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— THE POWER OF GROUP STIGMATIZATION:
Wealthy Roma, Urban Space and Strategies of Defence in Post-socialist Romania

REMUS CREȚAN AND RYAN POWELL

Abstract
Recent research on Roma stigmatization has tended to focus on the marginal socio-economic and spatial position of Roma people within European societies, with poverty, persistent inequalities and substandard housing conditions (for example, ghettoization) highlighting their differential treatment. Central to such accounts are group images and stereotypes of Roma as 'benefit scroungers' and/or 'beggars' lacking notions of self-restraint and social responsibility. This body of research is hugely important in terms of its contribution to an understanding of the complex dynamics of marginalization and stigmatization of poor Roma households. Yet not all Roma are characterized by poverty and economic hardship. This article explores the neglected experiences of wealthy Roma within urban spaces in Romania. It draws on empirical evidence from interviews with Roma families, leaders and local authorities. Our analysis exposes the way in which Roma are vehemently stigmatized regardless of their economic position or housing circumstances and highlights deep underlying sentiments towards them within Romanian society. We critique Wacquant's concept of territorial stigmatization by applying it to wealthy groups outwith typical areas of relegation (for example, Roma ghettos) within the specific urban context of post-socialist Romania. While our analysis points to the internalization of stigma, we also identify distinct defensive strategies wealthy Roma employ to counter and avoid stigmatization. We suggest that a focus on the neglected spaces of wealthy Roma groups can facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the distinct urban power relations that shape Roma stigmatization, reveal how this long-term process has recently been accentuated within Europe alongside a more overt populist and anti-Roma political agenda, and contribute to the development and refinement of Wacquant's thesis.

Introduction

Contemporary research on Roma in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has emphasized the marginal socio-economic position of many Roma communities and their spatial confinement within ghettos characterized by an inhospitable environment and substandard housing conditions (Crețan and Turnock, 2008; Berescu, 2011; Vincze and Raț, 2013; Filčák and Steger, 2014; Walach, 2015; Powell and Lever, 2017). Central to these accounts is the persistent poverty of many Roma communities and the inequalities (and segregation) they face in terms of access to housing, education and the formal labour market (O'Nions, 2010; van Baar, 2011; 2012). Indeed, the focus on impoverishment and deprivation has led some scholars to argue that this risks essentializing Roma and positioning them as responsible for their own situation (van Baar, 2011; Maestri, 2016), with poverty being constructed as cultural and blame being laid on the Roma themselves for their persistent marginalized predicament: a 'degraded and deprived people in degraded and deprived environments' (Filčák and Steger, 2014: 230). For non-Roma in CEE the dominant image of Roma is that of 'a poor uneducated and problematic group that is largely dependent on state benefits' (Grill,

2012: 1279). Or, in some cases, low socio-economic status and poverty are used as a means for explaining their stigmatized outsider position within European societies, as opposed to being a product of it (see Lucassen *et al.*, 1998). There is a growing body of quality research on poor Roma communities that furthers our understanding of the complex relations and dynamic processes contributing to marginalization. Yet not all Roma families are characterized by extreme poverty and economic hardship. Nor do all Roma live in ghettos, in substandard housing conditions or in marginal locations. However, the experiences of families who deviate from the marginal and impoverished image of European Roma that predominates have received very little attention to date.

In this article we draw on qualitative empirical material from interviews with Roma residents and local stakeholders to offer a unique contribution through exploring the hitherto neglected experiences and spaces of relatively wealthy Roma families within four ethnically mixed areas of south-western Romania. Our analysis highlights the intense stigmatization that is applied to Roma regardless of their relative wealth, socio-economic position or housing circumstances. We thereby challenge accounts that seek to explain Roma stigmatization based on perceived socio-economic characteristics, poverty or ghettoization. We build on the works of Norbert Elias and Loïc Wacquant to suggest that 'Romaphobia' (van Baar, 2011) must be understood as a complex and (very) long-term process of *group stigmatization* with economic resources insufficient to challenge the imposed inferiority and stigmatization emanating from much of the non-Roma population. Such stigmatizing conduct, which includes both the sentiment and behaviour of large parts of Romanian society, has been bolstered by a recent shift towards a more overt populist and anti-Roma political agenda within Romania (Bird and Candea, 2014)—a trend also apparent in other CEE countries (Fox and Vermeersch, 2010)—which has explicitly targeted wealthy Roma households (Ruegg, 2013).

At the same time, by focusing on the neglected spaces of wealthy Romanian Roma, we capture the diversity of Roma experiences and question the dominant perception and narrative of Roma lives as wholly negative and characterized by extreme poverty, economic exclusion and housing degradation. Our analysis challenges the widespread discourse on the entrenched welfare dependency of Roma communities, which is applied to Roma in general, by highlighting the strong work ethic and labour-market mobility of many of the Roma families in our sample. Contrary to popular and media discourse, the families we spoke to were not desperate to migrate to Western Europe in search of more generous welfare entitlements; rather, they were likely to do so reluctantly—in response to intense stigmatization and harassment in their home town or city. Most respondents attempted to limit these experiences through defensive strategies of mutual avoidance behaviour and by steering clear of public spaces, behaviour that highlights the inability of upwardly mobile Roma to 'legitimately participate in (access) and appropriate (occupy) urban space' (Flint, 2012: 258). Often there was also evidence of the internalization of stigma that some wealthy Roma respondents sought to counter by moving (and, to a degree, being 'pushed' out) abroad. In this regard, while our interviewees were not residents of ghettos, their responses to stigmatization mirrored that of ghetto inhabitants in terms of mutual avoidance behaviour, a retreat into the private sphere of the family and the internalization of intense and persistent stigmatization (Wacquant, 2012). However, the case of wealthy Roma in Romania also provides a theoretical contribution through a critique of Wacquant's theory of territorial stigmatization—that is, while territorial stigmatization is a *symbolic* logic that latches on to space (Wacquant *et al.*, 2014), empirical evidence on wealthy Roma suggests that it is *group* stigmatization that is the key determining factor that accounts for their persistent denigration. We therefore combine Wacquant's thesis with Elias's theory of established–outsider relations (Elias and Scotson, 1994) to emphasize the long-term, stigmatized outsider status of Roma and the centrality of power in understanding their inferior treatment.

We conclude by suggesting that a focus on the neglected experiences and spaces of wealthy Roma groups in other spatial and national contexts can contribute to an understanding of the long-term group stigmatization of Roma by focusing attention on the power relations and group dynamics that give rise to the dominant perception of Roma as inferior, regardless of their individual or family characteristics, or their housing and economic circumstances. The inability of 'non-segregated', economically active and upwardly mobile Roma families to escape from the powerful shackles of group stigmatization also leads us to question approaches and discourses on their social integration and how such integration might be achieved within CEE countries and, more broadly, within Europe.

The remainder of the article is divided into five sections. First, we briefly set out the unique historical context within Romania and explain what we mean by 'wealthy Roma'. Secondly, we outline our theoretical framework with reference to the work of Elias and Wacquant. Thirdly, we present the methods we utilized in our research, paying particular attention to their strengths and limitations. The fourth section presents our empirical material and focuses on wealthy Roma residents' experiences of stigmatization, as well as on their responses, to highlight both the similarities and differences that characterize the experiences of more deprived and ghettoized Roma households. In the final section we call for a more prominent place for power in accounting for the weak position and perennial group stigmatization of Roma within European societies and suggest that the synthesis of aspects of Elias's and Wacquant's theoretical work could prove particularly useful in this regard.

Roma in Romania: historical context and situating 'wealthy Roma'

Any understanding of contemporary Roma marginalization in Europe must acknowledge the long history of persecution and hostility towards the Roma people. Given space constraints, we focus in particular on the post-1989 period and the shifting position of Roma during the communist and post-communist eras.

The long history of the Roma people in Romania is defined by five hundred years of slavery followed by deportation to the Nazi death camps during the second world war (Kelso, 1999). Prior to the Antonescu regime (1939–1944) the Roma were seen as a marginal social group rather than an ethnic minority. As a consequence of agrarian reform in 1921 the Romanian authorities focused on controlling nomadism and coercing Roma groups into taking up 'useful' occupations (Achim, 2002: 55). During the second world war, from 1941 to 1944, Antonescu's military regime (allied with Nazi Germany) subscribed to a programme of Roma deportation in an attempt to rid Romania of what Antonescu termed 'undesirable populations' —namely, Jews and Roma (Kelso, 1999). In 1942 the Roma were targeted by Antonescu for deportation to Transnistria. By 1944, when the Nazi armies on the Eastern Front were defeated and the camps were liberated, fewer than half of the 25,000 deported Roma had survived—the majority having 'succumbed to starvation, disease, wretchedness and brutality' (*ibid*.: 115).

The socialist era brought strong assimilationist goals and economic inclusion, and new housing policies eliminated Roma-only settlements and education programmes. Although social conditions improved for the Romanian Roma, they still faced differential treatment, to their detriment. In 1948 'the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) established the guidelines of the policy of the communist state towards the "co-inhabiting nationalities", yet the Roma were not mentioned in the related documents' (Achim, 2002: 66). This effectively excluded Roma from the list of recognized minorities, who had enjoyed certain rights up to 1989. The general post-socialist situation of the Roma population in the 1990s and subsequent decades was significantly influenced by economic factors, with a large number of Roma becoming jobless after the onset of deindustrialization (for an excellent account of this wider context, namely, 'zombie

socialism', see Chelcea and Druta, 2016). Many families migrated to Western Europe (although this was not an option for everyone), while many continued to live in poverty within Romania (Crețan, 2015). At the same time, nationalist ideology was quickly spreading across the entire post-socialist Romanian political spectrum. Two ultra-nationalist parties emerged: the Partidul România Mare (Greater Romania Party) and the Vatra Româneasca (Romanian Cradle) (Gallagher, 1995). Both sought to mobilize long-standing disidentifications from Roma within Romanian society. Generally, their power to exploit and extend nationalism was fairly limited, but they were very active in the national media in Romania, and especially in their party's sponsored media. While the leader of the Romanian Cradle, Gheorghe Funar, targeted mainly Hungarians in Transylvania, Vadim Tudor was the harshest Romanian political leader to target the Roma. In August 1998 Tudor announced a ten-point programme, which included 'isolating the Roma criminals in special colonies' in order to 'stop the transformation of Romania into a Gypsy camp' (de Goyal, 2005: 131). Tudor subsequently lost his presidency to Ion Iliescu in 2000 in a very close contest after a hate campaign that targeted Jews and Hungarians as well as Roma, although he remained a senator. Even though his party received less support from voters, his mass-media appearances after Romania joined the EU reinforced anti-Roma sentiment against both poor and relatively wealthy Roma. The Greater Romania Party's journal, *Tricolorul*, was edited under the slogan 'Sus patria! Jos Mafia' ('Up the home country! Down with the Mafia!'), and many headlines referred to nationalist-driven discourses and the 'wealthy Roma Mafia'. This more recent focus on wealthy Roma within right-wing political discourse coincided with their increasing acquisition of wealth and assets since the turn of the century. As Ruegg notes, 'the dwelling of Roma in the centre of the city of Timișoara and their acquisition of historical buildings has provoked many demonstrations of anger among the urban population' (Ruegg, 2013: 19).

Although the New Right was consolidated as a political party in 2015, the far right acts through organizations or associations—despite legislation against the promotion of fascist symbols and ideology, racism and xenophobia—and 'sometimes in complicity with state institutions' (Climescu, 2013: 5). Fox and Vermeersch (2010: 352) argue that 'nationalism has been redefined and at times reinvigorated' as an unintended consequence of the expansion of the EU, and recent trends in Romania support this notion. Since 1990, nationalistic rhetoric has been a characteristic of Romanian politics (EDRC, 2001). Anti-Roma violence and hate speech reached a peak in the 1990s, while populism increased markedly throughout the 2000s (Bird and Candea, 2014; Crețan, 2015). Discrimination against Roma sometimes reached the level of physical violence, and incidents of Roma houses being burnt to the ground and of Roma being expelled from their villages, resulting in deaths of Roma, have been reported (Szente, 1996).

During the period of the expansion of the EU (post-2007), the situation deteriorated for the Roma communities in Romania (Scicluna, 2007). Political leaders engaged in populist discourses but also in overt discrimination (Bird and Candea, 2014; Crețan, 2015). Former Romanian president Traian Băsescu was convicted twice by the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD) for racist statements. In 2007, when a female Roma TV reporter attempted to interview him, Băsescu commented on 'how aggressive the stinky Gypsy was' (Scicluna, 2007: n.p.n.). And in 2010, on a trip to Ljubljana, he declared that nomadic Gypsies traditionally 'live only on what they steal'. Băsescu had always regarded the Roma people as a burden, and as Mayor of Bucharest (2000–2004) he stated that 'Gypsies are nomads and nobody can do anything about them—they will bring their horses into the flats ... we should build special camps and keep them outside our cities' (Scicluna, 2007: n.p.n.). Roma have also faced, and in some cases resisted, widespread evictions in recent years as a result of the 2001 Restitution Act (see Lancione, 2017).

Political leaders on the left have also targeted Roma and sought political capital from their stigmatization. One of the most controversial recent examples of overt hate speech is a comment by Rareș Buglea, a local council member in Alba county and leader of the National Liberal Party (PNL) Youth Organization there, who was accused of embracing Nazi-style eugenics by stating that if social workers in Romania find a Roma woman who does not have 'the intention to raise the child in humane conditions' it would be better for that woman to be 'sterilized after her first child' (Bird and Candea, 2014: n.p.n.).

While the fortunes and social positioning of Roma in Romania can be said to fluctuate, and while communism is a key period in this regard, the dominant historical narrative is one of intense persecution and stigmatization, in the course of which the Roma were constructed and viewed as an inferior social group at odds with normative notions of 'Europeanness' or 'civilisation' (Powell and Lever, 2017). This historical context and the complicity of the Romanian state and the political establishment within it is a key component of understanding the empirical findings that follow.

–   A note on wealthy Roma in Romania

It is the experiences and treatment of wealthy Roma and their response to stigmatization within Romania that is the focus of the remainder of this article. Therefore, it is necessary to articulate first of all what we mean when we refer to the category 'wealthy Roma'. Our categorization is operationalized through neighbourhood selection and indicators of relative wealth, such as housing circumstances, residential location and other status symbols. For example, in Timișoara, wealthy Roma live in very large dwellings within more affluent neighbourhoods traditionally inhabited by wealthy German and Jewish families, many of whom emigrated from Timișoara in the 1990s. These 'Roma palaces' serve as a 'symbolic way of affirming one's new social status' and are often clearly visible and distinguishable by the alterations their occupants have made (Ruegg, 2013: 3). Furthermore, as explained below, wealthy Roma tend to disaffiliate from poorer Roma families and residential spaces, adding weight to the notion that their dwellings are a symbolic marker of distinction. In accessing wealthy Roma households we relied on contacts within the Roma community identifying families whose material wealth is well above the average and who were therefore deemed to enjoy a better standard of living. Their material conditions diverge markedly from those of the average Romanian Roma family, with a clear demarcation apparent in terms of acquisition of assets (for example, home and car ownership) (see Ruegg, 2013). What is crucial for the discussion that follows, is that their residential location, their conspicuous housing consumption, their cars, dress and jewellery are all clearly visible symbolic marker of social status and wealth. Wealthy Roma families also tended to spend a large part of the year away from their home town or city in Romania, making them even more visible when they returned for specific periods or events in their 'luxurious cars'.

The power of group stigmatization: synthesizing Elias and Wacquant

The discussion that follows draws on a theoretical synthesis of the relational works of Elias and Wacquant. It is therefore necessary to outline the key aspects of their respective approaches, which serve to guide our empirical analysis. While Elias's figurational (or process sociology) approach provides for an understanding of group stigmatization and centres on the dynamics of interdependent power relations (Elias and Scotson, 1994), Wacquant's framework underscores the importance of the spatial manifestations of stigmatization, taking its cue from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power (a view from above) and fusing this with Erving Goffman's work (built from below) on the 'management of spoiled identity'. Wacquant's (2008b) concept of territorial stigmatization has resonated widely across the social sciences and has proved to be a useful analytical device for furthering understanding of the spatial dynamics

and urban formations (for example, the ghetto) characteristic of the governance of marginality in the contemporary period. A key aspect of Wacquant's related concept of the ghetto is the assertion that the experience of the ghettoized can often be ambivalent, as it serves at once as an instrument of 'confinement and control' for the dominant group, and as an 'integrative and protective device' for the stigmatized (Wacquant, 2004; 2012). Urban scholars have utilized this thesis to good effect in their attempt to understand the complexities of the marginalized Roma ghetto, by highlighting the trend towards Roma segregation; environmental exclusion; the potential positives of the ghetto in terms of internal solidarity; and the avoidance of hostility and harassment (Filčák and Steger, 2014; Clough Marinaro, 2015; Walach, 2015; Powell and Lever, 2017). However, it is important to note that while Clough Marinaro's recent work (2015; 2017) on Roma camps in Rome points to the unravelling of internal solidarity within what she terms the Roma 'neo-ghetto', which is strategically undermined by external economic and political interests, Maestri's rich ethnography (2014; 2016) of the same city informs us of new squatter solidarities for Roma and challenges the essentialization and exceptionalism of the Roma category. These empirical accounts underscore the specificity of national context and the dynamic relations of the ghetto.

Territorial stigmatization asserts that it is the symbolic representation and denigration of the neighbourhood, the ghetto, or 'areas of relegation' that informs the popular perception of that space as a 'no-go area', and its inhabitants as 'urban outcasts' (Wacquant, 2008b). This, in turn, ensures social and spatial separation and instils mutual avoidance behaviour. Thus, it is the symbolic making of space—territorial stigmatization as a symbolic logic that latches onto space—that produces deleterious effects, particularly where these misrepresentations inform policy based on popular and widespread (mis-)perceptions (public, politicians, media) (*ibid*.). However, in the case of wealthy Roma residents, this thesis is in need of refinement. What is striking in what follows is that Romanian Roma *outwith* the ghetto, who appear relatively well integrated in terms of economic inclusion and housing circumstances, still experience intense stigmatization and harassment. As we shall see, regardless of their spatial location within the city or their material circumstances, Romanian Roma are vilified as intensely as their counterparts who are confined to the margins of the Roma ghetto. This suggests that it is not relative poverty, marginality or ghettoization that feeds widespread anti-Roma sentiment among the public; it is 'the fact that [Roma are] members of a group which [non-Roma] consider *collectively* as different from, and as inferior to, their own group' (Elias, [1976] 1994: xx, emphasis added). That is not to deny that many Roma ghettos bear the hallmarks of territorial stigmatization, nor to downplay the significance of Wacquant's theory in understanding Roma segregation and ghettoization across Europe. Rather, empirical insights on the neglected experiences of wealthy Roma suggest that ghettoization and an over-emphasis on *spatial* explanations for stigmatization provide only a partial account at best, and at worst block the path to an understanding of the wider processes giving rise to such longstanding perceptions of human inferiority. Elias's theory of established–outsider relations resonates here, given the emphasis on the way in which 'established' (non-Roma) and 'outsider' (Roma) groups are bonded together in particular ways mediated by power imbalances, with separation driven by powerful group controls (see Powell, 2008; 2016). Elias refers to:

> a universal regularity of any established–outsider figuration: the established group attributed to its members superior human characteristics; it excluded all members of the other group from non-occupational social contact with its own members; the taboo on such contacts was kept alive by means of social control such as praise-gossip about those who observed it and the threat of blame-gossip against suspected offenders (Elias, [1976] 1994: xvi).

Such social separation is more straightforward through the spatial confinement of 'outsider' groups to the urban periphery (for example, ghettoization); and territorial stigmatization can be seen as a particular manifestation of that separation which reinforces the symbolic denigration of the group(s) residing there. But where Roma cannot be confined to the degraded environments of the periphery and do not conform to the dominant impoverished image of the majority, territorial stigmatization is much less apparent. It is *group stigmatization* that serves as such a powerful weapon for maintaining perceptions of inferiority, taboos on social contact, and also in mobilizing widespread disidentifications from Roma for political ends, regardless of spatial context. As Elias notes:

> the ability of one group to pin a badge of human inferiority on another group and to make it stick was a function of the specific figuration which the two groups formed with each other ... At present one often fails to distinguish between, and relate to each other, group stigmatization and individual prejudice ... one found members of one group casting a slur on those of another, not because of their qualities as individual people, but because they were members of a group which they considered collectively as different from, and as inferior to, their own group (Elias, [1976] 1994: xx)

Elias's theory therefore draws attention to group dynamics and the way in which power mediates inter-group relations, but also *internal* group sentiments. The ability to maintain separation and perceptions of inferiority requires continual effort involving the invocation of political and public reworkings of longstanding stigmatizing group discourses legitimized in order to perform political work. This is a key notion in understanding the very long-term, stigmatized outsider position of Roma within Europe.

Yet, as we shall see, Wacquant's conceptualization of the ghetto *is* of use here in terms of the response to stigmatization on the part of wealthy Roma. We suggest that the case of wealthy Roma not only offers new empirical insights into our understanding of the dynamics of Roma stigmatization, but also has broader implications for the theory of territorial stigmatization—for its extension and refinement. This is particularly true for peripheral groups for whom a stigmatized outsider status can be seen as a ubiquitous aspect of their (very) long-term social relations. In the case of European Roma communities this raises profound questions about current, and invariably ahistorical, policy attempts at Roma integration, which are largely premised on the facilitation of housing, economic and educational integration.

Methods

In terms of geographical focus, two cities (Timișoara and Reșița) and two smaller towns (Bocșa and Deta) from south-western Romania were selected, where concentrations of relatively wealthy Roma families had been identified. Statistical data from the previous Romanian census of 2011 (INSSE, 2013) was then profiled to ascertain the relative size of the Roma population within the selected urban areas. Table 1 shows the ethnic structure of the four case study locations.

In all areas, Roma comprise a very small proportion of the overall population—between only 1% in Timișoara to 3.5% in Bocșa. The Roma population is largest in absolute terms in the largest city of the four, Timișoara, with over 3,000 Roma inhabitants recorded in the previous census period. By contrast, only 144 Roma reside within the small town of Deta.

Sixty face-to-face interviews were conducted with wealthy Roma residents across the four areas. In the absence of reliable data sources, most participants were recruited through the method of snowball sampling, which proved to be an effective

TABLE 1   The position of Roma in the ethnic structure of the selected urban sites

City/Town	Total Population	Romanian		Roma		Hungarian		German		Others	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Timișoara	317,660	271,666	85.5	3,062	1.0	24,287	7.6	7,157	2.3	11,488	3.6
Reșița	73,282	59,899	81.7	1,061	1.4	1,522	2.1	1,221	1.7	9,579	13.1
Bocșa	16,518	13,116	79.4	573	3.5	315	1.9	177	1.1	2,337	14.1
Deta	6,260	4,247	67.8	144	2.3	869	13.9	252	4.0	748	12.0

SOURCE: INSSE (2013)

means of connecting with potential Roma interviewees within the four locations. Thus our sample is not meant to be representative of the wider Roma population, but rather is intentionally skewed towards those Roma households whose economic position is relatively more comfortable. Further interviews were conducted with Roma (n = 4) and non-Roma (n = 8) leaders from each of the four areas. These interviews were helpful in showing how local leaders perceived wealthy Roma and their experiences of stigmatization locally. The focus of the interviews was therefore on how wealthy Roma experience stigma, how they respond, and how stigmatization is perceived by local leaders/elites. Interviews were not structured; respondents were simply asked for their opinion on the stigmatization of wealthy Roma families in their area. Table 2 shows the breakdown of interviewees by geographic location. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority hailed from the larger case study areas of Timișoara and Reșița, with just a handful of interviews conducted in the much smaller town of Deta.

TABLE 2   Geographical distribution of interviewees

Interviewee Type	Bocșa	Deta	Reșița	Timișoara	Total
Wealthy Roma residents	12	4	19	25	60
Roma community leaders	1	1	1	1	4
Non-Roma community leaders	1	1	2	4	8
Total	14	6	22	30	72

SOURCE: Authors' research

Information on the age, gender and occupational status of interviewees is presented in Table 3. Given the focus of this article on wealthy Roma, the sample is inevitably skewed towards older Roma who are more likely to have accumulated wealth and assets in their lifetime.

Interviews with Roma residents were semi-structured and consisted of open-ended questions aimed at recording respondents' views on the stigmatization of wealthy Roma. On average, interviews were approximately half an hour long, although the length varied from 20 to 50 minutes and sometimes involved more than one family member. Interviewees had the option of being recorded and permission was sought to do so, but not a single interviewee agreed to this request. Consequently, extensive notes were made for each interview encounter, but some data were inevitably not captured, and in some cases our notes were insufficient for verbatim quotations. Nevertheless, every effort was made to document the salient aspects of each interview, including requests that respondents repeat or clarify specific sections of an interview that were deemed to be particularly significant. In a handful of cases, repeat interviews were conducted. The data were then coded and analysed; major themes were based on geographic location

TABLE 3 Interviewee characteristics: age band, gender and occupation

	Under 18		19-65		Over 65	
Occupational Status	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Unemployed	3	3	4	6	–	–
Higher managerial and professional	–	–	4	3	–	–
Public-sector workers	–	–	2	2	–	–
Private-sector workers	–	–	4	2	–	–
Other	–	–	5	5	3	
Retired/pensioners	–	–	–	–	7	7
Total	3	3	19	18	10	7

SOURCE: Authors' research

and on the characteristics of the interviewees (age and gender). On the basis of this analysis, three distinct strategies of defence in the face of stigmatization and hostility were identified.

In addition, website platforms and local media reports were examined to attempt to capture the stigmatizing discourses brought into public space and how such discourse was explicitly directed towards wealthy Roma. Three newspapers were selected: *Adevarul* (national), *DeBanat.ro* (regional) and *Timisonline* (regional).[1] These were chosen to provide a balance of regional and national perspectives. Articles spanning a five-year period from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2016 were analysed. After some initial scoping of the online archives of each of the three newspapers, two key Romanian words were chosen—'romi bogati' ('wealthy Roma') and 'tigani bogati' ('wealthy Gypsies')—to identify articles dealing explicitly with wealthy Roma. Codes were then assembled to identify different themes and narratives framing the nature of stigma. These are discussed below. Analysis of archival texts revealed a heightened level of anxiety on the part of non-Roma regarding wealthy Roma and their residential status, as well as more overt expressions of hostility and stigmatization, particularly since 2013.

– Limitations of the research

A key limitation of the research approach we adopted is the necessity of using snowball sampling and relying on contacts, neighbours and acquaintances in recruiting wealthy Roma to be interviewed. Consequently we cannot claim to have achieved a representative sample. Indeed, the gender representation of interviewees was slightly skewed towards males (n = 32). The sample could also have been enlarged through the inclusion of several other towns within the Banat region of Romania. Banat is one of the most developed regions in the country, and the wealthy Roma in urban areas there may perhaps be perceived differently. Secondly, our data set does not include poor or ghettoized Roma and therefore precludes a comparison of the relative intensity of stigmatization for wealthy Roma vis-à-vis poorer groups. However, media analysis (presented below) suggests an explicit targeting of wealthy Roma in more recent years (see also Ruegg, 2013). Thirdly, although interviewers spoke Romanian, several Roma interviewees (four persons) struggled with the language and some data were inevitably lost. Fourthly, the reluctance of interviewees to be recorded also represents a weakness in terms of the data. Reliance on note taking during interviews may dilute the richness of some of the interviewees' detailed answers, while also precluding the possibility of capturing behavioural expressions such as sighing, laughter, and so on. Given the heightened populist discourse in Romania, many interviewees seemed suspicious of the

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1   The authors accessed the websites of *Adevarul* (adevarul.ro), *DeBanat.ro* (debanat.ro) and *Timisonline* (www.tion.ro) from 23 May to 11 June 2017.

interviewers and their motives. For example, one Roma man asked if the interviewer was an undercover policeman and assumed he had come to take his assets. Such scepticism may have resulted in less open dialogue, although the final data set does not support this view: most respondents were relaxed after the initial discussion and spoke openly and honestly about their experiences and perceptions.

Wealthy Roma in south-western Romania: stigma, public space and strategies of defence

Analysis of qualitative interview data with wealthy Roma participants revealed three distinct but related strategies of defensiveness in response to the persistent stigmatization they experienced. First, *international migration* from their home town or city was a reluctant but active response in the sense that those who were moving away were taking back control of their own fate by escaping stigma and searching for a viable future (Grill, 2012). However, this option was not available to all respondents and was mediated by economic position and resources. Secondly, many respondents sought to avoid confrontation and public spaces, a strategy driven by experiences of hostile attitudes and vilification within respondents' local neighbourhood spaces, contributing to *mutual avoidance behaviour* on the part of both Roma and non-Roma. This can be considered an apathetic response, although there were subtle generational differences that suggest a more resistant attitude among younger Roma, who cited social justice and combating extremist views as imperative goals for Romanian society. Thirdly, in line with the strategy of mutual avoidance, wealthy Roma respondents explicitly articulated their tendency to *retreat into the private sphere of the family* in the face of stereotypical abuse and harassment within public spaces. Strong extended family ties were universal, and experiences of stigmatization served to reinforce the notion that 'family is everything'. This section details these defensive strategies with reference to qualitative empirical evidence.

Our findings also problematize current efforts towards the social integration of Roma at the EU level. Many households in our sample may be regarded to actively adhere to discourses around integration through successful labour-market engagement, through their move towards homeownership and through residing in more diverse (less segregated) neighbourhoods. Yet their exposure to and experiences of stigmatization appear equally intense, despite the fact that they reside in affluent neighbourhoods and have wealth and status—placing them at odds with the dominant perception that Roma are an impoverished and marginalized people living in degraded environments (Filčák and Steger, 2014): 'a *normal* Roma is supposed to be poor and to deserve at best our pity; a rich Roma is thus an abnormality that does not fit into the social landscape' (Ruegg, 2013: 19, emphasis added). Thus, following Elias and Scotson ([1965] 1994), we tentatively suggest that stigmatization responses to wealthy Roma may be intensified, especially if the wealthy Roma reside in large properties ('Gypsy palaces') in central locations; this intensification can be attributed to the perceived challenge this represents to non-Roma and to their assumed social superiority.

– International migration as an active response to stigmatization

Grill argues that previous forms of migration have established themselves as survival strategies through which Roma have managed their livelihoods, but 'despite the growing interest in Roma migration … little is known about the migrants' practices, strategies and own understandings of their mobilities' (Grill, 2012: 1270). The focus on wealthy Roma therefore helps address the 'tendency to reify Roma migration and to homogenize its varieties under a single analytical umbrella' (*ibid.*). Wealthy Roma in Romania regard their migration as driven not by economic necessity or survival, but rather by a desire to escape powerful processes of stigmatization that manifest in public spaces. Many would like to stay in their home towns in Romania but choose to

live abroad for most of the year for reasons of safety and security. A 40-year-old Roma man from Timișoara compared the sense of security and emotional wellbeing he felt in his adopted country, Germany, with the misperceptions and stereotypes he endured in his native city:

> I think *centrul* (the city centre) is the place I feel better but I cannot say it is a Roma place now. We are few rich Roma who built or bought houses here. Even if I like the centre, I usually don't stay in my house in Timișoara. Why should I leave my house and hear, 'look, he is a thief', or 'he begged in Germany and now he is rich here', or that my daughters are 'prostitutes'. So it's better I live there, abroad, and nobody blames me. I speak German and I'm better accepted as a minority person in Germany. Here I come only for Christmas and Eastertime, during the summer period, and if some relatives have family events. I don't want to emigrate but I feel better and safer abroad (40-year-old male respondent from Timișoara).

This man's narrative reveals the *emotional burden of stigmatization*, of being labelled a 'thief' or 'beggar' despite its lack of foundation, and despite his having achieved relative economic prosperity through labour-market endeavours. Persistent and widespread assumptions of illegality injure his sense of self, despite his upward social mobility. This echoes Elias and Scotson's ([1965] 1994) observation that the weaponry of stigmatization of a more powerful group has the *power* to bite owing to the awareness in the recipient of his or her weaker, inferior position. Such stereotypes have a very long history and must be situated within the longer-term process of group stigmatization (Hancock, 1997; Lucassen *et al.*, 1998; Powell, 2008; Powell and Lever, 2017). This respondent expressed a clear preference for residing away from his homeland as opposed to being wrongly and negatively judged regarding the means by which he secured his income. Such stereotypical judgements also extend to his offspring, with non-Roma arriving at the unsubstantiated assumption that his daughters are engaged in sex work. The stigma the respondent faced in Timișoara outweighed his attachment to place, compelling him to live as part of a minority population in Germany. It is evident that in this case the migration decision, while to a degree an active choice, can also be considered an enforced choice (or a constrained choice in the absence of alternative options) for the only effective defence against the stigmatization experienced in Timișoara: to flee it. This is linked with de Genova's (forthcoming) notion that we can consider Roma mobilities as 'veritable refugee movements' that reflect the fact that migration is often driven by the desire to escape subordination and persecution in the country of origin.

Some out-migration was temporary in nature and driven by labour-market mobility. Contrary to media and popular discourses on Roma as 'work shy' or 'welfare dependent' we found that among our sample of more wealthy Roma respondents' orientation towards work was usually characterized by a strong work ethic and a willingness to travel large distances to secure employment. For example, as a 25-year-old Roma man from Reșița stated:

> I work with my father and uncles seasonally in Spain, both for a better standard of living and to escape people's insults. Most non-Roma in Reșița stigmatize us in different ways—they call me a thief, beggar, and so on, but in Spain we are respected. We have rented an apartment in the Madrid suburbs—but do you know how expensive it is to pay the rent there in a capital city? Nobody knows how difficult it is to work there ... But all the money I make is for building this villa for me, my wife and my three children. So we don't want to emigrate, just to complete this house and have a better life in Romania (25-year-old male respondent, Reșița).

While the primary reason for migration is economic ('for a better standard of living'), he also wishes to 'escape people's insults'. In Spain he and his family are 'respected', which implies that they are not respected in Romania. This is not to say that Roma (or Gitanos) in Spain are free from stigma, but rather that the respondent's experience in cosmopolitan Madrid contrasts favourably with Reșița. The stereotypical labels 'beggar' and 'thief' are utilized by non-Roma, who have the power to hurt the respondent, as such insults undermine the legitimate and difficult circumstances and conditions under which he resides and works in Madrid. This respondent, though not immune to the stigmatization he experienced in Romania, expressed a defiant sense of hope regarding a prosperous life in Reșița in the future.

Although these two respondents' narratives differ in terms of their long-term view regarding a return to their homeland, both point to common experiences of stigma despite their relative affluence. Both expressed being more respected for their work and social standing in other countries than in their native Romania. Thus, irrespective of socio-economic status, negative and stereotypical imagery is applied to *all* Roma—a process of *group stigmatization* that is based simply on membership of the heterogeneous category 'Roma', regardless of the socio-economic position and characteristics of the individual.

It is important to note that international migration is a costly and risky response to stigma and not available to all Roma. Migration may also be unsuccessful, considering that Roma people are stigmatized across Western Europe and beyond (Cahn and Vermeersch, 2000; Clough Marinaro, 2003; Guy, 2003; Picker, 2010; van Baar, 2011; Clark, 2014; Levine-Rasky *et al.*, 2014; Walach, 2015) and may therefore not necessarily yield a Roma person the freedom and ability to pass undetected as a Roma, as is presumed (Grill, 2012). Historical evidence indicates the selective nature of migration: whether medieval urbanization or European emigration to America in the nineteenth century, it tends to be 'the wealthiest and the most active who emigrated, not those who were the poorest and without resources' (Geremek, 1994: 61). Likewise, it is wealthy Roma groups who are most mobile in terms of migration from Romania. For some respondents, however, emotional attachment to place and homeland precludes the option of international migration. Such families must develop alternative coping strategies against stigmatization.

–   Mutual avoidance

Recent research suggests that mutual avoidance behaviour is a daily characteristic of the social worlds of ghettoized Roma, while this process produces intense forms of stigma, constraint and segregation (Wacquant, 2004; 2010; Berescu, 2011; Wacquant, 2012; Powell, 2013; Vincze and Raț, 2013; Filčák and Steger, 2014; Clough Marinaro, 2015; Walach, 2015; Powell and Lever, 2017). For non-Roma the ghetto is a 'no-go area' that is to be avoided, while for Roma it can *potentially* serve as a buffer against the harassment and stigmatization experienced in public spaces (Wacquant 2004; 2008a; 2010; 2012; Powell, 2013; Powell and Lever, 2017). Our findings suggest that a strategy of avoidance is also evident in the responses of wealthy Roma families outwith the ghetto, some of whom reside in conventional housing in socially and ethnically mixed neighbourhoods. Analysis revealed strong avoidance behaviours on the part of Roma respondents, most often to avert confrontation with non-Roma and to prevent negative experiences of harassment and stigmatization. This extended to parenting practices, with some Roma instructing their children and grandchildren to steer clear of their non-Roma peers and, in some cases, withdrawing them from formal schooling:

> I told my children and grandchildren not to go out and play with Romanians, as they say that they smell, have lice, or speak too loudly. One boy of mine was considered a 'crow' by some of his schoolmates, and I preferred him not to

> continue school. We teach them practical things at home; why should he come home and tell me he has been beaten by Romanian colleagues because he is considered a crow. Or why should I hear that my kids do not wash, when they are clean and wear clean clothes each day. So it is better to teach our children at home in the Roma traditions (68-year old female respondent, Reșița).

This interviewee cites fears and experiences of bullying and physical abuse, both at school and in the informal spaces of the neighbourhood. Thus stigmatization across generations is the key process that informs avoidance behaviour. The respondent's reference to her boy being labelled a 'crow' (*cioroi*) is significant: it relates to the Romanian saying 'to walk around with the painted crow'—meaning to trick and lie— and denotes a common derogatory term used widely by non-Roma when referring to Roma. Evidently, the stigmatizing behaviours of non-Roma are exhibited across age groups, which would suggest a deeply ingrained, historical sentiment towards Roma as an inferior group that is instilled from a very early age (Lucassen *et al*., 1998; Powell and Lever, 2017).

Besides the strategy of home-schooling, another strategy is to completely avoid engaging with non-Roma at all and to refrain from responding to insults and inferior treatment within public spaces. As a 55-year-old wealthy Roma man from Timișoara reflected:

> I cannot say that I am afraid of Romanians saying bad things about rich Roma. Usually, they blame all Roma categories, but indeed lately we, the rich, are at risk. What do I do to flee those non-Roma offences? I prefer to go away from those people. Once I was drinking a coffee at the airport and I heard a Romanian saying to her husband: 'be careful of your pocket, some Gypsies are at the table behind you'. Then I moved to another table in order not to argue with her (55-year-old wealthy male respondent, Timișoara).

Here the participant, while not 'afraid' of hearing negative comments about rich Roma, nevertheless preferred not to challenge such discriminatory views, which tentatively points towards the internalization of stigma as something to be dealt with *within* the individual. Importantly, the respondent also noted that in recent times wealthy Roma, in particular, had become targets ('we, the rich, are at risk') of such stigmatizing behaviours (see Ruegg, 2013), which is linked with the notion of an increasingly populist rhetoric within Romania in which disidentifications from Roma are mobilized for political ends (de Swaan, 1997; Sigona, 2003; Powell, 2008; Powell and Lever, 2017).

Despite local neighbourhood relations and those in other public spaces often being characterized by hostility and provocation, the wealthy Roma in our sample invariably opted for a non-confrontational approach, avoiding contact with non-Roma. Unlike the inhabitants of the ethnically homogeneous ghetto, however, avoiding interaction with non-Roma for those in ethnically mixed neighbourhoods is more problematic. This situation was said to be further accentuated in the context of wealthy Roma owing to their, albeit occasional, visibility within the city and the fact that their economic position (read through symbolic markers of wealth and status) is deemed to be at odds with dominant expectations and images of marginalization and poverty. It therefore represents a challenge to the cognitive positioning of Roma as socially inferior within the minds of non-Roma. This then gives rise to unfounded fantasy-laden images and narratives about Roma that are intensified and heightened in respect of wealthy Roma.

This is supported by our analysis of local media coverage. For instance, for the five-year period from 2012 to 2016, 53 articles relating to wealthy Roma were identified

in the three newspapers. The frequency of articles involving some form of stigmatization of wealthy Roma is around ten per year in *Adevarul* (the national newspaper) and two per year for each of the regional publications. Most articles (75%) appeared from 2013 to 2015, which coincides with the emergence of the New Right as a political party in Romania. Analysis reveals that representations of wealthy Roma are invariably negative and draw upon a range of common stereotypes, such as criminality, violence and begging. However, the most frequent media stories related to more recent tropes levelled solely at more affluent Roma: the large and 'ugly' mansions of wealthy Roma (22 articles); associations with the 'Gypsy Mafia' (12 articles); far-right rallies against wealthy Roma as important 'public actions' (10 articles); and criticisms of 'luxury' and 'ugly' ceremonies for weddings and funerals (10 articles). The response below from a 32-year-old Roma man from Bocșa captures some of these tropes:

> I know many non-Roma avoid us on the street because they say we are thieves. But we try to avoid them too. I go to my relatives downtown, or to other Roma and non-Roma friends and we help each other, play cards, have a chat. It's better also not to be seen sitting on my porch/balcony. It's not good to be seen on the streets because people are envious that we are rich and then tell us that we are thieves. There are thieves from different ethnic groups but the Romanians see only us (32-year-old male respondent, Bocșa).

This respondent is acutely aware that avoidance behaviour is mutual. Furthermore, he acknowledges that wealthy Roma have to suffer from the additional negative bias of the majority population, attributing it to a sense of jealousy regarding their relative affluence. These attitudes consistently find expression in the notion that Roma wealth has been secured through illegitimate means, thereby undermining the work ethic of many of the economically successful Roma families we interviewed. The extract above also reveals another strategy that Roma people employ to avoid stigmatizing encounters: attempting to be socially invisible by avoiding being seen in public at all. This perspective was echoed by a local-authority stakeholder we interviewed as part of our research:

> The wealthy Roma in our town are almost invisible in the public space. Most of the time they are in Germany; few stay at home. The men are bringing in money and invest it in assets: houses, cars (60-year-old local-authority stakeholder, Bocșa).

Therefore, the stigmatizing weaponry of non-Roma draws on age-old stereotypes and discourses that conflate *all* Roma with crime, incivility, laziness, welfare dependency and promiscuity. Like the story of the mythical Gypsy who steals babies, these discourses are often 'worldwide narratives' with a life of their own (Hancock, 1997). Such longstanding tropes and misrepresentations are drawn upon to discredit and dishonour Roma who have managed to achieve relative economic security. The wealthy Roma we spoke to are very much aware of the negative sentiments towards them, which shape their behaviour and prompt them to avoid specific public places where they may be more susceptible to hostile encounters with non-Roma. Although they are not confined to the ghetto, wealthy Roma are indirectly excluded from some public spaces. This extends to local neighbourhood spaces, leisure spaces and the institutionalized space of the school.

–   The retreat into the family sphere
        The retreat of Roma from public space and their avoidance of interaction with non-Roma is closely related to the third discernible strategy in response to stigma: the

retreat into the private sphere of the family. Wacquant points to this as one of the key characteristics of the ghetto, but it is also apparent for wealthy Roma families residing in relatively expensive housing within mixed areas. The extract below typifies the retreat of wealthy Roma into the family sphere and their apathetic response in respect of this retreat:

> I am not against anyone who says bad things about us, the rich … What I can say is I prefer not to respond to them, but to take care of my children. Family is everything to me … I think people who blame us are paid by extremists abroad—I heard this. And they target us because we don't respond to them and we don't have a street protest reaction (44-year old female respondent, Timișoara).

Some elderly interviewees contrasted their recent experiences and encounters with 'extremists' with their more favourable positioning in the past:

> Under communism nobody dared to blame us. We were rich then too. But the law was respected; everybody had a place to work and they didn't have time to swear at us. When extremists call me a thief or consider my children part of prostitution networks, we have to not respond to them and stay inside our house (59-year old male respondent, Deta).

This man compares the Roma's situation in the communist era with that in the current era, in which anti-Roma views seem to be expressed more openly and freely (see Crețan and Turnock, 2008; Chelcea and Druta, 2016). Roma were 'respected', protected by law, and economically included (Guy, 2003) under the communist regime, as ethnic differences were downplayed and class took centre stage. However, protection from the state is less apparent today: the apathetic response of the Romanian authorities mirrors that of the wealthy Roma community. The role of the state is crucial here: the knowledge that the state apparatus reflects and reproduces the stereotypes and stigma found in the wider population, and indeed mobilizes disidentifications from Roma for political ends (more frequently and more overtly in recent years), reinforces the power imbalance between Roma and non-Roma, thereby deepening the sense of inferiority of the stigmatized (Elias and Scotson, 1994). The inaction of the state in responding to the extremism directed at Roma people can also serve to legitimate such political views, while attempts to respond at the EU level can produce unintended consequences in the shape of 'backdoor nationalism' and the re-emergence of 'old nationalist ambitions' (Fox and Vermeersch, 2010). This chimes, to some extent, with Abram de Swaan's recent work on the compartmentalization of society: 'a separation of the [dominant group] from the target group in every sense and at every level' (de Swaan, 2015: 118–19). Although de Swaan's work on compartmentalization and genocide is far removed from the current Romanian context, his thesis on the increasing separation of groups complements our understanding of the situation of the Roma communities within post-communist nations. With regard to the conflict that raged during the breakup of the former Yugoslavia he notes:

> The dissolution of Tito's Yugoslavia led to a 'recompartmentalization': a renewed division along ethnic lines, an increasing spatial and social separation, increasing mutual disidentification, a decline of interaction among groups, and the gradual dissolution of mixed friendships, even marriage … Once the dialectics of identifications and disidentifications is in full play, fantasies mutually exacerbate one another' (de Swaan, 2015: 189).

To a lesser degree we can observe similar trends and experiences for Roma within post-socialist Romania: there is a re-emergence of hostile attitudes that were kept behind

the scenes of social life during communism, when class politics replaced ethnic politics (*ibid*.). In recent years, however, divisive ethnic politics have gained new momentum across CEE nations (Fox and Vermeersch, 2010).

In contrast to the apparent 'avoidance consensus' among older Roma respondents, a younger generation of wealthy Roma are more vehemently expressing their discontent with the recent rise in populist anti-Roma sentiment and far-right extremist views. Younger respondents spoke of their frustration at the relative apathy with which many Roma responded to derogatory labels, harassment and vilification:

> I think Roma must be more united. Indeed, we keep together in our family, but we are not united with other Roma. We don't help our poor Roma brothers enough. But if we would not be so selfish, we could be a strong voice against extremists. Most of their blaming on us is not real. How can they say we are beggars? There are indeed beggars among Romani but I saw [non-Roma] Romanians and Albanians begging abroad, too. And not all Roma beg—it is a shame in my family to beg (24-year-old male respondent, Reșița).

While this younger respondent recognizes and values the strong family orientation of the Roma community broadly, unlike the older generation he also bemoans the lack of internal cohesion and solidarity among wealthy Roma ('we are not united with other Roma'). Indeed, younger interviewees were more animated in expressing their anger at the negative behavioural characteristics being imposed on Roma and felt a strong sense of injustice. This manifested itself in a desire to counter extremists by transcending the family focus of their Roma elders and uniting against the negative voices of the majority population. The lack of interaction with other Roma on the part of some wealthy Roma households was a key distinction in comparison to scholarly accounts of Roma who are ghettoized, or confined and segregated within marginal locations (Wacquant, 2012; Powell, 2013; Clough Marinaro, 2015; Powell and Lever, 2017). As a non-Roma stakeholder noted:

> The wealthy Roma are usually separated from other Roma and other ethnic groups too. They feel a kind of protection by avoiding getting in touch with other ethnic families. Only relatives are important to them (55-year-old non-Roma stakeholder, Reșița).

Despite emergent intergenerational differences in terms of attitudes towards resistance and the struggle for recognition, almost all our respondents agreed that Roma within south-western Romania largely remain silent in the face of prejudice—resulting from a concern over the welfare of the family and a fear of reprisal. Wealthy Roma prefer to retreat into their family spheres, upholding the power imbalance between Roma and non-Roma despite their economic capital and upward social mobility. This results in their extirpation from public spaces: they are driven away by hostility and stigmatization, which, in turn, ensures their separation and exclusion from public life.

The stigmatization of wealthy Roma manifests itself in public and neighbourhood spaces across all age groups in experiences of being labelled negatively—as 'dirty', 'thieves', 'beggars', 'prostitutes', 'uncivilized'—and based on assumptions of involvement in unlawful activities, or associations with the 'Gypsy Mafia'. What underlies these labels is the trivialization of the life struggles of wealthy Roma to achieve affluence, and the attribution of their success to criminality, or less dignified ways of achieving wealth. The predominant response to this stigma is that of avoidance. This manifests in the desire to flee to other countries (temporarily or permanently) in search of respect, home-schooling children, being socially (publicly) invisible, and restricting social encounters to the extended family. There was also general consensus about apathy or inaction on

the part of local and state authorities to combat extremism or address misperceptions held by much of the non-Roma population. Evidently, their relative affluence did not empower the wealthy Roma or afford them any degree of protection against stigmatization. In spite of their upward social mobility and economic security their categorization as Roma remained the overriding aspect informing disidentifications, their relative and visible wealth, in particular, making them a target for stigmatization (Ruegg, 2013). Thus, their ethnic group identity and their stigmatized outsider status always trumped their relative class position.

Conclusions

This article presents a unique empirical contribution to understanding the group stigmatization of Roma within Europe. We focus on the neglected spaces of wealthy Roma in Romania to capture the under-researched diversity of Roma experiences and challenge their representation as a homogeneous mass of impoverished, marginalized people residing in degraded environments. Thereby we support recent ethnographic research, which has sought to challenge the essentialization of Roma (Maestri, 2016; Lancione, 2017). Yet, despite their economic success, wealthy Roma are stigmatized as vehemently as their more deprived Roma counterparts who remain confined to marginal locations. This suggests the need for a renewed focus on group stigmatization for understanding the persistence of anti-Roma sentiment within Romania and, more broadly, in Europe.

The positive sense of self that upwardly mobile Romanian Roma might reasonably be expected to experience, in light of the economic and emotional rewards for their hard work (for example, a secure home and family life), is punctured by their continued experiences of hostility within public spaces. In response, wealthy Romanian Roma exhibit three interrelated key strategies of defence against stigma: migration; avoidance of interaction with non-Roma; and retreat into the family sphere. As such, group stigmatization serves to extirpate upwardly mobile Roma households from public spaces; spaces within which meaningful interaction could be forthcoming (Bannister and Flint, 2017) and through which identifications, rather than disidentifications, have the potential to flourish (de Swaan, 1995). Group stigmatization therefore emerges as a powerful force that perpetuates the separation of Roma and non-Roma, instilling apathetic responses (Elias, 1994) that need to be located within the long history of the persecution of the Roma people within Europe. We argue that a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary Roma marginalization and stigmatization can be achieved through research that incorporates the experiences of both poor *and* wealthy households (and those in the middle) over time, as well as non-Roma sentiments towards them.

Further to our empirical contribution, our analysis also questions the salience of territorial stigmatization as a theoretical tool for understanding Roma stigmatization. Accounts by wealthy Roma suggest that spatial marginality is but one reinforcing aspect of stigma and that the process of group stigmatization manifests itself in spaces across the urban realm, as relative Roma wealth and mobility challenges the assumed social superiority of non-Roma. In this regard, an over-emphasis on territorial stigmatization may block the path to a historically informed approach that can account for the long-term positioning of the Roma people as a collectively inferior group, and the reluctance of European states to provide for their welfare. We suggest that a synthesis of the approaches of Elias and Wacquant can overcome this weakness: Elias's framework focuses on the centrality of long-term power relations and group dynamics across time and space, while Wacquant's relational, analytical concept of the ghetto can help us understand the contemporary responses of Roma communities to stigmatization, whether ghettoized or not. Such a synthesis can provide a dynamic framework of group relations (with power at its centre) that may be applied across a range of spatial

scales, from the neighbourhood through to the European level, while also capturing the subtle political shifts and reworkings that serve to maintain stigmatization, inform perceptions of inferiority and mobilize disidentifications—regardless of economic position or relative wealth. In our methodological approach we focused on wealthy Roma in south-western Romania, but the theoretical synthesis we applied might usefully be extended and refined to be applied to other national contexts, or across Europe, and to other stigmatized outsider groups.

Finally, our findings call into question current approaches towards Roma integration, which emphasize the need for desegregation and formal participation in the labour market as routes to 'empowerment' and economic inclusion. The experiences of wealthy Roma in south-western Romania suggest that even when Roma adhere to this discourse, their material and housing circumstances are insufficient to counter the powerful process of group stigmatization and the related imposition of an inferior social status. This points towards the need to foster more meaningful and reciprocal interactions between Roma and non-Roma. Both the current and historical context in Romania and CEE more broadly suggest this would be a hugely challenging and long-term endeavour, given the current widespread and deep-rooted anti-Roma sentiment. Yet, until the widely held perception of Roma inferiority (backed and maintained by power inferiority) is properly acknowledged and better understood, policies designed to promote Roma 'integration' are likely to meet with only limited success.

Remus Crețan, Department of Geography, West University of Timișoara, Vasile Parvan no 4, 300223 Timișoara, Romania, remus.cretan@e-uvt.ro

Ryan Powell, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TN, UK, r.s.powell@sheffield.ac.uk

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