and migration resulted in the following conclusions:

- Classic assimilation theories are built on fundamentally questionable assumptions about the nature of ethnicity, based on a Herderian worldview, thus their claims are unreliable.
- An alternative view on ethnicity focuses on boundary processes, assuming that ethnic groups are result of social processes of boundary making. The boundaries
are marked through cultural element that are perceived as relevant by the actors themselves. The boundaries are created in interaction between individuals and groups on the inside and outside.

- Consequently, assimilation can be seen as a process of boundary shifting, realised by members of both the migrant and the host society.
- As a consequence, the focus of research in the area should be on the boundary processes, rather than the cultural content within the boundaries.

Furthermore, it is possible to make some connections between Roma identity and the theoretical views discussed here. First of all, we can conclude that it is not possible to talk about Roma ethnicity in the Herderian sense. Rather, the emphasis needs to be put on the socially constructed nature of the Roma ethnicity, as described by Okaly (1994) and Willems (1997). Second, it can be argued that the separation of the Roma can be associated with processes of boundary maintenance, including both internal processes of active differentiation from non-Roma groups (Barth, 1969; Formoso, 2000), and external boundary building, influenced by the negative sentiments of the gadjo towards Roma (Bancroft, 2005).
Chapter 3: Methodology

As part of this dissertation, qualitative empirical data has been collected about the ethnic identification and cultural practices of the Romanian Roma in Govanhill. The first part of this chapter focuses on describing the various research methods employed, the research strategy, methods of data collection, and the sampling, while the second part discusses the context of research, and the most important ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Strategy and Methods

3.1.1 Research Strategy

For the purposes of the present study, a qualitative research strategy has been deemed most appropriate, because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the individual meanings and understandings associated with issues of ethnicity and migration. This approach is also in line with the theoretical assumptions underlying the research, which generally promote a socially constructed view on ethnicity, culture, and identity (constructionist ontological orientation), and it has facilitated the investigation of individual’s interpretations of the social reality (interpretivist epistemological orientation). Furthermore, as there is no existing theory directly relating to the research questions, the study employs an inductive approach – aiming to generate new theory based on the findings of the research (Bryman, 2012).

3.1.2 Methods of data collection

The study uses multiple methods of data collection, which allows for a more rounded investigation of the research questions. The bulk of the data comes from seven semi-structured in-depth interviews, considered to be the main method of data collection.
However, the interviews have been supplemented by participant observation, focusing mainly on the religious and social lives of the Romanian Roma in Govanhill, as well as the secondary analysis of the words of a young Romanian Roma woman from Manchester, as recorded in a book presenting her experiences of migration.

The *semi-structured interviews* have been employed as a means of gaining access “to the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds” (Miller and Glassner, 1997:100). By focusing on the individual’s views, I aim to give a voice to people who are often not asked to speak about themselves, even in relation to issues most central to them. Furthermore, the flexibility of this method allowed for the further exploration of specific topics, which emerged during the interviews, while still having a clear focus, provided by the pre-devised and tested interview schedule (see Appendix 1). Details about the interviews will be given in the next sections, but first, the other two data collection methods will be briefly presented.

The aim of the inclusion of a second type of data collection, which I am calling *unplanned participant observation*, is to openly discuss and include in the analysis the various inputs and information I have gained while spending time within the community while arranging meetings, before and after conducting interviews, as well as carrying out work not directly linked to the research. During most of the research, I have been a youth development worker in Govanhill, an area of Glasgow with a considerable Romanian Roma population. I carried out several hours of street work, and during the early months of 2013, I did community engagement work with Roma from Romania. As part of this work, I attended several religious services, one family event, and spent time with various members of the community. My observances during these occasions often complemented, and sometimes contrasted the interview data, allowing for a better
analysis on the relations between realities as observed by ‘outsiders’ and reconstructed by the participants (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

Additionally, I am using the secondary analysis of the words of Elvira, a Romanian Roma woman living in Manchester, who presents her personal experiences of migration in the book entitled “Elvira and Me” (2012), created in collaboration between Ramona Constantin (Elvira) and photographer Ciara Lemming. In the prologue of the book we read: “Elvira and Me is about one young woman’s two lives. Her family in Romania call her Elvira but in England she is known by the name on her passport, Ramona.” I am using Elvira’s book to complement my limited data from female participants, and also to put my own empirical findings in the context of other personal stories.

3.1.3 Sampling and recruitment

The target population of the study were people from Romania, self-identifying as Roma, and currently living in Glasgow. However, the study focuses on one particular Romanian Roma community in Govanhill, Glasgow. This community has been selected based largely on convenience factors, such as its visibility to outsiders and the relative ease of access due to some (even though fairly limited) contact that local organisations had with the community. For the interviews, sampling has been achieved through a combination of purposeful and opportunity sampling and a few interviewees have been selected by using snowball techniques. The use of purposeful sampling was crucial for the aim of the study. Besides making sure that the interviewees had the basic desired characteristics, there was also an emphasis on creating variety, primarily in terms of gender and age, and secondarily in terms of family status and length of stay in the UK. This was only achieved to a limited extent, due to various difficulties in getting access to participants in general, and to certain groups, such as women, and younger adults in
particular. Thus opportunity sampling was often employed, as I conducted interviews with those, who I was able to get access to.

*Initial access* has been achieved through an organisation providing a drop-in service for Romanian nationals on various legal and administrative issues. After some contacts were established, snowballing techniques were used for reaching further interviewees. On two occasions participants were recruited by making basic contact with them while spending time in the area and the community, and later following up on their interest in the study.

The final *sample* consists of seven interviews, complemented by the secondary analysis of data from one person (Elvira). The relatively small sample size still allowed for the emergence of some themes, but most importantly it made possible the collection of detailed data. Furthermore, as Ritchie and Lewis (2003:83) pointed out, “statements about incidence or prevalence are not the concern of qualitative research”. The study acknowledges the limited generalizability of the result, and accordingly, focusing instead on voicing personal meanings and interpretations.

The final sample, together with individuals’ basic sociological variables is presented in the following table (*Age* and *Length of stay* refer to the time of the interview, or the time of the last note in the book, in the case of Elvira):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Family status</th>
<th>Length of stay in the UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mihai</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petru</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marius</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ion</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzana</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elvira</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Sample

3.2 Critical discussions

3.2.1 The challenges of data collection

Overall, gaining access to the Romanian Roma communities of Glasgow, earning people’s trust, having them to agree to interviews and finally being able to conduct the interviews has been one of the most challenging aspects of the project. In this section I will describe and critically discuss some of the practicalities of the fieldwork, focusing on building trust, and the researcher – interviewee relationship.

As it has been described above, my initial access to members of the community was granted through a drop-in centre targeted at Romanian nationals. Even though the organisation has been very helpful and allowed me to establish direct contact with its clients, a lot more work was needed before I was granted the first few interviews. Lack of trust seemed to be a significant obstacle at the start of my data collection. I found that
there were two different types of “distrust” that came up during the fieldwork. First, there was a general distrust towards outsiders, and second, there was a specific distrust towards authority - I was often seen as a government worker, social worker, or interpreter, and on occasions people were not willing to give out much information, worrying that it will get to the authorities or “on TV”.

In order to distance myself from this position, I recruited less from the drop-in centre and refused an interpreting job I had been offered there, largely due to considerations about confidentiality, and conflict of interest. I found that in order to build trust I needed to spend time in Govanhill (library, cafes, on the streets, in the park), being seen and getting recognised by the locals. Later I have also noticed that working in the area and with the community also had a positive impact on people’s attitudes towards me.

Even after someone agreed to participation, I was often faced difficulties in getting to the point where the interview could be carried out. Most of my participants were reluctant to set up a time in advance; people often cancelled in the last minute or couldn’t be reached on the agreed day. Also, I had to familiarise myself with the informal norms and expectations of people, and learn to adapt my approaches accordingly. For example, being flexible about times and being available on short notice turned out to be crucial factors.

3.2.2 Language

All the interviews have been conducted in Romanian, and most of the interaction during participant observation happened in Romanian. Being fluent in the language, I managed to avoid the use of interpreters, which could have possibly caused misinterpretations (Hennink, 2008). In order to keep as much of the original meanings as possible, the
original Romanian version will be included in the footnotes after the English translations of verbatim quotes.

Nonetheless, most participants used the Romani language within the family and within most personal circles. Even though they were all fluent in Romanian, some meaning might have been lost by talking about personal issues in a language mainly reserved for the public space.

3.2.3 Position of the researcher

My own social position has actively shaped the dynamic of the relationship between the interviewees and myself. Coming from the same country as my participants built some initial trust, and people sometimes claimed that there is an implied trust between us, due to our shared nationality, and our shared language (especially since most of the participants had difficulties communicating in English). However, being non-Roma, educated and a lot more ‘middle class’ than my participants did raise some barriers. Even though I feel that I have managed to build good relationships with the participants, it has to be acknowledged that I was still an outsider, not a member of the community, and this has influenced people’s attitudes towards me, and might have shaped the answers given to the interview questions.

In a related example, when people agreed to participate, they often tried to please me; many were trying to be helpful, and asked me what they should say so that it’s okay for me, using phrases like “Just tell me where to tick YES” (Daniel, 42, M). This could be interpreted as a result of power differences, or more probably, it can be seen as a consequence of a post-communist distrust of social institutions (Mishler and Rose, 1997). People sometimes seemed eager to help me as a person, in order to finish my
project and to get a good grade, but they were not concerned about the validity of the project or the institution of the university.

Besides my interviewees’ attitudes towards me, it is also important to acknowledge my own attitudes and prior knowledge of the group I set out to study. Coming from an ethnic minority background (being ethnic Hungarian from Romania), I understand the complex issues of identity and culture that result from this position, and have experienced ethnic discrimination myself, even if only to a fairly limited extent. Furthermore, I am currently facing similar situations to them, being a ‘Romanian’ immigrant in Glasgow. Thus, it could be said that I sympathise with the Roma, and I hope that this people will contribute to a better understanding of their culture and identity, and further the social acceptance of the group. Nonetheless, I aimed at adopting an objective position during my work, and I trust that my data provides an accurate representation of reality.

3.2.4 Methodological limitations

Certain methodological choices, such as the focus on one community, and the small sample size, limit the wider validity of this study. The findings are not representative of ‘Roma’ in general, or even Romanian Roma in the UK, and overgeneralization should be avoided even when discussing the Romanian Roma in Govanhill. Statistical generalizability was not the aim of the research, rather the focus was on deep understanding of individual perceptions and related processes.

In turn, the use of individual interviews as the main method of data collection might reduce the overall reliability of the data. Answers to interview questions only allow for an understanding of personal views, and furthermore, various motives, such as the need
to create a positive image of oneself (or in this case, the community) might compromise the accuracy of the answers (Dean and White, 1958).

3.3 Ethical considerations

Throughout the project, but most importantly during data collection, ethical considerations have been given a primary focus. Every participant has been informed about the details of the project, and the interview has only continued if they were willing to go forward. Although written materials have been produced in line with the University’s ethical procedures (see Appendix 2), due to the limited literacy skills of several participants, everything has been explained to them verbally. Written consent has been sought (Appendix 3), where appropriate, and in the remaining cases, consent has been verbally recorded. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants, except for one where lack of consent, meant only written notes were taken. All data is kept anonymous, and all quotations are presented under pseudonyms.

As my understanding of the Romanian Roma community has been shaped by my work at a local organisation, consent has been sought from this organisation to use information accessed in this position. Since consent has not been sought from individual people, only general information gained from this source will be included in the research. During the initial stages of data collection, I have been offered a position as an interpreter at the Romanian drop-in in Govanhill. Unlike the community work I carried out, this task would have involved working with people on an individual basis, handling confidential information. In order to avoid any possible conflict of interest between that work and this research, I didn’t take up this position.
Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

In this chapter the empirical findings of the study will be discussed and placed in the context of the exiting literature. The findings originate from a thematical analysis of recurring themes and concepts in the interviews, complemented with observations from the participant observation.

This analysis has been guided by the research questions presented in the introduction. However, given the nature of inductive, qualitative research, the focus of the study slightly shifted during data collection and analysis, reflecting the relative importance of specific aspects of the research, as they emerged from the data. Consequently, in this chapter the following points will be discussed:

- The context of migration, including individual motivations, overall impressions of life in Glasgow and future plans.
- Commonalities and variations in individual identification, cultural elements, and community relations, with focus on the changes associated with migration.
- Processes, which contribute to the construction of Romanian Roma ethnic identity in Glasgow, with a focus on the relationship between identity, culture and community, and the boundary processes involved.

4.1 The context of migration

Most of the interviewees, and a large majority of the Romanian Roma in Govanhill, come from the West of Romania, particularly from Arad and Bihor counties. Their length of stay in Glasgow varies considerably, from seven years to just a few months.
Most arrived with families, with the exception of some young men coming on their own.

When asked about the motivations for migration, my informants all mentioned financial factors, which were comparable to Steven’s (2003) findings. Although no one named it as a direct reason for leaving, some pointed out discrimination against Roma in employment situations in Romania, which could make it more difficult for them to find employment in the overall troubled economy of the country. The situation is slightly different for Elvira (26, F), living in Manchester, who followed her new partner to this country. She says she came here “to get some air”, and never mentions financial motives. However, she did not discuss her partner’s motives.

The role of the kinship networks, emphasised by Grill (2011, 2012), has also been made obvious in the interviews. Apart from the two people who arrived seven years ago, everyone had family members or relatives living in Glasgow (mostly Govanhill) already, who gave them information on local opportunities, and provided help with the adjustments.
All the participants claimed that overall their lives have changed for the better since moving to Glasgow. Again, most point out the financial aspects, and suggest that they are better off here. Many relate the better income to better opportunities, and better lives for their families.

*Of course [our lives] have changed, since we make some money here. We feel more relieved.* (Daniel, 42, M)

When asked about their longer term goals, a clear division of intent became obvious, suggesting that conditions have changed since Steven’s study in 2003. While some admittedly only came here to earn money, and then go home, others have settled down here, or have the intention to do so. Daniel, who said that he would prefer to go back to Romania, added:

*A part of me wouldn’t want the children [to come back]... If they studied, found a job, get settled down here, I would like them to stay.* (Daniel, 42, M)

Overall, most people said that they left Romania in order to find better opportunities and experienced changes for the better since moving here. While some intend to return to their home country at some point, others seem to have found new homes in Glasgow.

### 4.2 Identity

Five of the seven interview participants declared that they are Roma. One other participant said that he was half Roma and half Romanian, while yet another person, Ion, stated very strongly at the beginning of the interview: “I’m Roma, it’s just logical”, but

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3 Original: “Normal că s-a schimbat viața, că mai câștigăm și noi ceva bani. Suntem mai ușurați.”

4 Original: “O parte n-aș vrea copiii [să se întoarcă]... Dacă ar învăță carte, ar găsi un loc de munca, se stabilesc aici, aș dori să rămână”
later he claimed that he is only “half Gypsy”, and he only started living among Roma in Glasgow, and has learnt their language here. During the interview he often distanced himself from the Roma by talking about *them* in the third person, and emphasising the differences between him and the Roma.

Questions about their ethnicity (or nationality), and the way they normally identify themselves, often triggered a need for defence in participants, resulting in statements such as:

You know, for me this is not an insult. [...] If I’m Roma, then what would happen if I said that I was Romanian? As if I would get a higher or lower grade, or...⁵ (Mihai, 42, M)

I would say that I’m Roma. I belong to the Roma. It’s true that in the past there were people from Roma ethnicity, who were uncivilised. But now we are very, very civilised. We even compare to Romanians now.⁶ (Suzana, 35, F)

On several occasions, the unchangeability and biological determinism of ethnicity was emphasised, people related their identity to the ethnicity of parents, skin colour and often evoked statements like: “You can’t change the blood”, suggesting a Herderian understanding of their own identity. Furthermore, this set nature of ethnic identity was connected to ethnic pride on several occasions, suggesting a state of compromise, where you have to be proud of who you are *because* you can’t change it.

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⁵ Original: “Știți ce... Pentru mine asta nu înseamnă o jignire... [...] Deci eu dacă sunt Rom... ce s-ar întâmpla să spun că sunt Român? Parcă am un grad mai sus, sau unul mai jos, sau ce?”

⁶ Original: “Spun că suntem Romi. Fac parte din Romi. Într-adevăr că în timpul trecut o fost oameni din etnia Romilor, o fost necivilizați. Dar acum sunt foarte civilizați. Ne putem compara la nivelul Românilor, deja.”
Daniel: In fact, I am happy to be a Gypsy.
Interviewer: Is this something you can be proud of?
Daniel: Whether it’s pride or it’s not, I can’t say. I am what I am.\textsuperscript{7}(Daniel, 42, M)

Overall, personal identification took various forms, and it reflects some of the levels of Szuhaj’s (Vajda, 2000) scale. Some examples are presented in Figure 4. \textsuperscript{8}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of self-identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am half Roma, but I ashamed to be from Romania, as the Roma are begging, and the Romanians are stealing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am Roma. I am what I am, but sometimes I say that I am Romanian, because I don’t want people to know that I am Roma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am Gypsy, and I am happy to be one. I know that I can’t change this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am very proud of my Roma ethnicity. Because we were born in this ethnicity, we can’t change it. It is true that there are certain [negative] Roma traditions, but because we are Christians, we have different traditions, and we can be proud of our traditions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{7} Original: "De fapt eu mă bucur că-s țigan. (Este o mândrie?) Păi, că-i mândrie, că nu-i mândrie, nu pot să spun. Ce îs, ăla îs."

\textsuperscript{8} These are summaries of various statements four participants made related to their ethnicity, throughout the interview. They are not direct quotes.
4.3 Culture

When looking at the cultural elements associated with Roma and most specifically, Roma in Govanhill, I mostly employed the categories already found in the literature (Liegeoid, 1994; Clark and Greenfield, 2006), and adapted them to reflect the data that has been collected. When presenting the findings, emphasis will be put on the changes associated with migration, whenever relevant.

a. Family and gender relations

Roma love their children a lot, children are on the first place; they love their family.9 (Ion, 32, M)

Children and family play a very important role in the lives of the Govanhill Roma, and family has a great influence in decision making. Most social circles are formed around extended families, and in migration, people rely on the support of family members and relatives. The level of centrality attributed to the family, seems to justify Liegeois’s statement: “Every aspect of Gypsies’s […] lives gravitates around the family” (1994:43).

Generally, men and women play ‘traditional’ roles in the family. Women stay in the house, while men arrange most public issues, like going to various offices. During my work in the community, it was always men who got involved in the ‘important’ conversations, while women waited in the background. These traditional roles seem to have remained similar from those adopted in Romania.

Mihai emphasised the role of the family in marrying their children, however, he acknowledged that these days the girls have more and more influence in deciding on the

9 Original: “Romii îşi iubesc copiii foarte mult, copiii sunt pe primul loc; îşi iubesc familia.”
husband. Although underage marriages are still happening (I have witnessed one myself, even if not in ‘legal terms’, supporting Sabou’s (2011) observation about marriages formed by the consent of the families), one participant was very keen on emphasising that these ‘uncivilised’ traditions are mostly a thing of the past, and girls are usually getting married at around the age of 18, 19 or even 20.

b. Language

All the five interviewees, who said that they were Roma, also said that they use the Romani language at home, but they use Romanian when a Romanian person is around. Petru, who said that he is half Romanian, said that they speak both Romani and Romanian in the house. Young children are usually fluent in English, but most adults have very limited knowledge of it. Everyone speaks Romanian, and parents emphasise that even young children learn the language.

Overall, it can be said that the Govanhill Roma are very protective not only of their own language, closely associated with their identity, but also of Romanian, either because this is the language normally associated with certain aspects of life, such as church, and because the possibility of returning to Romania often remains.

c. Religion

Interviewees all agreed that religion is very important for the Roma of Govanhill. There are two Pentecostal churches in Govanhill, self-organised by members of the Romanian Roma community, and attended by about 150 - 200 people every week, attended by people of different religions too (e.g. Baptist, Orthodox).
They [the Roma] are very religious. But not everyone. Some are religious for interests, others for love.\(^\text{10}\) (Ion, 32, M)

Suzana pointed out that not being able to attend church services held in a language that she understands was a concern of hers before migration, but due to the self-organised Roma churches, people are able to keep the religious aspects of their lives unchanged.

\textbf{d. Dress}

When asked about particular ways of dressing that are widespread among the Romanian Roma, most participants claimed that there are none.

\begin{quote}
Daniel: Other Gypsies are like that, they still keep those traditions, with the long skirts, to the ground, […] with the hats, moustaches […].
Interviewer: Is it important in your family too?
Daniel: No. Everybody dresses as they want.\(^\text{11}\) (Daniel, 42, M)
\end{quote}

It is however, noticeable that most women wear long skirts all the time. Mihai explains:

\begin{quote}
Among us it is a shame [for women to wear trousers]… […] because we all have eyes, right? And we look at each other. And then it happens automatically: ‘Look, what a beautiful girl!’ You see? But for us this is a disgrace. […] \(^\text{12}\) (Mihai, 45, M)
\end{quote}

Others point out that the rules are not that strict anymore. Young women, especially if they are not married, often wear trousers. Married women however, are more restricted

\(^{10}\) Original: “Romii sunt foarte religioşi. Dar nu toţi. Unii sunt credincioşi din interes, alţii din dragoste.”

\(^{11}\) Original: “Alţi ţiganii, ţin tot de obiceiul ăla, tradiţiile alea, cu fuste lungi, până în pământ… […] cu pălării, mustăţi […] (Sunt asta importante şi pentru familia dumneavoastră?) Nu, toată lumea se îmbracă cum vrea.”

\(^{12}\) Original: “La noi este o rușine [ca fetele să se îmbrace la pantaloni]… […] știi-ți cum e ochiul, […] de aceea avem ochi, să ne uităm unul la altul, nu? Și de la sine vine: Uite, ce fată frumoasă! Dar la noi e rușine, știi?”
in their choices. Women’s attitudes towards these rules differ. While Suzana couldn’t imaging not wearing long skirt, Elvira’s words suggest that for her it is more like an obligation: “that’s just our tradition. I have to behave right”. (Elvira, 26, F)

\textit{e. Work}

Although most interviewees claimed that there are no such things as \textit{typical jobs}, they also mentioned that men mostly do construction related jobs, on a self-employed day-worker basis. Some other jobs mentioned included working in car washes, restaurants, or selling The Big Issue. In many cases people do different work here than in Romania, for example, some were working in agriculture there. Others said that they weren’t working at all in Romania.

\textit{We manage by being resourceful. It is not worth working for 10-15 million.}
\textit{(Refers to Romanian Lei, old currency, now 1-1 ½ thousand RON, approx. £200-300, per month)} \textsuperscript{13}(Marius, 26, M)

Marius’s words support Micheal Stewart’s (1994) observations about Roma values, claiming that Roma prefer dealing to labour, and cleverness to diligence, however, they also put them in the wider context of the limited return waged labour can bring in Romania.

Women usually do the housework, although some work as Big Issue sellers, or in other jobs. Both Elisa and Suzana said that they used to work before, but coming here they can’t find jobs. Elisa mentioned that she doesn’t speak English, which would make taking up any work very difficult. A very different example is that of Elvira, who started as a Big Issue seller, but later found work as an interpreter and support worker for Roma.

\textsuperscript{13} Original: “Noi mai mult cu descurăreala. Nu merită să lucrezi pentru 10, 15 milioane.”
For her, moving to Manchester resulted in great changes, as she never worked in Romania, and didn’t even receive much education. She however, talks about herself as the exception, and describes the pressure her independence put on her and her family:

_This wasn’t easy for my husband, Amar, though. To start with, all the Roma men were laughing at him because they didn’t understand what I was doing [...] and for a while there was a lot of tension in my house and a lot of arguments._ (Elvira, 26, F)

People only mentioned begging as something negative, arguing that it creates a bad image. It is something that ‘others’ do, but ‘we don’t’.

Overall, work seems to be one of the few aspects of the lives of Roma migrants, which undergoes significant changes with migration. Better wages might make work a more appealing way of earning, then it is in Romania, however, legal matters and language barriers make taking up regular work difficult.

_f. Education_

All the parents emphasised the importance of education for the children. My own observations supported the fact that younger children were generally in education; however, I have seen children at home during school time on several occasions, and adults sometimes mentioned that the children help them out with translation, when needed. Consequently, I would argue that at least on some occasions, family needs take priority over education, and children will stay at home, if they are needed.

_g. Free time and use of space_

When looking at the ways the Romanian Roma spend their free time, some differences were noticeable based on family status/age and gender. Both married men and women
talked about spending time with their families, visiting relatives, and some close friends. Some also mentioned having a drink or two, and occasional dancing, but others, who were more religious, rejected these practices, calling them uncivilised. The two unmarried young men in the study said that they spend their free time the same way Scottish people do, going out in pubs over the weekend, and Ion especially emphasised that he often spends his free time with Scottish friends.

Elisa also pointed out that compared to Romania, they spend a lot more time in the house. This is particularly interesting, since the Slovakian Roma in Govanhill are well known for the large amount of time they spend on the street corners of the neighbourhood. Jan Grill writes that “[i]n a way, these meeting places serve as a substitute for doorsteps in rural Slovakia, where Roma habitually sit on benches, hanging out, chatting and visiting neighbours” (Grill, 2012:46). Since most Romanians come from similar rural backgrounds, it would be safe to assume that they would pick up on this practice. The reason why they don’t (or only to a much more limited extent) remains unclear, but one explanation could be that the place was already ‘taken over’ by the Slovakians by the arrival of the Romanians, and also, the latter often try to distance themselves from Slovakians (see in section 4.5).

**h. Music, art and tradition**

When asked about Roma traditions, several interviewees claimed that these are rarely kept in Glasgow, and Mihai was the only one who mentioned their traditional dances or music. It has to be noted however, that according to the norms of the Pentecostal religions, those who are baptised in the religion, are not allowed to drink, smoke, or have big celebration with dancing.
We have our Christian music, but we don’t dance. We don’t dance. We have songs for praising the lord, but we don’t dance. [...] There are Roma who have fun, those who are not baptised, they have fun, they dance, they have their own music.¹⁴ (Suzana, 35, F)

Even though they mostly sing religious music, this plays a central role in their services, and it has very strong influences from Gypsy folk, supporting Liegois’s (1994) argument about the value Roma musicians create by adapting already existing music.

### i. Behaviour and values

From direct questions and thoughts on related topics, a few general values and connected behaviours became evident. Most often people emphasised the respect for each other, centrality of the family, love of every human being, and helpfulness as the most important values, which differentiate the Roma from others. Talking about his relationship with Roma, after moving to Glasgow, Ion said:

* A Gypsy, if he sees you on the street he will take you in his house, and help you, in many ways. [Not with money], but in other ways, he takes you, they give you to eat, if you don’t have anywhere to sleep, give a place to sleep.¹⁵ (Ion, 32, M)

The interviewees often used the terms ‘civilization’ and ‘being civilized’ or ‘uncivilized’ as a way of differentiating between positive and negative behaviour.


¹⁵ Original: “Un țigan, dacă te vede pe stradă, te ia, te bagă în casă, te ajută în multe feluri. [Nu cu bani], dar altfel, te ia, te bagă în casă, îți dă să mănânci, dacă nu ai unde să dormi, îți dă să dormi”
[I would like my children] to be civilised, to talk nicely when have a conversation with someone, to respect others, to study, to get along with everyone.¹⁶ (Suzana, 35, F)

In this section the cultural elements deemed most relevant to Roma identity by the participants and/or by the existing literature were presented, and discussed, focusing on the point of view of the participants. Overall, it has been found that most of these cultural elements remained unchanged in the migration, and in some cases keeping the traditions to which people are accustomed to is particularly important, e.g. in the case of the language or religion. Some other aspects have changed as a result of migration. These changes occurred either intentionally (e.g. looking for work opportunities), or due to the circumstances (e.g. not being able to work, spending time inside the house).

### 4.4 Community

Most participants said that they mostly spend their time with other Roma from Romania, often their extended family. Encounters with others were restricted to ‘public’ spaces, and situations, such as in shops, various offices, children’s schools, or work. One exception to this was Ion, who has been in Glasgow for 7 years, arrived on his own, and had better language skills than most of the participants. He often spends his free time with non-Roma, such as Scottish friends, and co-workers.

Overall, language seems to be a significant barrier in establishing and maintaining relationships with others.

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¹⁶ Original: “[Copii] să fie civilizați, să vorbească frumos când discută cu cineva, să respecte omul, să fie bine cu toată lumea.”
If you can speak English, you can spend time with others as well. I can’t, I don’t speak any English.\textsuperscript{17} (Elisa, 37, F)

We have more in common with those we can understand each other with. Because of the language.\textsuperscript{18} (Daniel, 42, M)

Compared to Romania, however, people also have relatively less contact with Romanians, although this could easily be due to the fact that there are not many non-Roma Romanian immigrants in Govanhill.

4.5 **Negotiating ethnicity and culture**

In order to reveal the processes, which contribute to the reconstruction and maintenance of Romanian Roma identity, in section the empirical findings presented above will be placed in the context the theoretical accounts of ethnicity and migration, discussed in chapter two.

Based on the evidence, it can be argued that the Romanian Roma in Govanhill employ several methods and processes in order to (re)construct and maintain their ethnic identity. These are:

- ethnic boundary creation through the enhancement of certain cultural traits
- ethnic boundary maintenance, through active differentiation from outsiders
- community formation

*Ethnic boundary creation* is a key aspect of the identity construction process, and it is mostly achieved through the emphasis of the significance of certain cultural elements,

\textsuperscript{17} Original: “Dacă vorbești Engleză, poți să stai și cu alți. Dar eu nu pot. Eu nu vorbesc Engleză deloc.”

\textsuperscript{18} Original: “Cu cine avem mai mult in comun... cu cine ne putem înțelege... cu limba”
deemed important by the actors (Barth, 1969). In the case of the Romanian Roma in Govanhill, the most obvious cultural element used this way is the Romani language. All those participants, who considered themselves to be ‘purely’ Roma, claimed that they would always use the Romani language in the family. Petru, who identified himself as half Roma and half Romanian, said that they used both languages. Participants also equalled ethnicity/identity with language. For example:

   You can’t change the language. [...] Before I learnt [the language] I hated Gypsies a lot. "(Ion, 32, M)

In order to maintain this ethnic boundary, members of the group actively differentiate themselves from non-members. Even though the literature suggests that internal Roma boundary maintenance mostly focuses on the divide between Roma and non-Roma (e.g. Barth, 1969; Formoso, 2000), only limited support has been found for this view in the empirical work carried out in Govanhill. Most interviewees avoided the active differentiation of Roma and Romanians, and the shared language was sometimes evoked as an important factor linking the two ethnic groups.

The only one who emphasised differences was Ion, who could be considered to have a double role as both insider and outsider, due to his individual circumstances. When talking about the differences between the two groups, he always referred to Roma as ‘them’, suggesting that he was maintaining this boundary from the outside, rather then the inside.

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19 Original: “Nu poți să schimbi limba. [...] Deci, înainte să învați, eu îi uram pe țigani.”
You can tell the Roma apart from a thousand metres, as soon as you see them, you know that they are Roma. The way they walk, the way they look, the way they talk. 

(Ion, 32, M)

Most participants, however, were lot more keen on building a strong boundary in between ‘themselves’ and other Roma – especially Roma from Slovakia, the group that are sharing their geographic location with the Romanian Roma (in Govanhill). People emphasised the differences in culture, often describing the Slovakians as more ‘uncivilised’ (for example they engage in drinking and smoking, and are loud), and tried to distance the Romanian Roma from them.

They are people too. They are Roma as well, but different traditions.

(Petru, 30+, M)

[Slovakians] are different [...] they are a different nation. They are not like us, Gypsies.

(Daniel, 42, M)

Language, the element seen to be central in creating the boundary, takes up a crucial role in reinforcing it. Almost every Romanian Roma person I came across claimed that the Romani language spoken by Slovakians was very different from that used by Romanians, and it was very difficult, or even impossible for the two groups to understand each other. Interestingly, however, conversations I have witnessed proved that this was not true. Even if we take into account that among Slovakian Roma, the use of the Romani language is not as widespread as among Romanians (many use Slovakian instead), the firm statements by the Romanian Roma could be interpreted as an act of

20 Original: “Rom se cunoaște de la o mie de metri. Când îl vezi, știi că e Rom. După mers, după privire, după cum vorbește.

21 Original: “Sunt oameni și ei... Și ei sunt Romi, dar au tradiții diferite.”

22 Original: “[Slovacii] îs altfel [...] îs o alte nație. Nu-s ca noi Țiganii”
boundary maintenance, aimed at achieving differentiation from a group that they considered to have (or be associated with) negative social values and norms.

The third aspect of ethnic identity construction is the creation and maintenance of imagined or real communities. Based on the strong differentiation from various Roma groups (both from other countries, as well as specific groups from Romania), it is very difficult to argue for the existence of a universal ‘Roma identity’ with the associated community, as many common sense (and often Herderian) accounts would suggest. Even though people’s ethnic identification seemed strong in many cases, for example many added phrases such as “of course”, or “it’s just logical”, when they stated their Roma ethnicity, the study yielded little evidence of a sense of belonging to an international, or even national Roma community. The only indirect suggestions of this came from outside of the interviews, from a pastor, when he talked about his commitment to share the word of the Lord with Roma people across borders.

It can be argued however, that it is possible to talk about a Romanian Roma community in Govanhill. In this context ‘community’ is defined as a social structure, which arches over several elements of social organisation, similar to Okamura’s (1981) social situations. The Romanian Roma community in Glasgow is largely based on an informal network of extended families, and acquaintances, the majority of private interactions of members of the community (i.e. excluding work, contact with various organisations, and other public matters) happen within the community, information travels informally throughout the community, members of the community are largely aware of each other and most religious practices are kept within the community. The churches are important pillars of community formation, by bringing large number of people together regularly.
Furthermore, even though the presence of Romanian Roma beggars in Glasgow is undeniable, and various informal sources suggest that at least some of them are based in Govanhill, their presence in between ‘us’ (as used by the interviewees) was always denied. This could either mean that maintaining the right image, and keeping up the impression of a boundary is so important, that people will deny the evidence of the opposite, or that the researched community has in fact created some strong boundaries around itself based on ‘civilisation’, and those who don’t fit this criteria, won’t be admitted.

Overall, it can be argued that the evidence supports the basic theoretical assumptions, which suggest that ethnicity is constructed through the combined use of cultural elements, ethnic boundary processes, and community formation. These three aspects are not identical, and cannot be treated as one; however, they are closely interconnected, as can be seen above.

It is also important to note however, that different individuals have excluded different groups by setting their own boundaries, and they have also emphasised different cultural aspects as the key elements of Roma identity. For example, Suzana emphasised the role of religion, and Mihai the traditional values, and for them, these were indicators of Roma identity. Consequently, it is impossible to talk about ethnic identity, boundaries and cultural requirements as homogenous among all Roma people. This study shows that this is a difficult task even among this relatively small ‘community’.

Furthermore, the evidence reveals the complex and often blurry nature of the relationships between these processes. People identified themselves as Roma, as opposed to Romanian, yet they still built stronger boundaries between themselves and Roma from a different country, than they did between Roma and Romanians.
Communities are built based on location, kinship and origins, but certain groups are excluded, perhaps based on certain cultural characteristics (being ‘uncivilised’). In contrast with popular thought, there was little evidence of any cross-national Roma identity or community; however, an important exception to this is the communities formed through the transnational migration of the Romanian Roma.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Summary of findings

In this study, I have presented an analysis of the ethnic identity, culture, and community of the Romanian Roma in Glasgow. This analysis has been based on empirical findings obtained through qualitative methods, and discussed in the context of the existing literature on ‘Roma identity and migration’ and ‘boundary focused models of ethnicity and assimilation’. Following the recommendations of theorists such as Barth (1969) and Wimmer (2005), this research focused mainly on the processes which contribute to the creation and reinforcement of the ethnic boundary in the context of migration, while also discussing some of the cultural changes which took place inside these boundaries.

The research findings revealed strong boundary processes aimed at protecting the Romanian Roma identity in a multi-cultural area of the city. Cultural changes noticed in this study seemed to be limited in their extent, but it needs to be pointed out that this Romanian Roma group is a new addition to the population of Glasgow, with the length of stay of most Romanians ranging from only a couple of months to just a few years. However, changes have taken place in relation to the position of the boundary around Romanian Roma, more specifically, with the creation of a boundary between Romanian and Slovakian Roma, triggered by the new social context faced by the Romanian Roma in Govanhill. Being the second Roma group of significant size in Govanhill, Romanians often find themselves being identified with Slovakian Roma, regardless of the significant cultural differences and community barriers that exist between the two groups.
In conclusion, it can be argued that Romanian Roma have re-constructed their ethnic boundaries in order to maintain the identity of their group in this new social context, where being Romanian is ‘positive’, and being Slovakian Roma is ‘negative’. They maintain this boundary by emphasising certain cultural elements they perceive as relevant (such as language), and by forming and maintaining a relatively closed ethnic community.

The findings of the study largely support the boundary based theoretical assumptions about ethnicity discussed in the literature review, however these often contradict previous research on Roma identity.

The case of Slovakian Roma - whom outsiders generally assume to be part of the same Roma group as Romanians, but Romanian Roma see as ‘outsiders’ - supports the theoretical assumptions arguing for the socially constructed, subjectivist nature of ethnicity (Wimmer, 2007). Barth’s (1969) claims about the use of specific cultural elements, *perceived as relevant* in the boundary building process is also exemplified by the data, which showed that language is used as a significant boundary marker between Slovakian and Romanian Roma in Glasgow, even though it has been shown in this study to not be an *objective* difference, despite subjective claims to the contrary.

One of the general claims of the literature, arguing that Roma people have a strong cultural and community identity, has found some limited support in this study. Even though the informants have demonstrated strong ethnic identity as ‘Roma from Romania’, their cultural and community identity was normally focused on various sub-groups (such as religious Roma, Roma in Govanhill or non-traditionalist Roma), rather than Roma in general. This example further supports the theoretical claims, which argue
that ethnic identity, culture, and community are related, but distinct elements of the social reality (see in the Literature Review).

One of the most important implications of this dissertation is that Roma identity is not just based on ‘differentiation from non-Roma’, as suggested by Formoso (2000), but rather it is constantly negotiated and reconstructed, based on relevant social situations and interactions.

5.2 Limitations and implications for further research

Besides the issues discussed in the Methodology chapter, some other limitation of the study arise from the scope of the research, which focuses only the internal processes of identity creation and boundary maintenance. Theories suggest that both ethnicity creation and assimilation depends on the interaction between internal and external processes aimed at building, maintaining and shifting the ethnic boundary (Barth, 1969; Nagel, 1994). In order to gain a more accurate understanding of ethnic identity processes (including assimilation) in migration, a more complex analysis has to be conducted, focusing both on processes internal to the studied group, as to the context of the host society, and the various boundary processes sustained by it.

Further research in the identification processes of the Romanian Roma is recommended in order to reveal recurring themes and explain variations. To improve the external validity and reliability of the data a longitudinal research design could be employed, in the UK, or following participants through the migration process. In both cases an ethnographic element of the research is recommended as this allows for understanding of contextual elements, often taken for granted by participants. Overall, studies of Roma identity and migration have to be based on firm theoretical underpinnings, and built on less positivist understandings of ethnicity.
References


Appendix 1

Interview Guide

Negotiating Identity and Culture

General Questions

How old are you?

Where do you live? (What area?)

When have you moved to Glasgow? / Length of stay

Why did you move here?
  - Why leave Romania?
  - Why Glasgow in particular?
  - Have you lived in any other place?

Your Ethnic Identity

What do you consider to be your ethnicity (nationality)?

Would you normally call yourself Romanian or Roma?

Are there any occasions when you would rather call yourself Roma/Romanian? Why? When?

Are there occasions when you wouldn’t say that you were Roma? When? Why?

Are there any circumstances when it is more beneficial to say that you are Roma/Romanian? When? Why?

Roma Identity

Are there any differences between Roma from Romania and Roma from other countries? Are they the same nation/ethnic group?

Are there any differences between Roma from different parts of Romania? Are they the same nation/ethnic group?
Appendix 1

Roma Characteristics

Who is Roma? (What makes someone Roma?)

Is there a specific way how Roma behave? Or think?

Are the following important/relevant for Roma? If yes, why? And in what ways? Can you describe it?

- Origins (family, place)
- Dress
- Religion, church
- Language
- Work
- Living conditions
- People they spend time with
- Customs, traditions

Are there any differences between Roma and non-Roma? What? How? (Do you think any of the above are different for non-Roma)

Can anyone stop being Roma/ become Roma? Why/ Why not?

If yes, what would they have to do/ learn/ change?

Is there anything you would like to change about being Roma? What? Why?

What would you like to keep?

How important is being Roma for you? What is important about it?

Do you think that being Roma influences your everyday life? How?

Life in Glasgow

What are your personal experiences of life in Glasgow?

Has your life changed in any way, since living here? How? In what way?

Do you engage in any activities that you would say are typical for the Roma (or Romanians)?

Who do you have more in common with: Romanians, other Roma, British people?

In what ways are you similar (or different) from non-Roma Romanians/ other Roma / others?
Appendix 1

Is there anything that you stopped doing / engaging in since you moved here?

Are there new things that you started here?

Have any of the following changed? How was it in Romania? How is it now? Why did it change?

  Language, church, house, cooking, shopping, clothing, school, work, family, friends, free time, keeping the traditions. Anything else?

Who are the people you’re normally spending time with?

  • Does it tend to be Roma or Romanians or other migrants or “locals”?
  • When do you spend time with Roma? And when with non-Roma? (public / private?)
  • Was this the same in Romania? In what ways has it changed?

Plans for the Future

What are your plans for the future?

  • Where would you like to live?
  • What plans do you have?

What about your children?

Should the children keep the Roma traditions, the Roma ‘way of life’? What In particular? Why?

Would you like them to become more like “Scottish”? In what sense?

What are the most important things (values) you would like to teach them?
Appendix 2

Roma Identity and Integration among Romanian Roma Immigrants in Glasgow

Information Sheet for Research Participants

Researcher: Eszter Tarcsafalvi

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

I am conducting this study as part of my Undergraduate work at the University of Glasgow. Through this study I am looking to find out more about the Romanian Roma immigrants in Glasgow, focusing on the everyday experiences of Roma people and their relationships with the larger community. For this study I am seeking to interview about 8 people who consider themselves Roma or Gypsy, are originally from Romania and are currently living in Glasgow.

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to commit to an interview of about one hour, in which I am going to ask you about your experiences of living in Glasgow compared to Romania and what being Roma means to you. You can decide not to answer any of the questions and if you want to withdraw from the project you may do so without questions before 20th February 2013.

The interview will be audio recorded, but your name and details identifying you will be kept confidential. The recording will be deleted after the project is completed and any transcripts of it will be anonymised. All data will be stored securely on a password protected computer. Anonymised quotes might be included in the dissertation resulting from this study. Also, at the end of the project anonymised data might be retained in a secure way and used in the researcher’s further work, such as a PhD thesis.

If you have any questions please contact me at 0907218t@student.gla.ac.uk or 0740 412 2149. You might also contact my supervisor, Dr Nicole Bourque at Nicole.Bourque@glasgow.ac.uk or 0141 330 4090.

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project you can contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer by contacting Dr Valentina Bold at valentina.bold@glasgow.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.
Appendix 2

Identitatea etnică și culturală a imigranților români de etnie roma din Glasgow
Foaie de Informații Pentru Participanti

Cercetător: Eszter Tarcsafalvi

Sunteți invitat să participați la un studiu de cercetare. Înainte de a lua o decizie, este important să înțelegeți care este scopul studiului și ce se va întâmpla dacă decideți să participați. Vă rog să citiți atent următoarele informații și să vă consultați cu alte persoane dacă doriți. Dacă aveți neclarități sau doriți mai multe informații, nu ezitați să îmi adresați întrebările dumneavoastră. Vă rog să vă gândiți atent înainte de a lua această decizie.

Această cercetare face parte din studiile mele de licență din University of Glasgow. Prin acest studiu doresc să aflu mai multe despre imigranții români de etnie roma din Glasgow, despre experiențele de zi cu zi ale romilor și relațiile lor cu oameni din jur. Pentru acest studiu doresc să realizez interviuri cu aproximativ 8 oameni care se consideră a fi de etnie roma (rroma) sau țigan, sunt originari din România și care momentan trăiesc în Glasgow.

Participarea la acest studiu este voluntară. Veți lua parte la acest studiu doar dacă doriți. Dacă decideți să participați, vă voi ruga să îmi acordați un interviu de aproximativ 1 ora în care vă voi adresa întrebări despre experiența de viață în Glasgow în comparație cu România și părerile dumneavoastră despre ce reprezintă etnia roma. În timpul interviului puteți să refuzați să răspundeți la orice întrebare. De asemenea, puteți să vă retrageți din acest studiu până pe data de 20 Februarie 2013.

Numele dumneavoastră și toate informațiile care pot fi folosite pentru a vă identifica vor fi strict confidential. Interviul va fi înregistrat audio, dar înregistrările vor fi ascultate doar de cercetătorul numit mai sus. Înregistrarea va fi struită după terminarea proiectului și orice transcriere a interviurilor va fi păstrată sub anonim. Datele vor fi păstrate pe un calculator protejat cu parolă. Citate anonime pot fi folosite în lucrarea care rezultă din acest studiu. La sfârșitul proiectului date anonime se vor păstra în condiții sigure și pot fi folosite în alte lucrări ale cercetătorului, cum ar fi o lucrare de doctorat.

Dacă aveți orice fel de întrebări, puteți să mă contactați la adresa de email 0907218t@student.gla.ac.uk sau la numărul de telefon 0740 412 2149. Puteți contacta și coordonatorul de licență, Dr Nicole Bourque la adresa de email Nicole.Bourque@glasgow.ac.uk sau numărul de telefon 0141 330 4090.

Dacă aveți orice fel de preocupare în legătură cu desfășurarea acestui studiu, puteți să contactați Responsabilul de Etică de la College of Social Sciences, Dr Valentina Bold la adresa de email: valentina.bold@glasgow.ac.uk.

Vă mulțumesc pentru timpul acordat.
Appendix 3

Title of Project: Roma Identity and Integration among Romanian Roma Immigrants in Glasgow

Researcher: Eszter Tarcsafalvi

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw until the 20th February 2013, without giving any reason.

3. I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

4. I understand that my name will not appear in the dissertation arising from this research.

5. I agree to take part in the above study.

_________________________    ___________________    ___________________
Name of Participant                     Date                     Signature

_________________________    ___________________    ___________________
Researcher                     Date                     Signature
Titlul proiectului: Identitatea etnică și culturală a imigrantilor români de etnie roma din Glasgow

Cercetător: Eszter Tarcsafalvi

1. Am citit și am înțeles foaia de informații pentru participanți corespunzătoare acestui studiu și am avut oportunitatea să pun întrebări.

2. Înțeleg că participarea mea la acest studiu este voluntară și pot să mă retrag din proiect oricând până pe data de 20 Februarie 2013, fără să explic motivul.

3. Sunt de acord ca interviul să fie înregistrat audio.

4. Înțeleg că numele meu nu va apărea în disertația bazată pe acest studiu.

5. Sunt de acord să particip în acest studiu.

Numele Participantului ___________________________ Data ___________________________ Semnătura ___________________________

Numele Cercetătorului ___________________________ Data ___________________________ Semnătura ___________________________