The schooling
of Roma children
in Belgium

The parents' voice

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B | King Baudouin
Foundation

Working together for a better society

COLOFON

FOREWORD

Roma children… If ever there was a complex issue, conducive to controversy and prejudice, it is this. The cliché of parents exploiting their children by forcing them to beg dominates our perceptions. Yet beyond the stereotypes, poignant images and news items, lies a hard reality: in Belgium today, the situation of Roma children requires a response and, precisely because of controversies, demands an answer from society, notably regarding support for the children's schooling.

Faithful to its mission and commitment to greater social justice, the King Baudouin Foundation wanted to make a contribution to this issue. Faithful also to its methods, it chose a different and innovative approach that complemented those adopted by other actors.

The project is innovative even insofar as how it was generated: it came about after the Foundation had been alerted by worrying reports, notably those gathered by its Listening Network. Social workers, researchers, resource persons and of course the Roma themselves subsequently sustained our disquiet.

The approach is different because of the Foundation's wish to select a theme, an angle of attack (the difficult relationship between recent Roma immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe and school) and the chosen methodology (approaching the Roma parents themselves).

No, the report you are about to read is not the nth piece of general research devoted to the issue of the Roma. No, the research commissioned by the King Baudouin Foundation does not approach the world of Roma children under the angle of begging. And no, the Foundation does not have the ambition of resolving their overall situation. We do not have the resources for this… Were those working in the sector hoping for operational support? It is not, this time, the approach we decided to take.

Given the angle assumed, this study is characterized by a somewhat original bias: the desire to hear the Roma's own voice, to get Roma parents to express their own point of view concerning their children's and their own schooling, the difficulties they face in life and their vision of the world. This may seem rather obvious, but this is not what happens in reality: the Roma's own voice is all too rarely heard. Not only regarding this subject, but on other issues too.

The very essence of this project is thus in the methodology adopted: a study conducted among Roma mothers, and later Roma fathers, in order to better understand the Roma's relationship with schooling, so that the findings could be based on their perceptions and experience.

Furthermore, in order to get as close as possible to the parents' points of view, we opted to conduct the interviews through cultural intermediaries, Roma women, whom we later refer to as "interviewers", who are making an effort to play a role in the public sphere, highly motivated to progress in society, and who enabled us to meet Roma families in an environment of confidence and obtain high quality information. Killing two birds with one stone, we could say that, whilst ensuring precious relevance of the interviews, the involvement of these young Roma women also enabled their standing to be enhanced, provided support for their efforts to encourage behavioural development in their community and even played a role in developing our own views of the Roma.

Despite all of this, as we had expected, the approach was not without its difficulties: identifying Roma women in various towns across the country, getting into contact with them, gaining their confidence, encouraging them to talk… So many steps and obstacles, which required time, learning and considerable human and professional investment.

Until September 2007, this study was in the hands of Ann Clé, a cultural sociologist who, as a researcher at the KUB, had already done a research on begging in Brussels. Iulia Hasdeu then took over and completed the project and it is she who has been responsible for writing this research summary. Doctor in Anthropology from the University of Geneva, researcher at the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve and of Romanian decent, she was able to contribute her own real-life experience for the benefit of the research. Iulia Hasdeu's analysis reflects her involvement and her empathy for the ordeals experienced by generation after generation of Roma. In doing this research, she offers us a mirror. She leads us to consider our refusal, to date, to dialogue with this "Other" that are the Roma and she encourages us to question our thought processes. It is in this confrontation that the originality of the research can be found.

Beyond this, the research that she completed is firmly attached to the perspectives of social and cultural anthropology. This report set itself several objectives: to provide more information, without the ambition of its being exhaustive, on the diversity and complexity of Roma groups; to offer an interpretation of the findings from the Belgian fieldwork; to point out the complexity of the lives of the Roma in general; and in particular to describe their attitudes regarding schooling.

Last, and not least, the report has enabled the Foundation to draw up recommendations, under the supervision of an Advisory Committee. These can be encapsulated in just a few cogent sentences:
- all actions relating to the schooling of Roma children must be accompanied by recognition of citizenship and by the cultural specificity of the Roma being taken into account within the more general framework of policies aimed at reducing inequality of opportunity;
- beyond any potential financial support, such actions must be undertaken within the framework of ties and rapprochement;
- these could come about through the creation of support centres, the development of personal and affective ties with the educational institution, through mediation, through fathers' involvement;
- they must be accompanied by an adult education and training project.

The Foundation's warm thanks must be expressed within the same logic as the methodology outlined above. We address our grateful thanks to all of the Roma who participated in the project, to the project intermediaries and supporters of the project who, in the sector active in the field, were willing to share with us their experience and contacts. We should particularly like to extend our thanks to Eva Bologhova,

The Foundation is very conscious of the fact that a report such as this will certainly stimulate debate, because its author has provided her own and deliberately engaged interpretation of the findings. Nevertheless, the findings of the research and the paths suggested constitute a considerable advance for an issue where, for far too long, the search for solutions has always come up against the weight of history, fatalism, impatience and incommunicability.

Will there be Roma children on the path to school at the end of the dialogue? As of now, we know that it is realistic to dream of this.

King Baudouin Foundation
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CONTENTS

SUMMARY

This report covers a study commissioned for the King Baudouin Foundation in 2007. It examines the views of Roma parents, originating from Central and Eastern Europe, regarding the schooling of their children in Belgium.

The Foundation decided to launch the research following disquieting reports it had received from its Listening Network regarding the problematic situation of Roma children. To approach this issue, the Foundation chose an original approach, complementary to methods used by other actors but which asked the Roma themselves to give their views about their children's and their own schooling, the difficulties they face in life and their vision of the world. Interviews were therefore conducted with forty-five Roma, of various nationalities and representing almost all of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, with the help of several Roma cultural mediators, all of the interlocutors making a significant contribution throughout the research.

In a deliberately engaged approach to the issue, the author of the report advocates better knowledge and comprehension of the Roma's cultural patterns and, highlights the question of Roma children's schooling seen through the Roma's own explanations.

The issue of education appears to be perceived differently by the Roma and non-Roma. It is, however, precisely through recognition of this difference, in terms both of experience and vision, that the integration and schooling of the Roma can be envisaged *with* them and not merely *for* them. The Roma see their children's schooling above all as the possibility for a better status that in turn leads to a better standard of living and a regular income. Having been extremely marginalized in the societies from which they have originated, the parents have mostly had negative experiences of school (segregation, stigmatization and violence) and express the wish, which might seem paradoxical, that their own children be treated with affection and enjoy greater attention from the teachers. Furthermore, as Roma cultural identity assigns greater importance to marriage than studies from the point of view of Roma social capital, Roma morality and co-education at school are frequently seen as incompatible. Finally, migration itself (often involving a journey across several countries) does not facilitate educational integration. The accounts given by the Roma parents, whilst illustrating their willingness to send their children to school, showed that, given the differing socio-cultural foundations, it is hardly possible for them to transform their children's schooling into a strategy for social success.

The report recommendations emphasise everything that could favour school attendance of the Roma's children. As well recognizing Roma citizenship, taking account of their cultural specificity and possible financial support, an atmosphere of rapprochement and a spirit of confidence are essential when implementing any initiatives. Mediation, the creation of support centres, and adult education and training are further areas that could facilitate greater Roma presence at school.

The King Baudouin Foundation sincerely hopes that the information and recommendations contained in this report can, through schooling, contribute to better integration of Roma children and their parents into Belgian society.

« Today, more or less as always, we do not want to see the Gypsies. We do not want to see them destitute, begging in front of the Duomo of Milan or in the Arcades of the Rue de Rivoli in Paris. Nor do we wish to see them prosperous, millionaires in Mercedes, riding along the suburban streets of those same cities. By shamelessly juxtaposing the extremes that we apply to ourselves in order to separate, Gypsies appear to blatantly assume the traits and values of our civilization. Could it not, therefore, be the open display of our own truth that their presence renders intolerable?" (Williams, 1993: 8)

INTRODUCTION

The last few years have witnessed increasing anxiety in Belgium regarding the Roma: what solution should be proposed for the problem of begging that is mostly practised by the Roma[1] of Central and Eastern Europe – and in particular those originating from Romania (Clé, 2006[2]); how can Roma children be integrated into the educational system? The search for answers to these questions has led certain welfare workers to examine the cultural patterns of the Roma (their values, the socialization of children) within the framework of social work (CPAS/OCMW) or research actions (CODE, 2004[3]; Foyer, 2004). The point of departure is the children's scholastic backwardness that has to be matched with appropriate means and strategies: regular absenteeism at primary school and prematurely dropping out of school at the start of secondary school. According to the documents consulted, these appear to be situations that are characteristic of the Roma population in general[4].

If we consider the situation of the Roma in their country of origin, existing data show that throughout the CCEE[5], Roma children are practically inexistent in nursery education, the percentages of Roma registered at the beginning and end of primary school are lower than for non-Roma children, whilst the percentage falls again dramatically at secondary and higher educational levels[6].

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1   The appellative Rom means « man » (masculine) and is opposed to Gadjo, foreigner, a term to define the "Other", non-Rom. Similar binary categorizations exist in Spain (Gitano/Payo) and in Great Britain (Gypsy/Gorgio). Not all of those of Roma origin consider themselves to be Roma. Despite the fact that it is a semantic abuse, in this text we shall use "Roma" in general to designate the Roma/Gypsies coming from Central and Eastern Europe. "Rom" is a masculine noun. Romni (S.F.) means married woman. The masculine plural is Roma, the feminine plural is Romnia. We shall use Rom for the singular and Roma for the plural, as well as Roma for the adjective, and Romany for the language, in order to simplify reading and adapt these forms to English. Similarly, Gadjo (s.m.), Gadji (s.f.), Gadje (m.pl), Gadjia (f.pl). We shall use Gadjo for a singular noun and Gadje for all plural nouns and as adjective (grammatically incorrect).

2   The summary of this research can be consulted on line at http://www.kbs-frb.be/ uploadedFiles/KBS-FRB/Files/Verslag/La%20mendicité%20interrogée%20(résumé%20 de%20la%20recherche).doc

3   The research reports are on the CODE website www.lacode.be under Dossiers – Mineurs en situation de mendicité.

4   These aspects are mentioned in an internal report of the Liege CPAS (2006), in « Recherche-action de la CODE, in Foyer research (2004), in Bruggen (2006), in De-8 working documents (2004, Antwerp), VROEM (2007, Hasselt), in the text of RORA views (2005).

5   Countries of Central and Eastern Europe

6   A comparative table of countries can be found at: http://www.soros.org/initiatives/esp/ articles_publications/publications/monitoring_20061218/table_20061218.pdf

Nevertheless, to understand the difference that characterises the Roma in their relations with the *Gadge* society (here, Belgian society) and more particularly with the educational system, it is insufficient simply to list what we consider as social handicaps, notably incomplete or no schooling. We must consider not only who and/or what are the Roma like, but also and above all ask the question about the nature of this relationship (notably power relationships, their representations, the mechanisms of legitimacy etc.) that link all of the actors involved in the Roma's schooling: school in the country of origin (as well as other state institutions); school in Belgium (as well as other Belgian institutions); social professionals and the Roma themselves (pupils and parents). The research-action led by Sarah Carpentier and Frédérique Van Houke (CODE, 2004) sets out an exhaustive list of institutional actors and responsibilities regarding the Roma's integration into Belgian society.

Our research focuses on the parents as actors. Our objective is not to make an appraisal of the schooling of Roma children in Belgium, nor to make an evaluation of public policy in this area. Research already undertaken (CODE, 2004; Roma, 2004) enabled an inventory of the current situation, recommendations and a list of good practises to be drawn up. We stress that our purpose is not to repeat the research conducted in earlier studies, but rather to consider the theme of "educating Roma children" based on the experience and accounts given by Roma parents, which should then bring something new to our discussions about the Roma's presence in Belgium. In other words, we hope to set out in the following pages some elements that will lead to a better understanding of the Roma as people, men and women, and especially as parents, without recommending immediate solutions for their integration, since that would go beyond the mandate we have been given. We shall, nevertheless, provide some thoughts on the functioning of policies relating to minorities and on the institutional actors in charge of the schooling of Roma children in Belgium. We shall provide some illustrations of the complexity of this issue through interesting cases and we shall set out recommendations. Finally, we should like to point out that this report has been written from the point of view of an anthropologist, whose work is to provide a portrait of the humanity of the interlocutors by observing them from close up, by getting on well with them without idealising them, and by casting a critical eye over their relationships, institutions and the social structures within which they are the actors.

The research of Carpentier and Van Houcke (2004) highlighted the misunderstandings in communication between schools (head teachers and teachers) and the parents of Roma children. These misunderstandings are more than just linguistic: they express fractures regarding the recognition and the legitimacy of the Roma as subjects. We ask the question as to whether these misunderstandings (between the Roma and the Gadje) are perceived as such by the Roma themselves. Is there resistance, a conscious and strategic opposition designed to preserve the Roma's identity? Do the Roma perceive any voluntary hostility or discrimination on the part of the Gadje regarding educational integration?

Basing ourselves on the experience acquired in Romania within the framework of a study on, and with, the Roma in a number of villages[7], we believe that the Roma-Gadje relationship is characterized by misunderstandings and ambiguities as well as by a conscious effort by both sides to differentiate themselves one from the other. We have also taken into consideration the close collaboration and complicity that exist in this relationship. According to Maurits Eycken (2006) who conducted some fieldwork among

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7   *The author of this report conducted ethnographic fieldwork between 2001 and 2006 in three villages inhabited by Kaldarari Roma (cauldron and bucket artisans) in the suburbs of the Romanian capital, Bucharest.*

the Vlach Roma[8] of Central Europe (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania), there exists a certain "symbiosis" between the two worlds of the Roma and the Gadje: in order to exist, the Roma need the Gadje and vice versa. Alaina Lemon (2000) shows that, according to her, in Russia, despite a whole series of efforts on the part of the Gadje to separate the "real" Gipsies from the "ordinary" Gypsies, and on the part of the Roma to differentiate themselves from the Gadje (whom they label as fools, for example), they share a common memory and lifestyles influenced by the communist regime. That is to say that there are as many similarities as differences between the Roma and the Gadje and that it is worth considering them simultaneously.

Beyond present experience, one sees that the history of the Roma is marked by serious attacks on their human dignity. These took the form of slavery (from the 14th to 19th centuries in Walachia and Moldavia), forced assimilation as part of the minorities policies of the Austrian Empress Maria-Theresa of Hapsburg (1740-1780) and Joseph II (1780-1790) in Central Europe, the racialization of Gypsies in Western Europe in the 1930s, ending with partial extermination or deportation during World War II. In the light of this history, which the Roma elites are today trying to have recognized[9], we consider that exclusion is incorporated into a collective Roma subconscious that unites the Roma (and/or Gypsy) peoples and this despite their innumerable differences in terms of language, religion, jobs and lifestyles. This relationship of exclusion is at work in the lack of trust and the distance that the Roma feel towards the Gadje. On the other hand, for the Gadje, it is the marginalisation of the Roma that is the rule. From the 19th century onwards this rule was expressed in the form of an emerging Gypsy "problem". More specifically, in the countries of Central Europe, it was with the classification and challenges of homogenization of the judicial system and the police state that the situation of peoples of Roma origin was to deteriorate considerably.

In short, we observe on the one hand the need for each other, their coexistence and co-development, and on the other hand the intrinsic fractures in the relationship of force exerted by the Gadje. Such tension existing across all the relationships between Roma and Gadje, it also turns up in the question of schooling, for which we shall examine specific cases. Moreover, it is this self same tension that makes any research among the Roma conducted by Gadje difficult and this was therefore an important point in considering the choice of methodology, as well as the manner in which we conceived and conducted the research in the field and the analyses that followed.

The respondents in this research defined themselves as Roma, they all spoke Romany, came from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CCEE), where they had lived about half of their lives, and had been in Belgium for at least one year. What we consider as the "Roma community" is in fact a multitude of networks and memberships, within which individuals often do not know (and do not wish to know) one another. As already indicated, our research places the accent on the potential benefits of a social justice that seems to be improving. Our objective is to let Roma women and men speak for themselves about their children's education, by trying to understand their representations and their expectations regarding the schooling offered in Belgium and how they express these. Whilst recognising the utopian aspect of absolute empathy, as well as the impossibility of *"putting ourselves in the Other's shoes"*, as one of our

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8   Vlach is an appellation that designates the dialect with many Romanian words. Vlach comes from Walachia, a Romanian-speaking province where the Roma were slaves until the 19th century. After the abolition of slavery, they emigrated across Europe and even to the USA, Canada and Australia. There are other dialects in Europe which, according to the same principle, give their names to respective groups of Roma: Polska Roma, Russka Roma, etc.

9   In 1971, 8 April was designated International Day of the Roma People by the International Roma Union.

respondents requested (M, 25, Romania), with this research we shall, nevertheless, try to describe the Roma's world, and in particular the question of their children's schooling, from the Roma's point of view. This has a double impact: on the one hand in terms of access to awareness of one or more of the Roma's visions, and on the other hand in terms of action – the fieldwork constitutes a way of involving the Roma in the discussions, a way for them to recognize the importance of *their* point of view, which will thus be more visible.

In order to do this, we have thus deliberately favoured what the women had to say, based on the supposition that it is they who are more involved in the education of their children. If improved schooling is foreseeable for Roma children, it is perhaps their mothers who will be the main agents of change in this area as well as the most concerned as responsible adults[10]. The research was therefore initiated as a survey among Roma mothers. However, as we shall see, we had to nuance our approach and we decided to include the views of some men. Nevertheless, we retained as our objective, the search for vectors that could contribute to the empowerment of Roma women. The choice of male and female respondents, as well as the use of semi-structured interview guides to conduct the interviews, will be described in the second chapter.

By interviewing the mothers and fathers of Roma children, our study hoped to uncover the interpretation that adult immigrant Roma in Belgium attribute to schooling, to social success, the respective roles of men and women in the education of their children and their recognition. As mentioned above, one cannot understand issues of education without situating them within the subjective experience of the individual and the group. The study thus also covers questions relating to the status of the Roma in Belgium, their revenues, their family values and gender relationships, the daily organization of their lives and religion.

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10   *As in our own society, the Roma women are responsible for the education and care of children, which raises questions about inequality in work and responsibilities within the structural relationships of gender.*

1. BACKGROUND AND SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1.1 The names, number and languages of the Roma

It is not surprising that every study about the Roma stresses the difficulty of defining this people. The name "Rom" means "man" in the Romany language and it is an ethnonym of self-identification for certain groups among the Gypsies. The terms "Gypsy", "Ziggeuner", "Tzigane", and Csigany" attributed by others have often acquired an extremely pejorative meaning[11] across the centuries. It is for this reason that the Roma's political organizations recommend the use of the ethnonym for self-identification (written *Rrom*), although this in no way guarantees the avoidance of prejudice or stereotypes.

Not all of the groups designated from outside as "Gypsies" consider themselves to be Roma: in fact the *Sinti, Manouches, Jenisch* and *Kalé* of Western Europe use these very ethnonyms in order to distinguish themselves from the Roma, who are considered as having arrived after the collapse of the communist regimes in the CCEE. Even in the East, certain Gypsy groups do not call themselves Roma, such as the case of the Balkan Albanian-speaking *Ashkali* (or *kastali* – 'of wood', meaning non-Romany[12] speakers), or the Romanian-speaking *Boyash* (*Rudar*) of Hungary, Romania and Croatia. "Gypsies" is thus more of a generic label for poor and marginal travellers or itinerants, specifically forged in a state apparatus of selection and repression, which amalgamated peoples of Roma origin and other peoples considered as deviants. Whatever the case, it would seem that reducing these groups to a single label of Gypsies or *Roma and Roma-like*, or "people without a compact territory" (Courtiade, 2003) comes from a logic that is above all political and whose stakes are henceforth European. According to historians and linguists, these peoples came to Europe from North-East India and Persia as of the 4th to 5th centuries AD.

Conventionally, this period is called the first wave of Gypsy migration; a second wave followed the abolition of Gypsy slavery in Walachia and Moldavia at the end of the 19th century, whilst a third (Reyniers, 1993) began after the Second World War and intensified after the fall of the communist regimes in the CCEE.

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11 However, « Gitane » for example is considerably less pejorative within a French context than "Tzigane" in the East-European context.

12 The confusion between the Ashkali and the Roma causes a problem for the latter, in Kosovo for example where the Roma mostly opted for loyalty towards the central Serbian government.

Insofar as the generic term "Roma" is concerned, its use is somewhat controversial. What is more, there is, paradoxically, a sort of semantic and historical complicity between the ethnonyms "Gypsy" and "Roma", due to the fact that the two terms refer to a population considered to be marginal. The Roma, whilst not accepting the name "Gypsies" given by the Gadje, know that this name refers to them: the category name of an individual or a group reflects the historical experience of interacting with other groups and the political manipulations for which they have been used. The Roma often use "Gypsy" as a translation of "Roma" in the Gadje language. Thus, when speaking about themselves to the Gadje, they almost always speak of "Gypsies". Obviously this does not mean that they accept the pejorative connotations attached to the name, but these differentiated uses – "Roma" among themselves and "Gypsies with others – seem to be part of a tacit convention for communicating as well as the discursive construction of a symbolic frontier that is always reiterated between the Roma and Gadje.

There are differences between the Roma groups in Europe in terms of occupation, assimilation in the surrounding society and the languages spoken etc. According to linguists, the *Romany* language (which has a Sanskrit nucleus with traces of Greek, Turkish, Slav, Romanian etc.) brings together some sixty dialects, divided into five sub-groups. The most widely spread dialect is *Vlax*, which has sub-dialects such as *Kalderash, Lovari* and *Machavo*. As highly mobile former artisans and traders, occupying rich economic niches, the Roma had their place in European societies up until modernity[13]. Their situation declined significantly with massive industrialization and the modern policies of assimilation (Eycken, 2006; Williams, 1992). However, these aspects vary considerably according to whether one goes from East to West, or one compares the countries previously under the Ottoman influence and those under Germanic influence. As a general rule, one can say that the process of decline is still under way.

As far as the number of Roma is concerned, a question posed insistently and for reasons of control by the state (and more recently the EU) faced with a population over which it has no hold, it seems that there are currently some 8 to 12 million Roma living in Europe (of whom around 2 million are in Romania, about 800,000 in Bulgaria, 500,000 in Slovakia and 450,000 in Serbia)[14]. Changes in the global economy have greatly affected the activities on which the Roma communities rely for their survival: the production of household goods has been replaced by the recuperation of materials such as cardboard, glass and metals. At the same time, within these activities, the economies of institutionalised services marginalise the Roma more and more. Commercial policies adopted by the states contribute to their exclusion: the Roma are asked to have licences in order to recuperate paper, sell second hand clothes or sell products such as fruit and mushrooms picked in the woods. If, in the CCEE regions that were previously highly industrialised but now display high levels of unemployment, the whole population is poorer, the Roma are the poor among the poor. They are becoming sub-proletarian levels which have only very limited access to local resources that are already very limited. Whilst there exist among the Roma successful entrepreneurs, workers and teachers, most of them live below the poverty line (according to estimates of the UN-UNDP and the World

13   Modernity is a controversial notion. Here we are referring to the political modernity of the Enlightenment characterised by theories of the social contract. It inaugurated, among other things, ways of governing and a status of subject (citizenship) that were radically different from those of the Ancien Régime. They politically excluded from the city persons considered as inappropriate to the contract "by nature", including women and the poor for instance. The political exclusion of the Gypsies (Bohemians and Sarazins) follows this logic and because of their itinerant lifestyle, this was gradually accompanied by economic exclusion. This economic exclusion has been historically slower and less radical than their political exclusion.

14   These are not official figures (from census data) but estimates coming from research, NGOs and Romany organizations. International reports in fact are also based on this type of non-official estimation. For further information on the estimates of Roma by country, see the monitoring of Roma education at European level on: http://www.soros.org/initiatives/esp/articles_publications/publications/monitoring_20061218/monitoring_20061218.pdf

Bank) and they are victims of racist and xenophobic prejudice. According to numerous reports from scientists, journalists and the Roma, and according to regular opinion polls, the Roma experience particularly striking forms of racism. Most Gadje, whether educated or not, thus think that the Roma are dirty, primitive thieves, and such ideas appear to be obvious and rooted in reality (they rarely question the source of information for these ideas, assuming rather that it is the "nature" or "culture" of the Gypsies that is the cause). Moreover, the Gadje do not even appear to recognise the racist content of their ideas and usually refuse to discuss the question of racism coming from their own society[15]. What is more, according to such ideas, the Roma are discriminated against because of their lifestyle and so they are considered as being responsible for their own discrimination[16].

1.2. Origins

People often talk about the Indian origins of the Roma. Without in any way contesting this idea supported by the linguists, it nevertheless seems to us that the systematic reference to the Roma's Indian origins is a result of a prevailing argument. We, Gadje, are as much of Asian origin if we consider the waves of immigration of the Huns, Mongols and Slavs that mixed with the sedentary peoples during the first centuries AD, but these origins are not mentioned in accounts of current policies. The reference to the distant origins of the Roma, as a way of explaining certain aspects of their culture or their relationship with European societies, contributes to denying them any European territorial foothold and to them always being referred to as foreigners, from elsewhere and thus not in their proper place among us. This contributes to the racialisation of these people. One of our respondents spontaneously commented, in reference to this:

> "In Romania or here, it's the same thing – I'm a foreigner. Here (in Belgium) I am 'étranger' ('foreign' in French) and in Romania they call me a Gypsy who has come from India or I don't know where." (M, 28, Romania)[17]

When specifically asked about this, the Roma we interviewed said that they most often felt offended and stigmatized by being racially rejected:

> "I was told that we come from India, but I have seen Indians and they are all black, but look at me, I am as white as you!"[18]

It is not surprising that the question of origin was ridiculed by the Roma (with the exception of the Roma elite):

> "God gave mankind a cheese and told them to each choose a piece. They rushed to choose a territory and the Roma stayed and ate the cheese. That's why they don't have a homeland." (M, 45, Bulgaria)

Even if traces can be found in the Romany language, India is not present in the collective memory of the Roma. As for other instances of building an ethnic (or national) identity, reference to a common origin and

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15 In 2005 and 2006 Valeriu Nicolae of ERIO (the European Roma Information Centre) spoke in a number of virtual fora and newspapers, denouncing racism in football stadia (particularly in Romania). He explained that not only did the appropriate organizations take no measures against racism, they did not even acknowledge its existence.

16 We specifically noticed this in fieldwork conducted in Romania between 2001 and 2006. It is also the subject of an article by Petrovna, see http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=1218, as well as in the accounts of Maghyari-Vincze (2006) in his report on the exclusion of the Roma from Timisoara: http://www.euro.ubbcluj.ro/structura/pers/excl_romi.pdf

17 The interviews with the Roma themselves will be presented in Chapter 2; We have chosen extracts from these conversations just so as to illustrate the points we are making here about the Roma in general.

18 Conversation with S., a young Rom, whom we met by chance in a Brussels station. S's position reflects things often heard from the Roma in Romania.

other unifying elements (such as a founding and unifying myth) emanate from elites and are a recent intellectual construction. So, starting from the point of view of most western anthropologists who are specialists in Gypsy peoples, we consider the Indian origin as in no way an explanation of the Roma's cultural patterns or their negotiation of a position among the Gadje.

1.3. The Roma: identities, cultures and policies

We can see that the word "Roma" was forged in political and scientific vocabulary at the same time as the updating of the East-West divide, the opening of frontiers and the integration of most of the post-communist states into the European Union[19]. Since January 1st 2007, and the entry of Romania and Bulgaria into the EU, the Roma (and the associated aforementioned groups – 'Roma-like' and 'Roma-related groups') have become numerically the largest minority within the EU. The European institutions play an important role in the discursive creation of this category, as well as in imposing the henceforth officially used distinction at Europe level between Eastern Travellers and Eastern Roma: "*This separation is the precondition for portraying 'Eastern Roma' as obstacles to EU enlargement"* (Simhandl, 2006: 110).

There seems, nevertheless, to exist a divergence at the level of claims formulated by the Gypsy elite: in Western Europe, Travellers claim that citizenship depends on a different lifestyle (the caravan, whether mobile or not) and not according to ethnic belonging, whilst in Central and Eastern Europe, the *Roma* and *Sinti* elites aspire to a European transnational minority status and try to combat discrimination at national level.

At the same time, it was within the context of European enlargement that the political voice of the Eastern Roma was born after 1990. Numerous national NGOs appeared, as well as political parties that gained representation in national parliaments. At international level, organizations such as the European Forum of Roma and Sinte Organizations and the International Roma Union also have representatives to the European Parliament and the European Commission (there is, for instance, a permanent consultative group on Roma questions at the Commission). The United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), as well as the European Parliament have adopted numerous resolutions regarding the protection of minorities and even specific recommendations for the Roma. However, the question is what type of recognition do the Roma themselves aspire to and in what ways do they want to be recognized: as a nation without territory in diaspora, as a transnational minority, or as citizens of the country where they live or migrate to? The post-communist states have adopted anti-discrimination legislation and have special structures and finance (European and American)[20] in order to implement policies that favour the Roma. It is, however, also true that such policies have not achieved really concrete and convincing results regarding improving the living conditions of local Roma/Gypsy communities. This is a result of the large gap between the institutional reforms and social representations.

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19   Andrea Boscoboinik (2007) noted that in Bulgaria and Macedonia, no-one (except the Roma between themselves) used this appellation twenty years ago. This is also true for most of the CCEE.

20   Thus, the recent « Roma Decade 2005-2015 », a number of European programmes, which fixed objectives, priorities, indicators etc. (notably with regard to education, employment, health and housing), was addressed to the governments of the Eastern European countries of Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Serbia and Montenegro, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Macedonia. National appraisals after two years show innumerable legal and political barriers to the implementation of projects. A series of reports can be found at: http://www.romadecade.org/index.php?content=4&list=14

At the same time numerous Roma from the CCEE have seen themselves being assigned the name "Roma" (synonymous for them with "Gypsies") when they would rather be considered as nationals: *"Can you see what is written here Madame? ROMANIA! I am Romanian…Yes, I am Gypsy! That's the way it is…"* said S, a young Rom met by accident in a Brussels station, in reply to the question "Are you a Rom?"

This allows us to comment here that the question of national identification cropped up constantly in the accounts heard and in the justifications given to create groups and associations. A young Roma woman from Bulgaria doing an internship at the European Commission in Brussels said (in English): *"The Roma don't have to be separate from other national migrants."* It is true that Roma on the one hand and Romanian or Bulgarian on the other hand, are not mutually exclusive forms of identification, but we nevertheless understand that issue of national citizenship does not belong only to the Manouches and Roma of the West. This must also be understood by the Roma elites so that they can get closer to the people they represent.

Furthermore, we have noted that national origins play an important role in structuring migratory networks. The Roma of Romania in Brussels consider that they have nothing to do with the Roma from Kosovo or Macedonia. They believe that the 'Yugoslavs' are dishonest and that most of them are organized in Mafia-like gangs. For their part, the Bulgarian Roma, for example, see the Romanian Roma as lacking pride because they are beggars, and destitute because they are poor and backward. Moreover, within a supposed national community, the Roma of one village are seen by other Roma as ambitious and headstrong, others have the reputation of having backward-looking mentalities, whilst yet others are seen pejoratively as "cabbage growers" (farmers). 'Otherness' is created to serve a strategy of self-distinction: *"We are not that sort of Gypsy, we are different",* or *"Those are Gypsy-Gypsies, real ones"*. The fragmentation of the Romanian Pentecostal Roma of Brussels into three churches is proof of the issues of separation and distinctions that exist among the Roma themselves. When we introduced ourselves to the Kosovan Roma whom we met in Sint-Niklaas, as being familiar with the Roma cauldron makers in Romania, there was a respectful distance in their reaction *"But we are not all the same. We have seen Romanian Roma on the television and they are, how shall we say…very old-fashioned. We are not like that."* If one takes account of these limitations and plural categorizations, the syntagm "Roma people" reflects less of a sociological reality and more of a political issue.

When "Roma" is perceived as a stigma, there is a temptation to dissimulate its origin: *"I can honestly say that in order that I am not put in the position of having to justify my Roma origins, I prefer to tell people that I am Croatian or Bosnian or Yugoslav" (M, 24, Kosovo),* or quite simply for it to be forgotten in a mosaic of various ethnic groups: *"Here (in Belgium), I can move around freely and with dignity as a man, not like a Rom. I am not only a Rom."* (F, 45, Bulgaria). To be able to move around the street freely and more openly, that is a reason to leave home and defy the ethnic stigma: *"We are Roma but we are not people like everyone else. (And yet) in Serbia, at the doctor's, you stay outside"* (F, 41, Serbia). The diversity in appearance (clothes, skin colour etc.) compared with the uniformity the country of origin presents itself as a measure of liberty:

> *"In Bulgaria, it is not difficult to differentiate between a Rom and a Gadjo. In Belgium, there are lots of different nationalities, so they can't see that we are Roma."* (F, 39, Bulgaria)

One also notices that the Roma themselves not only translate "Rom" (between themselves) as "Gypsy" (for the Gadje), as we mentioned above, but they also translate 'Gypsy" as "Rom" which is now the politically correct syntagm among the Gadje in Belgium. So, has the substitution of the term "Rom" instead of "Gypsy" not changed things concerning the feeling of rejection, of being made to feel inferior because of being different? One understands that identity comes from a *habitus*[21] between oneself and in the interaction with others:

> *"When they meet the Gadje, Roma are on the defensive: they pay attention to what they say, they don't trust people, they are not really open, they watch their language…but a difference is made (constructed) on both sides. The Gadje say: for this job, we don't want any Roma"* (M, 28, Romania).

If this young man explains so well the creation of identity at the interethnic frontier, in a reciprocal reiteration of difference, others illustrate it in practice. Although a Turkish-speaking Muslim, one of our respondents who was a Bulgarian Rom hid this with a Slav-sounding name (helped by the official national Bulgarian policy that operated regarding onomastic conversions of this type). What is more, as an employee in an industrial butcher's, for ten years he had never told his boss or his colleagues that he was a Rom, not until the day that he was heard speaking Romany. At the same time, one can suppose that the fact of being obliged to dissimulate one's ethnic belonging might strengthen one's feeling of identity.

In Belgium, we see at work the following categorization: on the one hand the "autochtone"[22] Roma (mostly living in caravans on private or council parking lots), and on the other hand, immigrant Roma from the CCEE (especially after the collapse of the communist regimes). Flemish organizations that support the integration of these people call the former (with Belgian or French nationalities) "Roms", and refer to the latter (those who arrived in Belgium after 1989, usually as undocumented immigrants, stateless people, political refugees or waiting for regularisation[23] of their status) as "Roma". The Roma associations refer to all Gypsies of Roma origin[24] as Roms or Roma. The *Foyer*[25] (2004) estimated that there were 20,000 Roma in Belgium, of whom between 5,500 and 7,000 were in Brussels. According to estimates based on Pentecostal church attendance, the *Foyer* estimates that between 3,500 and 4,600 Roma in Brussels originate from Romania (and mostly from the western part of the country, from the region of Banat and Arad).

One also observes an effect of *territorialisation*, through which individuals claim and attribute to others a territorial identity whilst not necessarily having any particular links to that territory: *"The Roma of St. Ana are different from those of Timisoara"; "We Roma from Mitrovica, we had been there for 400 years".* The claim to a territorial anchorage, beyond the migratory journeys undertaken, is part of a positive identity

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21   *According to Pierre Bourdieu (1972) one should understand habitus as a set of dispositions. Just as the sense of game functions in sport, for example. Bourdieu notes that people who live out of step between their habitus and the demands of an objective situation have a greater sociological lucidity.*

22   *« Autochtone » is our term. According to the categories used in Belgian minorities policies, the Belgian Roma belong to the "allochtones" category. We shall return to this.*

23   *www.vmc.be, http://www.vroemvzw.be/*

24   *www.amarokher.be*

25   *The Regional Intergration Centre Foyer is a Flemish not-for-profit organization started in 1969. It is located in Molenbeek but is active at communal, regional and international levels in the global issue of the integration of foreign-born people (cf. www. foyer.be). Attached to the Flemish system of minority policy that is its main source of finance, the Foyer's 'Roma and Travellers Service', through its manager Koen Geurts, conducted an evaluation of the social problems of the Roma in terms of housing, health, employment, training and education, and presented its recommendations to the government in 2004.*

and makes a significant contribution to the creation of networks and subgroups, categorizations, distinctions and hierarchies.

Often this positive identity is hidden when an answer is required to the direct question "What does it mean to you to be a Rom?", as if, in the very question, there was an a priori accusation, because use of the term "Rom" implicitly refers to the Rom/Gadjo distinction. The answers bore witness to this defensive posture:
- sometimes as a natural arbitrariness of fate and accepted as such:

> *"I was born that way and I have no problem with it"* (F, 27, Romania);

> *"How can I explain? It's our nationality. If our parents were Roma, then so are we, it's not because you feel good or not, it's just the way it is. If I am Romanian, I can't become Gypsy. If I am Gypsy, I can't become Romanian. I was born Gypsy and I shall die Gypsy"* (M, 37, Romania);

- sometimes as a bothersome stigma in the context of racism within society:

> *(Regarding the hypothesis of having a Gadje husband) "(No) as long as he was not bothered by the fact we are Gypsies and he was not against having a Gypsy mother- and father-in-law, because, you see, I have met quite a few people like that, who would say, no, I would never sit at the same table as the Gypsies, or parents who say, no, not Gypsy"* (F, 26, Romania);

> *"Well, I was black and he was white and people thought that it was not normal for us to be together"* (F, 41, Slovakia).

It also happens, however, that difference with respect to the Gadje is seen in a positive light, favourable to the Roma. For the woman quoted above, the fact of being a Rom is a privilege, morally superior to the Gadje (decency, respect, religiousness, female sexual control):

> *"That's the way it is with the Romanian women…I'm sorry…Romanian girls go out with several Romanian boys…So, I can tell you there's a big difference between the Gypsies and the Romanians. Romanian women are loose women…They like going out with first one and then another and even another…The Gypsies don't do that. They take a husband and they stay with that husband…"* (F, 27, Romania).

This moral superiority is a critical part of Roma identity. The worry about moral integrity - which is identical for men and women – came up time and again in the discussions. We shall return to this later.

However, the issue of distance from the Gadje has its counterpart:

> *"I always wanted there to be a balance in life, both with the Roma and with the Gadje."* (M, 28, Romania);

> *"I am Catholic, like here in Belgium, it's the same faith"* (F, 41, Slovakia);

> *"I also have my traditional family life, we are never going to lose that, even if we are little by little part of another system"* (F, 26, Romania).

The difference might also be seen as the source of a potential inverted domination:

> *"Me, I told the Gypsies, it would be a good thing for them when they have all studied in higher education and the Gadje go before them and say "My respects to you, Mr Director"* (M, 44, Romania).

What is more, within the migratory context (especially through the bias of school), Christian Roma mix with other minorities, notably Turks and North Africans, Gadje who, as majorities in the context of underprivileged neighbourhoods and their schools, assign additional stigmas to them, linked to religious differences:

> *"At school, the children shout at my son 'Gypsy, pork eater' and one day, he said to me 'Papa, is it true that we eat pork? And if it is, then I want to become vegetarian'"* (M, 28 Romania);

> *Where I lived before, it was full of Moroccans and they said to us 'Jews, Jews!"* (F, 33, Romania)

We also, however, often came across the contrary, notably identification with this Other, probably in the hope of being able to conform to one's peers. A (Catholic) Roma mother of Slovak origin told us of her stupefaction when her daughter, out of friendship for a girl of Turkish origin, began to wear a veil.

This is to say that the views and feelings of the Roma regarding their identity are sometimes contradictory, that they may change in function of the social context and the challenges with which they are confronted, and that ethnic belonging is not univocal and definitive, but an on-going construction which makes its way between self-definition and the attribution of labels assigned by others, an incessant process of creating difference. The latter is interwoven in the historical construction of an asymmetrical relationship, where the Gadje held the instruments and the institutions of political domination over the Roma. Lastly – albeit an important point – we must distinguish between culture and identity. If we agree on a definition of culture as a system organized around codified cultural patterns, the use of language, holding beliefs and practices transmitted from one generation to another, we are nevertheless obliged to note that a strong sentiment of identity does not coincide with the practices and cultural representations listed as "Roma", and this despite the fact that many people find comfort in their identity when they claim a separate cultural character. In this respect, we will quote here the comments of one of the Roma women whom we consulted as mediator and translator. This is how she expressed her feelings about identity, to the detriment of any specifically cultural claim:

> *"I do not know what makes me a Roma. I don't look like a Roma woman, I am not a believer like a lot of Roma, I have never paid much attention to these stories about showing respect through how you dress, or by your behaviour and so on…and yet, I don't know, it must be in my blood."*

Identity sometimes moves between stigmas, pressure (often from the outside) to claim a particular culture, and multiple and competing identifications in the incessant process of constructing oneself and the other. The extract from an interview conducted (in Dutch) with a couple of Czech Roma illustrates this point (I = interviewer, M = man, W = woman):

> *I: What does it mean to you to be Roma?*
> *(Laughs)*
> *M: What is a Rom? I don't know. 'Rom' – I think it means 'human' or something like that.*
> *I: Does that mean you are different from the others? How would you describe that?*
> *W: Perhaps a little bit from a different culture.*
> *M: And a different colour*
> *I: You said 'culture.' Could you explain what you mean? What is the Roma culture?*
> *W: There are more musicians.*
> *M: The traditions of the old are passed from generation to generation.*
> *I: And do you still live according to these traditions?*
> *W: Yes, but not every day.*
> *M: There are some things that we really respect. The older Roma still have traditions. But we…times have changed! The new generations create their own traditions. The Romany language is not a written language It doesn't exist. There's nothing official. But the Roma make their own traditions.*
> *I: What are the things that still have importance for you?*
> *M: As Catholics. That's tradition. We don't go to church very often but we believe in God. Tradition is also Christmas, New Year, baptisms and marriages.*
> *W: Or, for example the tradition of November 1st, All Saints. We go to the cemetery, but we also light candles at home for the dead in our family (…)*

I: Do you feel any different? You speak of the Roma and the Gadje, but you, do you think like that? Is there a difference? What does this distinction mean for you?

M: Gadje, what does Gadje mean? (together) – Gadje are ordinary people. Real Czechs. And us, we are Roma. Or if I have to translate it, the Gadje are humans; The Roma are humans too.

I: So, there isn't much of a big difference for you?

M: No. Yes. Some Roma have problems with the Gadje. Saying Gadje to a Czech is like saying Belgian to a Belgian. It's like nationality. Or saying that someone has a problem with you. A 'bad person', that's also a Gadje for me. Not really 'bad' but foreign. (M and F, 32, Czech Republic).

These comments draw attention to the fact that the content of the Roma's cultural practices is susceptible to not always being "Roma" by definition or by tradition. The content becomes Roma through constantly working to create and appropriate it (see above, *The Roma create their own traditions*"). Within the context of another research project with the Roma, we showed the existence of stable practices and beliefs that could be considered as specific and distinctive from those of the Gadje and this over several generations (Hasdeu, 2007). Yet, as we can see here, this is not always the case. But this does not prevent difference from appearing and being reiterated, nor does it prevent the identity from being nourished, from positively affirming oneself and legitimately asking for recognition. Furthermore, and rightly so, "tradition" and "culture" are terms that, for many people, are synonymous with a system of official and institutionalised classification, not with their own experience. They do not recognize themselves in this vocabulary – this must be observed at a baptism or in the celebration of All Saints at someone's home if one is to realize the distinctive Roma specificity, which is different from the manner in which the Gadje celebrate the same rites, a difference in practice but which is not objectivized as such by our respondents. Next, a process of naturalization of the difference accompanies the structuring of collective and individual identities – as witnessed above by the female respondent when she referred to having Roma "in her blood". Finally, through the accent placed on difference in the questions asked of the Roma, the scientists and the experts participate in the construction of this difference. The analysis must not only list the objective elements of difference, but appreciate the subjective and discursive construction of this difference.

1.4. Migration

After the opening up of the frontiers following the collapse of the Iron Curtain, the Eastern Roma, among numerous other nationals from this region, left to make their fortune in the countries of the West. This new Roma migration took place within a difficult political and economic context, marked by tensions and violence that particularly affected the poor and destitute. An illiterate Roma beggar woman, experiencing an extremely difficult family situation, summarised her migratory journey as follows:

"I came to Belgium in the hope that my son (who is mentally handicapped) could be treated here. When he was in Romania, I gave him the medicines that were prescribed for him there. But they (the doctors) did not look after him and they asked me for money, and I didn't have any…In Romania, if you don't bribe the doctors, you die…here there is the CPAS (social security), you queue up here and there and you manage, but back there, it's different…And it is very difficult." (Woman, 27, Romania)

At the same time, the collapse of the communist state apparatus led to the revival of nationalism and local ethnicisms. The Roma found themselves even more stigmatized: on the one hand they appeared as

scapegoats because they were accused of having collaborated with the "enemy"[26]; and on the other hand the economic hardships that the whole population endured in these countries accentuated the violent competition for resources (especially in the regions that suffered from brutal de-industrialisation). Frustration among the Gadje and the brutality of the economic reforms were reflected in aggressive forms of xenophobia that were characterised by an obsession with attributing Manichaean forms of guilt, an obsession inherited from the experience of communism (Kligman, 2001; Verdery, 1996).

Under the pressure of a lack of resources, but also of lynchings, acts of violence, pogroms, even ethnic cleansing of entire villages, as well as drastically limited access to citizenship because of discriminatory state procedures, the Roma emigrated en masse to the countries of the West from the beginning of the 1990s (notably to Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and France). The Roma from Romania were among the first to take advantage of the opening of the frontiers from 1989 onwards and they were also among those most covered by the media, portrayed by Western rhetoric as the "flood of Eastern Gypsies". Fear of a Gypsy invasion led to precautions and limitations being put into place by the state authorities of Western Europe (forced repatriation in chartered planes, judicial procedures etc.) which seemed excessive in relation to the real amplitude of this phenomenon. Reyniers rightly points out that the "the Gypsy migrations fall well short of the migrations of other people from the countries of the East". (Reyniers, 1993: 67)

Dana Diminescu, specialist in Romanian migration, describes these migrants (from Romania in general) as "visible but not very numerous" (Diminescu, 2003). She also suggests that we focus our attention on their "integration from the bottom" in view of the efficacy of migratory networks, the use of technology (mobile phones) to maintain their links with the families back home, their aptitude to get help from friends-protectors they meet when they arrive etc., despite the illegal nature of their immigration and their clandestine work 'in black'. We should like to distance ourselves from this concept of integration from the bottom. The Roma use niches of collection and recycling (metals, cardboard and paper), the sales of flowers and newspapers, music, begging, second hand car sales. These niches are very different from the seasonal migrants who go to and from their own villages to working clandestinely in a western country. For the Roma, who install themselves as part of a more long-term migratory condition, there is greater instability, less regular income and thus less probability of integration from the bottom. Their activities render the Roma even more visible and less desirable than their co-national Gadje, unlike the Gadje migrants who provide domestic services, work in the building trades or do agricultural work, usually away from urban public view.

As far as the immigrant Roma in Belgium are concerned, some transit through France, Germany or Switzerland before arriving in Belgium. Belgium is only a destination of luck – and for some, perhaps not the last one *"because we had heard that people are nice here and they help us"* or *"because my husband's brother was here already", "because of my aunt",* or *"because we knew that here after you have requested asylum, it takes a while to get a reply, so you can stay here"* etc.

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26   In Bosnia, in the hot spots of the war (Mostar, Zvornik, Tuzla, Visegrad, Gojance), the Roma were threatened on both sides – Serb and Muslim: « With some 80,000 members, the Gypsy community of Bosnia would today have been completely disarticulated » (Reyniers, 1993: 66). In Bulgaria, the Xoraxane Roma (Muslim Roma) were criticized for being pro-Turk (Asséo, 2002), whilst the same Roma, although Muslims, were maltreated by the Albanians of Kosovo, accused of collaboration with the central Serbian government: http://www.csotan.org/Kosovo2004/texte.php?art_id=202).

As Alain Reyniers notes, this international journey is but a prolongation of previous national journeys: the *Xoraxane[27]* Roma of Kosovo left to live in Croatia at the start of the 1980s, but they returned to Kosovo in the early 1990s, only to have to leave again when the confrontations between Albanians and Serbs began in 1999. There followed the life of refugees for these people (with or without the recognised status as such), travelling across Switzerland, France and Belgium: *"You have to admit that the movements that push Gypsies from one place to another do not happen only in function of the need to find resources, but also and more profoundly, because of a well-tried dynamic of social production through circulating within established societies".* (Reyniers, 2003:62) This migratory dynamic, based principally on the rejection of Gypsy peoples, was described by a young woman from Romania as an on-going peregrination:

> *"The Gypsies from Romania are not really nomads because they have decided to be so. They have become so because they have been obliged to be so, but it's not want they wanted. Nobody chooses to go from country to country: just as you are beginning to get used to things and starting to integrate, woops, off you have to go again somewhere else. It was like that, people had to leave, without being able to go back to their country of origin where they had problems, so they went to another country"* (F, 29, Romania).

When they get to Belgium, many ask for asylum. Reyniers cites the Flemish organization *Amaro Kher* which recorded 1,000 requests for asylum by Roma between 1991 and 1993 (Reyniers, 2003: 59). The 2006 report "*Migratory flux from new EU member states to Belgium[28]* gives the account of 773 Slovak Roma who asked for, and were refused, asylum in 2005. Most of the Roma are clandestine and make an application for regularisation on the basis of Article 9 § 3 of the law on the establishment of foreigners. The requests (for asylum or regularization) are mostly followed by negative replies, appeals, delays, orders to leave the territory, further appeals, departure so as to return with another status etc. There are so many characteristic elements of a state of instability that can last for years and which go together with a feeling of siege and exile.

During the 1990s western media hardly ever mentioned the difficult and even inhuman conditions experienced by tens of thousands of other Roma migrants travelling clandestinely from their country of origin to reach the West of their dreams:

> *"At the end of the nineties, there were thousands of Yugoslav Roma who left (for the West) by sea from the Adriatic coast. I remember once hearing about people who had died doing that, but on TV they were speaking about a dolphin that had been washed up on an Italian beach"* (M, 50, Kosovo).

Likewise, in our research, we noticed a tendency to question why there was immigration without being sufficiently interested about how such journeys were undertaken. Here is a noteworthy comment about a journey that we heard:

> *"I came to Belgium with my mother and wife. Clandestinely. We paid someone to bring us by truck. It was expensive, and not something that everyone could undertake. I know people who came at the same time as us who are still working today to pay off the debt they contracted to make the journey. Back home in Romania at that time, it was German marks that were used to pay. The trip cost several thousand marks per person. Simpler people from the country sold their pig, their house to be able to leave. Practically my whole family left at that time, uncles, cousins… everyone, everyone. But we didn't all leave at the same time. That would have cost too much and there weren't enough places for the trip – you weren't sitting in seats for the trip. We travelled in a goods lorry. The women and children sat on the floor and the men stayed standing*

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27   *Xoraxay means « Turk » in Romany, referring to their Muslim religion.*

28   *www.diversité.be*

up. The lorry didn't stop a single time, because there was the risk of a road check. There were around thirty people in all, including the children. I remember that when we arrived it was autumn, and cold, but when I got out of the lorry I was wet with perspiration because of the heat generated by all those people. It was the second time that I had experienced that, that sad adventure, I want to say. And when you are a child, it really leaves a mark on you. The time before I was five years old and I had crossed the frontier clandestinely with my mother, my three-year old brother and my eight month-old sister who Mum held in her arms. My mother must have been 20 or 21. We were on a railway track, during the night, and we had to walk, a kilometre or two I suppose, to some houses where we were told we were expected. There was also another woman with five children, so two women and eight children in all. I remember that we could hear dogs and it frightened me. I thank God that my own children don't have to live through such things." (M, 28, Romania)

For the host country, it is only a question of economic migration from the East, characterized by "a strong dose of illegality and strong visibility" (Diminescu, 2003: 14), without acknowledgement of the difficult political situation experienced by the Roma, nor the nature of exile that this migration assumes. So it is a question of identifying the models of territorial mobility and the mechanisms of social exclusion that push the Roma to undertake these journeys, sometimes irrespective of their standard of living (the young man quoted above came from a comfortable family and we met others like him during the study).

Later on during the interview with this same young man, another important detail emerged referring to the pre-1990 period:

"There was a really harsh policy regarding trips outside the country. A Romanian had to give I don't know how many reasons for requesting a passport. Yet the Gypsies were given a passport without any explanation. The Gypsy gave half a kilo of gold and he got his passport. That's how we left during the communist period." (M, 28, Romania)

In some places, the Romanian communist police unofficially encouraged the Roma to leave the country. Police corruption and ideology about the purity of the nation came together to "gently" (and without any coherence at any level other than local) carry out ethnic cleansing. At the beginning of the 1990s, Czech local authorities similarly deported Roma under the pretext that they were of Slovak origin. In Kosovo, the Roma were despised and accused of collaboration as much by the Serbs as by the Albanians.

Chased out and unwanted, those Roma who had the financial means and a family network left for the West, only to become unwanted and driven out from the host country. In this sense, one can speak of a systematic blindness across all the states of Europe to the politically disturbing situation of the Roma on the continent. In the East, as in the West, awareness of this situation has been centred on the economic dimension or, in other words, poverty. In the West, it has taken the form of a somewhat sordid attitude based on a bad collective conscience (as was the case with colonialism), and by resorting to charity. In the East, the cynicism with which poverty is ethicized is accompanied by opportunism in the use of foreign financing destined for its eradication. This focus on poverty has been made to the detriment of considering the exclusion of the Roma from the political space as citizens as well as their painful uprooting that leads them, as in the case of the refugees from the war in ex-Yugoslavia, to leaving their whole lives behind them.

"I was a geography teacher and my wife's father was a doctor. With my cousin, who was an engineer, we fought for the introduction of schooling in Romany in the primary schools of Kosovo in the mid-1970s. I had a house, my family had a business…and I left with two suitcases. Everything came to an end in a single night… and we will never return to Mitrovica." (Man, 54, Kosovo)

2. METHODOLOGY

The research that constitutes the core of this study was conducted using a qualitative research approach. The sample is in no way representative and we have no pretensions of generalising the results. Our objective was to give the Roma the opportunity to speak, so what counted most in our approach was to find people who could talk about their experience and express their opinions and feelings in the most spontaneous, sincere and explicit way possible. Despite a number of methodological difficulties and bias that will be explained later, we believe that we have interviewed a meaningful segment of the population of Roma origin, namely 45 people whose national origins cover the geographical distribution of the Roma in Eastern Europe. It is, however, not the number of respondents in the study, but rather the approach used in the interviews that enabled us to go to them and formulate relevant questions concerning the education of Roma children in Belgium. As in any research study, meeting voluble and charismatic people was pure chance, whilst in other cases we were able to obtain rich information thanks to a friendly relationship with certain people.

The description and analysis of the accounts we collected can only be fragmentary and partial, given the framework assigned to writing this report. If the purpose is to enable the Roma to have their voice heard, this cannot be done at the "raw" stage (which is in itself a fiction), but rather with the manipulations inherent to this type of undertaking, between the oral and written form, the raw data and their reconstruction: linguistic translation, cultural interpretation and the loss of colour and sense that might have accompanied the translation, the selection of the accounts given by the Roma, and the interpretation of these accounts in the report itself.

For ethical reasons, we have preserved the anonymity of the respondents. We have indicated in parentheses their gender (M = male, F = female), age and country of origin. We have also suppressed as many details as possible about their biographies in order to prevent any identification. Where this has not been possible, we have tried to make sure that the accounts given as verbatims do not compromise the person in question, either in the eyes of the Gadje or the Roma who read this report. To avoid all possibility of being able to identify the respondent, any initials used are not those of the respondent's real name and nor do we give the ages etc. of the interviewers.

2.1. The fieldwork

2.1.1. The approach, techniques, selection of respondents and initial findings

After a full day's consultation with professionals working in the sector, scientists and Roma active in associations, we agreed a number of criteria with regard to how the research should be carried out:
- create a climate of confidence with respondents;
- take the time needed for authentic feelings to emerge: opt for accounts rather than replies to questions, avoid giving the impression of police questioning;
- interview not only the mothers, but also the fathers, because the child's education often depends on the decision of the father, who "*has the last word*".

During this day of consultation, some associations expressed their reservations about the idea of conducting a study at all because they felt that sufficient research had already been carried out. From their point of view, it was rather the implementation of existing projects that is lacking. For some managers, the problem was the lack of legal tools or political will. We differed partially from this view. Whilst understanding the worries of professionals in the social field regarding the implementation of integration, our argument for a study lay in the affirmation that from one project to another, recommendations are repeated, whilst the voice of the Roma themselves is largely absent.

Given the rather short period of time accorded at the beginning for the fieldwork (July-September 2007), the initial decision was to conduct semi-directive interviews on the basis of an interview grid. The interviews were thus conceived as an exploration into the theme of schooling in relation to the immigrant's status and migratory journey, living conditions, family relationships, ethnicity and awareness of the institutional and associative fabric.

The study used female Roma interviewers to talk to the Roma mothers, given that a shared language would play a positive role in gaining the trust of the respondent and establishing a relaxed atmosphere. Four French-speaking interviewers (three Roma from Romania, one Roma from Macedonia) and three Dutch-speaking interviewers (from Bosnia, Kosovo and Slovakia), took part. A Roma man, acting as interpreter, introduced us to some Roma from Kosovo in Sint-Niklaas. These people were known, and recommended to us, by associations working in the field. We not only appreciated the input to the study of these mediators (who had a different status from the respondents because they were almost all in employment or working independently as salaried freelancers), but also the feedback they gave us, which made a major contribution to the research. Thanks to their contribution, we understood and had a better "feel" for the Roma, because of their explanations and elaboration, even if sometimes the interviewing situation was not greatly improved by their presence.

During the first wave of the research (July-September 2007), 27 interviews were carried out with Roma mothers: 14 with respondents from Romania, 4 with respondents from Serbia, 3 with Bulgarians, 3 with Slovaks, two with Kosovans and 1 with a Croat. They were aged between 21 and 46 years old. 16 of them had abandoned school very early when they could barely read or write and 4 had finished their secondary education in their country of origin (after 8 years of school). None of them currently had salaried employment in Belgium. One of the respondents had worked as a nursing assistant in her country of origin. All the respondents had children, although two of them had only one child and one of them had 9

children. To earn some money they did household cleaning here and there, they sold flowers or begged. 14 of them had no regular source of income (the others receiving social security). Most of the interviews were conducted in the respondents' own homes, but four were carried out in interviewers' homes, one in the offices of the *Foyer*, and one in a school canteen (outside meal times). Interviews with the mothers were conducted in main towns and cities of Belgium (Brussels, Charleroi, Liege, Ghent, Antwerp and Sint-Niklaas).

Respondents were located with the help of institutional actors and those working in the field. The principle of recruitment was that of the network: institutional actors put us in contact with those who used their services and interviewers put us in contact with women in their circle (relations, friends and acquaintances). The selection criteria for respondents were that the women should have at least one child of school-age (minimum 3 years) and to have been in Belgium for at least one year, but not more than ten years.

We accompanied and supervised the interviews conducted by the interviewers. In order to meet the needs of the fieldwork (notably the very different competencies of the interviewers), this took different forms:
- interviews with the 12 Roma women from Romania were conducted in Romanian, mainly by the Roma interviewers but sometimes with the intervention of another interviewer (also of Romanian origin);
- interviews conducted in French (5) or in Dutch (11) were carried out by two Belgian interviewers, but simultaneously translated into Romany by the interviewers;
- 3 interviews were conducted in English.

The length of interview varied from 40 minutes to 2 hours.

In a second wave (November 2007), we interviewed six fathers, aged between 24 and 45 years old (4 Romanians, 1 Kosovan and 1 Bulgarian). Five of these had completed their secondary schooling in their country of origin; three were currently in salaried employment in Belgium; one had had a job but was currently unemployed; and two had no jobs. The interviews lasted about an hour and were conducted by a French-speaking interviewer of Romanian origin, without the presence of a Roma interviewer (translation was provided to interview the Kosovan Rom and the Bulgarian Rom). Resource persons were targeted who were active and known by the institutions and by the Roma in their community.

The four French-speaking interviewers were also interviewed during this phase of the research in order that they might give their opinions about their status as interviewers, on the questions asked of the Roma, about certain aspects that came out strongly from most of the interviews (different schooling for boys and girls, gender division of work in the couple), as well as how the research had contributed to their own personal experience. During this period, we also interviewed two female Roma doing internships at the European Commission, as well as a Roma teacher in a school with a majority of Roma children in Romania.

In December 2007, a couple of Czech Roma took part in a joint interview: the wife was a cleaner working as part of the organization that uses cleaning vouchers, and her husband worked in the building trade. The interview lasted about an hour and a half and was conducted in Dutch by a Belgian interviewer.

In a third phase (in March 2008), we completed a series of interviews relating to school integration projects in Sint-Niklaas (3 with male Kosovan Roma, 1 with a Roma man and his sister, 1 with a Roma interpreter originally from Macedonia and two Belgian project managers). The interviews were conducted in English or in French (with the help of a Serbo-Croat interpreter), by a French-speaking interviewer of Romanian origin.

Respondents were remunerated in order to indicate that there were making a contribution within the framework of a contractual relationship and to persuade them to participate in the study. The interviewers were also remunerated for each interview.

The interviewers also conducted informal conversations with the Roma (in accidental meetings or friendly discussions with the interviewers and other resource persons).

Interviews, conservations and observations in the form of notes all contributed to providing rich information within the framework of our study.

2.1.2. The difficulties

We made an effort to standardise the research tool (semi-directive interview) in order to reconcile the various imperatives of the study: the plurality of those conducting the interviews, the diversity of field conditions, a limited timeframe and the need to target Roma in their diversity. We realised rather quickly[29] that recording the interviews, even though they were semi-directive, was not an appropriate tool to use with the Roma because of their mistrust that the recording might harm their future. We were only able to develop a real situation of trust and find a willingness to speak about themselves among a limited number of people. In this respect, from a qualitative point of view, the interviews do not all have the same input value. We have tried to set out here, in the form of verbatims, information derived both from the accounts (interviews) and consultations[30]. We have also tried not to hide the pluralism and contradictions, but rather to preserve them.

As our ambition was initially to reach unknown people, living in destitution, we began by asking our interviewers to put us in contact with people who were *not* part of their own families. By so doing, we certainly missed the opportunity for a certain connivance or complicity, which could have made people more open and engage in a less formal conversation than that which often marked the interviews. At the end of the study, one of the interviewers said to us "*It's a pity that I didn't get you to speak to my sister-in-law, you would have heard some things.*"

In our wish to include the national diversity of the Roma, we found ourselves with a multitude of languages to manage in terms of logistics: finding the competencies of bilingualism and multilingualism and making sure that they were applied was a big challenge. In this respect, we consider it an advantage that the interviews in Romany were conducted in our presence by a Roma interviewer of Romanian origin. The fact

29   We had already been warned during preliminary discussions and through our experience with the Roma in Romania.

30   Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardam (1995) distinguishes between interviews of consultation (where one is looking for competency about the local society) and accounts (which provide the personal experience of the interviewee).

that the Roma interviewers spoke Romany led, on some occasions, to creating a more relaxed atmosphere. In other instances, the interview situation stayed formal and distant, despite there sometimes being a bond of friendship or family (of which we had approved) between the interviewer and respondent.

Not all of the interviewers had the same linguistic, interpretative or relationship competencies. Not all of them found the study as interesting or useful. Their motivation differed from one person to another and as the study progressed. Not all of them had the same patience or curiosity to listen to the respondents' accounts that they found familiar, they were frightened of silences and they did not dare to deviate from the interview grid to ask probe replies or ask other questions. Interviewers also accentuated differently the themes of the interview and approached the survey with their own varied views on Roma groups and the meaning of the research.

Regarding the location of the interviews, we wanted to have in each instance a familiar and secure place from the respondent's point of view (but also negotiated in function of the circumstances). Many of the women preferred to be interviewed at home but these rarely provided the calm needed to ensure good concentration on the themes to be discussed nor for high quality digital recording. Insofar as the male respondents were concerned, we thought it most appropriate to invite them to a location outside the home (with the exception of the men in Sint-Niklaas).

We tried to conduct the interviews with our female respondents in the absence of their children and husbands. However, this often proved to be impossible and we sometimes found ourselves nursing a baby or amusing the young girls with hand games rather than supervising the questions posed by the interviewer. The husbands were often present and did not hesitate to intervene, even when requested not to do so. This aspect of masculine superiority will be referred to later.

Regarding the interview content, we often noticed a gap between our expectations of the interviewers and the way in which some of them formulated the questions. Here is one such example: *Why did you come to Belgium the way you did?* (our question) *"What did Belgium seem like when you got here?"* (interviewer). This was not a case of linguistic misunderstanding, but of putting a different accent on the migratory journey: the interviewers focused more on the arrival and stabilisation, were more interested in this new departure that the "arrival" on Belgian territory represented, whilst we (in our question) were interested in the journey itself, the reasons and the circumstances for migrating.

The gender[31] of the interviewers and respondents greatly influenced the quality of the interviews. Far from generating a spontaneous feminine solidarity, the interview situations with the women showed up significant ethnic and social tensions. Aspects of social differentiation were immediately spotted and sometimes questioned by the interviewees. The female respondents were no doubt struck by the Roma interviewers' dress, by the ease with which they moved around, by the fact that they were working in an institutional framework, when they were roughly the same age as them and spoke the same mother tongue. During one interview the interviewer was explicitly asked why she wore trousers when she was a Roma. We shall return to this. The interviews with the men on the other hand seemed to be easier to conduct: the men seemed less susceptible than the women, more direct and more interested by the

31 *Simply, we could say that gender is the socially constructed belonging to a sex: becoming and being a man or a woman, a gendered subject, within a given socio-historic context. Gender is at the same time a system of relationships and the relationship to power.*

research. It is also true that, with one exception, all of the men had a rather elevated position in the Roma community and, as people who regularly worked with the associations, they had more of a habit of finding themselves in situations, like the interview, where things were discussed.

In summary then, the study produced information that was eclectic, polymorphous and no less contradictory: *"Everything is worthwhile in fieldwork"* (Olivier de Sardan, 1995: 90). We consider this to be inherent to the generation of data in a context such as this.

The table below provides a summary of the breakdown of interviews in Belgium and the diversity of competencies that we had to mobilise.

Respondent's country of origin	Men	Women	Languages	Interview location
Romania	4	14	Romanian Romany French English	Brussels, Liege, Charleroi, Antwerp, KBF
Serbia	0	4	Serbo-Croat Dutch	Ghent, Antwerp
Bulgaria	1	3	Romany French	Brussels, KBF
Slovakia	0	3	Romany Slovak Dutch	Ghent
Kosovo	4	2	Romany Serbo-Croat French Dutch English	Sint-Niklaas
Croatia		1	Serbo-Croat Dutch	
Czech Republic		1 couple	Dutch	Ghent
EU interns		2	English	KBF
Teacher	1		Romanian French	KBF
Interviewers (post-fieldwork interviews)		4	Romanian French	KBF

2.2. The analysis

Whilst the data collected are extremely heterogeneous, they contain a great deal of information on the subjects of interest to us. We have treated this as ethnographic information, even though the data collection did not take place over a long period (defined principally by participating observation as is the rule for ethnographic fieldwork). In this context, we mention here a sociologist who appears to have discovered ethnography after working among Travellers in France. Our approach, like his, was to *"evaluate differently the sense and the scope of the information gathered: grasp the social processes implemented as inextricably specific to the environment being studied and the study being conducted; admit that the job of the research lies less in the obstinate use of certain methods than in the need to record oneself, the movements of others, the circumstances, material of various types in order to exploit it (…)"* (Bizeul, 1999: 112).

The analysis consists of a systematic reading that can be qualified as comprehensive in the sense of going back and forth and considering the raw data in the form of accounts given by our respondents (Kaufman, 2007, Glaser, Strauss, 2006). Through repeated reading of the material, we were able to tease out recurrences in the interviews and extract the excerpts most illustrative of such points.

In this sense, we should say that the effort required to understand and make sense of the information from and with our interlocutors, as in ethnography, requires a certain time, divided up into successive phases. The phases mentioned below were decided as and when we proceeded with the research, for the sake of completing the information.

We should also like to state that in this approach (of *grounded theory)*, saturation of the sample depends on the development of relations in and with the field and on the evaluation of the researcher and his or her collaborators etc. In some respects, one might say that in researching the complexity of identities and the sense given to the experience, the sample is never saturated.

It is also to say that it is almost impossible to conduct a study of this type with complete neutrality and that it could never have totally objective ambitions. Rather than establishing verdicts and formulating definitive conclusions about the population being examined (here recent Roma immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe in Belgium), the desired effect is to highlight a new voice and to record it in the dissemination of knowledge.

3. WHEN THE ROMA SPEAK ABOUT SCHOOLING, THEMSELVES AND THE GADJE…

3.1. School and education: form, content and objectives

Overall, and contrary to the usual perception of social workers, all of the Roma interviewed thought they were doing everything possible for their children to be educated. In reply to the question *"Do your children go to school?"* the answer came rushing out, as if in defence: *"Yes, every day, except when they are sick."* In general, as parents, the Roma we interviewed had a very positive opinion of school in Belgium (its organization, its human relationships). For those who had themselves experienced school in their country of origin (sometimes for only a very short period), no comparison was possible:

- *"Here, you learn through games and for pleasure, it's not like back home (in Romania), with menaces and punishments."* (M, 28 Romania)
- *'The teachers were really strict in Romania, they hit, they sent you into the corner and they didn't really care about us, the Gypsy children. Here, when there's the slightest problem, they write it in the notebook, they ask you to come to school as a parent, but with respect. It's a big difference."* (M, 37, Romania)
- *'Here, you are given more explanations, it's better organized, they look after the pupils more."* (F, 41, Slovakia)
- *"How can I tell you? When I went to school (in Romania), I didn't like it, I didn't like the teacher. She hit us. And I said to myself, what, I go to school to be hit? She is not my mother, she doesn't have the right to hit me…and I said that I wouldn't go any more. And my mother said OK, if you don't want to go, don't go…and the teacher came to fetch me from home. I went up into the attic to hide, I didn't want to go any more."* (F, 31 Romania)

As can be seen in the description of our sample, most of the Roma we interviewed live in great precariousness. Thus, when they speak about school, they say that they don't have the money for public transport, for hot meals in the school canteen, for the children's clothes.

Most of those interviewed thought that it was very important for their children to complete their education and train for a job and live a more stable and pleasant life than theirs from a financial point of view. They believe that education is likely to provide them with a paid job and, through that, a better life:

> *"School gives you a trade, a salary. You must go to school. If you don't go to school you become a vagabond, a beggar. No-one will hire you if you don't have a diploma, if you don't know how to do anything?"* (M, 37, Romania)

With regard to the level envisaged, it appears to end at secondary school, in the technical/professional section. The cases of two girls training respectively to be a hairdresser and a seamstress were mentioned, as well as that of a boy training to be a mechanic. We will return later to the subject of formal diplomas.

Descriptions of the educational system and the child's school life are made in very vague terms: *"School is good, very good, we are very happy etc."* No expectations are expressed in terms of the curriculum. School is above all seen as providing a moral framework (how to behave, being good and polite, obeying the rules) and providing access to what is perceived to be modern, current or "civilised":

> *"We are in a free country here, you should show respect (…) our children are very respectful. Culture, science, school. We are no longer as we were under Ceausescu, we have moved on. We are civilised. It's the West. It's the European Community. You have every possibility. It all depends on you to do things. The Gypsies no longer want to be treated as Gypsies. Because, you see, there are Gypsies who are more respectful than the Romanians. They are real gentlemen. (…)If you haven't been to school, no-one will have taught you that you don't say 'Give me that pen', but 'Please could you give me that pen?'"* (M, 37, Romania)

Outside the context of this research – and we refer above all to previous studies done in Romania (Hasdeu, 2007) – this access to modernity (such as technological know-how and progress) is even claimed by Roma who are considered to be the most conservative (by themselves and others) concerning traditions: TV, the latest mobile phone and the computer are the most coveted elements of this modernity and now form part of the daily lives of these Roma, even if they are almost or completely illiterate. We stress here that it is not a question of dividing our interviewees into "traditional" and "modern". The social sciences have generally distanced themselves from this type of categorization and our analysis will not use it either. The Roma themselves whom we interviewed only rarely used the word "tradition". During their conversations, the desire to be considered as having the same standard of living as the Gadje was frequently apparent, a desire that was accompanied by a request for recognition that ignored the stereotypes attributed to them by the Gadje such as "primitive", "uneducated" etc. They express this by using words such as "civilised", "different", "changed mentality" etc. This is what we include under the term "modernity".

In this respect, school is also seen as a place of socialisation that is essential in changing mentality:

> *"Mentalities are different and everything comes from education. The education is a support, a help. If you stay alone, you ask yourself how to do this or that, but if you go to school or if you work you see different people, you open your mind. »* (M, 25, Romania – interview in English)

This ambition of being on a level with the West, which is perceived as more advanced, is not surprising and this for two reasons. On the one hand, as mentioned above, the Roma want to confront the image of "being behind the times" that others attribute to them. On the other hand, they share this ambition with most of the nationals (Roma and Gadje) of the old communist states, particularly when, as was the case for Romania, the country was completely isolated.

At the same time, this aim for modernity appears somewhat selective, because being too similar to the Gadje also implies having unacceptable habits such as smoking, drinking alcohol, answering back to parents, wearing 'indecent' clothes, speaking about sex and so on.

Moreover, men and women speak spontaneously about sanctions or praise that their children receive from teachers, of the fact that their children are more or less liked, but they do not speak of the intellectual

content of the education they receive. The idea that school could be important in the development of a child's intellectual capabilities seems rather absent.

When the children miss school or reserve is expressed about their continuing education, the following reasons are given:
- lack of security (they don't have the right to work, no social security, or not enough in relation to the cost of schooling: clothing, meals, extracurricular activities);
- danger (violence from other children, the risk that, at puberty, the girls might lose their virginity);
- doubt about certain moral values inculcated at school (through sex education for instance).

On the whole, the Roma women have had less schooling than the men. This is certainly one of the reasons why the answers of women about education were more limited and vague compared with those of the men, which were more developed, more explicit. For example, when we asked participants if their husbands had been to school and for how long, with only a few exceptions, the systematic reply to this question was *"I don't know"* or *"I think he went for a few years because he can read and write."* However, if one advocates training children through an educational institution, paradoxically, the educational future of the child is seen as resting on the child's own decision (adolescent being perceived as adult): *"They should go to school as much as they want to."* (F, 30, Romania). For the illiterate women, even though they regret not having gone to school and they recognize finding it difficult to get on in public (getting lost in the town, not being able to read official communications), they nevertheless accept this condition and do not foresee changing it. Learning how to read and write seems to be impossibility because they think it is too late (despite their young age). It also appears a luxury, given that their lives are already full caring for their children and doing the housework. Any regrets at not having helped their children to do their homework are not formulated as such. The institutional points of reference most often mentioned by these women are the CPAS/OCMW (the social security), Caritas (a charitable organization) and the Red Cross. Almost all of the women interviewed spoke of a Belgian person (or sometimes a couple) who helps them with loans of money, food, visits when someone is sick, etc.

Leaving a child in school gives rise to an emotional upheaval for some mothers. One of our respondents, particularly voluble and extrovert, told us about the first day at school of her only child. The day was a real hurdle in her emotional life:

"I cried. Oh, for me that was quite something, oh… Especially because I am also a child, I still have the spirit of a child…when I saw her go through the school door, I saw myself…As I told you, I had her when I was 16! The first day she went to school I cried. I was afraid to leave her because she was crying too… So they told me, 'If you cry, she will cry too, go out!' And I asked myself, what do these Belgians have against me, don't they know that I love her? They can't see that she is suffering and I'm suffering too? For me that was really difficult. Because for us, what is said is that you keep her at home because it's better!... So, I went outside and I could hear her crying, I wanted to go back in again, but the woman made a sign for me to leave… In the mean time my daughter has got used to it and when I saw that she came back from school with her friends and her stories, I said to myself, well perhaps it was for the better…I saw that my daughter had a lot of education that came from the school, that I could not give her…" (F, 24, Romania)

One can thus understand why our respondents emphasized the framework of friends and welcome, made available or, on the contrary, refused by some schools. The mothers expect their children to be loved at school:

"The primary school teacher liked her a lot…Yes, when she had to leave school, she came and put her arms around her and said to her "Bye-bye P." It's a very good school" (F, 27, Romania)

"(At nursery school) she had a really friendly teacher and the first time I saw her with her satchel on her back, it was really extraordinary"(…)
"The other day we met his teacher from last year in the street. She stopped to give him a big kiss! To my son! She said hello to us." (F, 39, Bulgaria)

In a town in Wallonia, some ten (Pentecostal) Roma families of Romanian origin send their children to a Protestant school. The people interviewed in this town said that the headmaster of the school is "*"very good, he helps us a lot, he comes home, the children <u>like</u> him."* (our underlining)

The need for affection, the expectation that school should be an extension of the family, appeared to us to be recurrent and significant. In this sense, if the school provides organized support[32] specifically for Roma families, the way that this aid is supervised should be envisaged, from the human point of view as well as the material content and its instrumental design.

3.2. "Why does your identity have to be your origin?" The power of stigmatization

If, in practice, school means (for everyone) creating a distance between it and the family, this distance is even more problematical, and sometimes really difficult, for those who have felt stigmatized in the past. Thus, aware of the power of labels, the parents quite rightly perceive school as an environment where domination is exercised and they formulate this in terms of the fear of violence inflicted on their children by their peers: *"An (ideal) school is one where no-one harms my children, where the other children don't hit them."*

This perception is the result of respondents' personal experience of symbolic but also physical violence, knowing that, in their country of origin, teachers handed out corporal punishment even in a fairly recent past (see below).

The case presented here is significant concerning symbolic violence. E. (a man aged 28 from Romania) completed the whole of his primary and secondary schooling in Switzerland. When he returned to Romania in 1995, he remembers that his father moved heaven and earth (at great cost) to be able to enrol his three children in the German college of the town (reserved for elites) because the children did not speak Romanian but German at school and Romany at home. However, having laboriously obtained their enrolment, the fact that they were "Gypsies", and the only ones in the school, continued to pose a problem:

"Me, I didn't hide what I was, I told people. My colleagues didn't believe me, but when they saw my brother and sister, who are darker skinned than me, then they believed me and they never stopped saying "the Gypsy" all the time. It was hard the first months. I was not happy and I said so at home, I often said that I would no longer go, but my brother and sister, who interiorised it more, said nothing at all until the day my brother got home from school, we were sitting at the table, he sat down too and he burst into tears. At that, I started to cry too (…) I had some friends and I had good contacts with some of the teachers who saw in me the man and not just the Gypsy, but I remained "the Gypsy" of the class."

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32   *Such is the case in certain schools*

In a different context, T. had a similar experience. After leaving Zagreb when he was 5 to escape the war between the Croats and Serbs, T. and his family settled in Kosovo, where he continued his schooling in Serbo-Croat (and not in Albanian like most of those in the province):

> *"I even spoke with a Serbian accent, so it was impossible to know that I was a Rom, but I was always being asked about my origins. It wasn't that I wanted to hide it but I wondered why you always had to identify yourself, why you always had to give your origin as your identity. I was the only Rom in the secondary school because the others didn't have the energy to fight against that every day."* (M, 24, Kosovo)

Upon arrival in Belgium, the stigmas seem to follow some people like a curse:

> *"My daughter's teacher asked me to go to school for a chat. She spoke individually to each parent for about 5-10 minutes. When it was my turn to go in, she had hardly finished telling me about a sum of money that we owed for the school trip to the countryside, than it was finished, I think I hardly stayed 3 minutes. She was very cold, she said nothing about C's results or anything else, how she was in class, how she felt. When it's my wife who goes, it's even worse, the teacher speaks to her at the entrance of the courtyard, not even inside."* (M, 28, Romania)

The negative attitude recounted by the woman below, regarding school managements who refuse undocumented children, raises an important question on the "equal opportunities" officially promoted in Belgium:

> *"But the problem was that we had to change school three times… Because here in Belgium, you have to be recognised, at least that's what I was told, now I don't know, I don't know the law… The first time when she was at nursery school, I was told after a few months that they couldn't keep the girl because there were no papers…and if I wanted her to continue going to school, I needed an attestation that she existed in Belgium. I was already afraid then, because I have no papers, so I changed school. I took her out of school. I didn't want her to go to school any more…And my mother-in-law said, you can't keep your daughter at home, you have to send her to school. So I took her to the school where my husband's nephews were and there, well, a good relationship was started… it's the school that he went to so they accepted her straight away. Then we moved house, we took an apartment and so we had to change school…And there the problems began… Whew we moved, we went to another area with other schools, the first school that was recommended to us, by neighbours and others, they all said take her to the Notre Dame School, even if it's a Catholic (private) school, it's a very good school, a good education, the means are good, so there. And so, I first tried there, it's normal that I want what's best for us and for my children. I went there and presented myself, I told them I was waiting for my papers, that I had a pro Deo lawyer who was trying to get me regularised, that my daughter didn't have any papers, but that she had to have schooling because all the children in Belgium are obliged to go to school. Firstly they asked me why I wasn't going to another school because we, blab la bla…And I said, listen, I don't like the other school because it's poorer, it doesn't have the same conditions and they said, OK we'll take her and we should like to be kept informed of your situation, with the papers and the lawyer and so on, because if nothing changes, you will have to change school because in our school you have to have someone who pays for the child and as she is not recognised in Belgium, there is no-one as her guarantor. After the first six months, the headmistress called me and told me that she could no longer keep her in the school because 'you don't have any papers and we are not used to dealing with cases like yours and it's better to go to a school better suited to your style of person'. I cried, and I asked myself, but what style? She said "your style" like that…and I understood that she meant that I sent her where there were other Gypsies… And I left, I looked at my daughter whose hair I had just plaited, I had got her ready, made her beautiful,*

well it was the new term….and then I said to myself, No! I don't agree to be treated like this, I am going to another school and I am going to knock at the door like that…But I was lucky! I was lucky because it was the headmaster's first day in this new school and I was the first person to present herself that day…And I knocked at the door and I said just like this: I need to speak with the school head, the manager of this school! S'il vous plaît (in French). He told me, calm down, calm down, it's me, come in! He invited me to sit down, I was still crying, and he gave me some paper handkerchiefs and suggested I drink something, calm down first of all… And he asked me what the matter was. And at that moment, I felt quite clear about the world, because I said, wherever I go, nobody wants us, wherever I go, one minute, two, people hesitate how to speak to you, they see you as an animal, I don't know, when they see you are a Gypsy, they want nothing to do with you, they avoid you…And this person, when he saw me and he saw that I was a Gypsy, but first of all, he said that I was a human being…and not a Gypsy. So I told him that my daughter had been to school for the first semester, but then they didn't want her to stay in their school, they told me to look for a school where there were other Gypsies, where they are used to cases like mine, because they don't want her to continue in their school. It was a more Bourgeois (in French) school. So! Stop! He said. 'Everyone has the right to attend school, and what is more it's the law in Belgium.' I told him about the papers and he said, OK, with or without papers I want I. to come to our school. This year, when he saw me he told me 'you (using the familiar "tu") were the first person that I saw and I. was the first child that I provided schooling to'…After the first semester, even in this school, they asked me to go to the office and they said: 'My personal opinion counts for nothing, you know that I am on your side, but I have people above me who are asking me for proofs and I have none. Where are you with your papers?' And I told him, I am a stateless person, but I am not recognised as being stateless, I have no rights and I am not regularised and that's not because it's what I want, but nothing happens…We Gypsies have to wait for the Foreigners Office, there is work, there are a lot of people to recognise (in French), and that is my problem…He said to me: "I am so sorry, but if nothing changes, I cannot continue to sort of lie like this to the people above me and say to them, tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow…I know that this is not your fault, but something has to be done…" When I went to this pro Deo lawyer, he lied to me all the time, telling me that the next day he was going to give me a paper to show me that my daughter was going to be regularised…So this pro Deo lawyer, it's the X law courts of X (town) who they assigned to me as a lawyer, because I didn't have anything to pay a lawyer with… he's not doing much about my papers, he's got a lot of Gypsy cases, people who have been refused, things like that and so on…in the end, even at this school I have problems, even if the headmaster is a really warm and humane person, he too (in French) has certain responsibilities." (F, 24, Romania)

These examples are not, however, the rule. As we have already pointed out, the general opinion of Belgian education is that of greater social justice within the educational establishment compared with that experienced in the countries of origin: *"(Here), he loves to learn above all because he feels as if he's accepted"* commented a man (aged 42, from Bulgaria) about his 11 year-old son.

The intensely close relationship between the Roma mother and her children is sometimes considered as a drawback, especially where very young children are involved, the latter attending neither a crèche nor nursery school. However, in order to discuss the fact that Roma children do not go to the crèche, before speaking of the close mother-child relationship, one should also consider that many Roma families are extended families where childcare is in the hands of several people, and notably several women. Insofar as nursery school is concerned, Roma migrants come from countries where nursery school is provided with very limited resources, without being obligatory. Roma children attend these establishments only very exceptionally.

Neither can we understand this aspect of the mother-child relationship without considering the social factors that determine it. If there is maternal anxiety attached to separation, there is nothing natural or Roma about it: rather it is based on the way in which many cultures, including our own, construct maternal responsibility for the well-being of the child. Furthermore, we should remember that women with no capital, married in a system that is most often patrilocal[33], are often so dispossessed of authority as daughters-in-law that they develop a certain possessiveness towards the children as a means of recuperating a sort of foundation for themselves and self-confidence. One should also consider the (subconscious) collective memory of an ever-present potential departure somewhere else, which explains why the mother keeps her child near to her, always ready to leave together (again), at an instant's notice. Finally, and it is to this point that we should like to draw attention, to all of this must be added the fear, based on experience, of police brutality, which sometimes is the forerunner of arrest and expulsion – the parents can only feel anxiety when the children are not present at the moment of questioning. G. (a 27 year-old woman from Romania), who has been living in Belgium for four years without papers, an illiterate beggar with three children (one of whom is mentally handicapped), provides a salutary example:

> *"At the beginning, the police took us to Zaventem (…) The police wanted to send us back without anyone knowing about it, neither the Ministry, nor the Foreigners Office[34], no-one! They kept us in a…room…the whole night…so, we were imprisoned, they kept us there and the next morning, they took us to the airport. They insisted that we went up into the plane, but we didn't want to, I was afraid! The boy was very young… They saw that we didn't want to go up, so they drove us to a centre, a centre near to Zaventem. There, a social worker acted on our behalf. And she told us that we had nothing to fear; that the boy was too small, he was only two months, not three…And they hadn't even arrested us while we were begging, not even that! They picked us up at the tram stop, we were waiting for the tram with the boy, we were waiting for the tram to go to Schaerbeek, to register in that commune (in order to get social security)…and, waiting for the tram, the police arrived and came over to us. Because there was another Gypsy there too. They took us away and made us get into the van, I, I didn't want to get in because I was afraid that they would send us back. I was told that no, they weren't going to do anything, they were only going to check our papers check us out and let us go. But it wasn't true. My daughter had stayed at home with her paternal grandfather. The police, when they saw our papers, they took note of the address, and they came to fetch the girl, they asked for the girl and I had told them that I had left her at home with someone. They forced my husband to get into a car to go and fetch the girl. Oh… we had lots of problems, that's why I sometimes hate Belgium…so they assigned a lawyer to us and the lawyer got us out of there…Because the baby was not yet three months old. If the baby had been three months old, the lawyer wouldn't have been able to help us, we would have had to leave. If they had been able to get us into the plane, it would have happened without anyone knowing about it, like an abuse…*
> *Q: Have you heard of anyone else being sent away like that?*
> *R: Yes, there have been lots…Gypsies…* (F, 27, Romania)

In this quote, the word "police" appears three times as such and is substituted by "they" nine times afterwards. The other "characters" are the lawyer, the social worker, the Minister and the Foreigners' Office. Everything happened in a closed location, like a van or a closed room. G does not speak French. Her account displays a feeling of anxiety and oppression. One can imagine the psychological terror that

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33   Pater (Lat.) = father. In this system, the wife leaves the parental home to go and live with her parents-in-law, under the principal authority of her husband's father.

34   In standard procedures, decisions on expulsion from Belgium are taken by the Foreigners' Office.

this mother lived through, when she had only recently given birth[35], as well as the impact of the arbitrariness of these strong-arm tactics on the way in which, from that moment on, she considered the relationship with the authorities, seen through the "police" prism[36].

In less dramatic situations, the simple fact of school being far from home and that a bus has to take the children from home to school without the mother being able to accompany them is initially experienced with anxiety. But is this not also characteristic of non-Romamothers too? A mother's attachment to her children seems to be a social construction coming from a complex conjunction of factors, where the experience of violent stigmatization plays a central role.

Furthermore, whilst feminine specificities can be detected, it seems nevertheless to be the case that attachment to the children and intergenerational links characterize the men as much as the women and inter-individual and intergenerational proximity characterise many families:

> *"For us, the Roma, children stay at home. Even when the children get married, the parents still look after them. The Belgians, they leave them somewhere in the morning and they pick them up in the evening, and when the children marry, Belgian parents don't get involved in their affairs any more."* (F, 41, Slovakia)

In this respect we draw attention too to the risk of emphasising the question of Roma values (such as women's attachment to their children and the long-preserved umbilical cord between parents and children) and through this to obscure the framework of experiencing stigmatization, harassment and violence, which is far from being an exception. In a world perceived as being dangerous and hostile, the family logically constitutes the environment that offers comfort and protection. Strong family ties – of all sorts, affective, helping one another, commercial, symbolic – among many Roma are explained in large part by the tense relationships they have with the Gadje world.

The daily weight of the stigmatization of being a Rom mobilises, as the respondent from Kosovo explained, so much energy on the part of individuals that it is hardly surprising that school sometimes falls to the second level of priorities. Such energy is also deployed when the school itself is the scene of a daily struggle, consisting of hiding/uncovering/legitimizing one's origins. We could therefore ask ourselves whether living in such a "state of siege"[37] really leaves any place for envisaging more long-term studies and thinking about the children's future in terms of a formal school diploma. Roma parents understand perfectly well the strategic importance of institutionalized education for their progeny's future, but a reaction of being on one's guard limits this strategic aim, giving place instead to a defensive reaction and falling back on the family when faced with the symbolic violence of the bureaucratic system of the state. This violence and the fallback it arouses in return contribute to the distance felt towards the Gadje.

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35 This implies fatigue, feeding the baby on demand, difficult emotions to manage.

36 Since this episode, G. begs alone, her older daughter (currently aged 8) goes to school and the two boys stay at home with their father. She is still waiting for an answer to her request for regularization based on the necessity to provide a medico-social environment for her handicapped son.

37 The expression is used about the Roma by Luc de Heusch (1960)

3.3. The place of school in migratory journeys

We have already seen that in the parents' generation, journeys between several countries, various languages and different educational systems had their effect on a child's school career. S. (F, 46, Bosnia) told how, after moving from Antwerp to Doel and then to Liege, her son of 11 refused to go to school (R = Respondent, I = interviewer):

> R (sister/ daughter): In Doel, there were a lot of friends, there were a lot of Roma. He liked to go to there (school) a lot. There was also a teacher he liked a lot. He visited us and took him to school. He helped him to read and write and all that. But here he's not so keen to go, because here there are no friends, he knows no-one. And we too, we are not sure of staying here (in Liege).
>
> R (mother): I asked him to go to school, but he said no. he would go if we went back to Doel. (…)
>
> (The interviewer asks if the two children speak French)
>
> R: No, they don't speak French. He speaks Dutch very well, he (the younger brother) also speaks a little. For me too, it's difficult when I go to a shop to buy something, it's difficult, because I don't understand anything.

After learning English, French and German and having had good school results, one of the interviewers told us that, when she as very young, she had been accepted in a college that trained qualified nurses (some 12-13 years before). However, she had to give up school because

> "I had to go with my father who was leaving for Belgium. Could I have stayed there just to go to school? The question wasn't even asked. We were together, we had never been separated. My parents never stayed anywhere without us. The teachers were really sorry about it and they told my mother so, but that's how it was."

Changing your environment, friends, language, might be seen as gaining experience of diversity, but such changes can be extremely difficult for children, knowing that learning has to take place in an environment that builds self confidence, that encourages communication, etc. We can see that continuity in education (as much for studies as on the social level) does not constitute the principal factor in taking a decision that leads to departure. One can nevertheless ask oneself whether, under such conditions of instability, it is not preferable to stay together, as the interviewer quoted above leaves it to be understood. Do these parents really have the choice between precariousness and the risk of expulsion to a place that is no longer really their home (such as the native village in Bosnia that was left more than 15 years ago and maybe does not even exist any more)? Obviously war is not always the threat: it may take the form of a lack of resources with which to live (no agricultural land, no work, no redeployment possible in recycling activities or small business, etc.). Sometimes too, the threat may be that of recruitment for military service getting close, the fact of debt repayment, local intolerance for the religion practiced or the language spoken, a personal rivalry or health problems (cf the account given in the first chapter), or even, in the other direction of the migration, expulsion or the decision to leave the country.

The experience of all this change leads to precocious maturity:

> "I am 24, but I feel as if I've lived for 35 years.(…) Having been obliged to leave my country, well, they say that the Roma don't have any country, but it was nevertheless my country, from one year to the next, I felt as if my life had been turned completely upside down. At 16 I was a child who studied, with books and everything, and at 17, I was a refugee" a young man from Kosovo told us.

Several languages, several places of living also mean being placed between the devil and the deep blue sea of ethnic groups, which engage in warlike nationalism, or being a right out foreigner everywhere, as E. explained in the previous section. If one of the hidden objectives of the school programme is to make

a substantial contribution to the maturity of the individual, as far as the Roma are concerned, one finds that those interviewed do not consider school as necessary to acquire this maturity. School is in competition with the experience of life acquired during the migratory journeys, in early work for the family etc. This was expressed literally by one of the interviewers:

> *"If I didn't have the opportunity to finish school, I nevertheless participated in the school of life. And I think that I learned a lot of things that will always be of use to me, I learned a lot in my contacts with people".*

Acquiring several languages, the experience of life and early maturity means that the children often get ahead of their parents. For example, in some of the interviews it was adolescent children who translated the questions for their mother and, inversely, the answers for the interviewer. This is what happens too in relations with the school. This radically changes and may even inverse the parent-child relationship of authority. At the same time, it also contributes to a redistribution of knowledge inside the family in function of a logical sharing of resources, which is not familiar to most Gadje.

Aware of the need for a certain stability and cultural consistency (of language and cultural patterns) to integrate Roma children into the educational system, one of the Roma interviewers thought (without considering other aspects of the problem) that such integration would be easier in the country of origin:

> *"It's easier (to make the children attend school) for the Romanians, for the teachers I mean, they know them, they speak the same language, they live in the same communities, whilst here, the Belgian teachers, they are more used to the Moroccans and the Turks, they don't know the Roma. For example, if the Roma children didn't go to nursery school, this seems inconceivable to them."*

3.4. The place of school in the project of social success

Remunerated work, whatever that might be, is good to live (survive) according to N. (M, 25, Romania):

> *"All work is the same. I am ashamed of nothing, but I want to do something legal. That's what I want to tell the Belgian authorities: give us this chance, to have a job."*

Along the same lines, one of the interviewers said:

> *"The Belgians, when they apply for work, they look to see if they like the job, if it matches their training, but among us Roma, a job is a job, as long as it provides some money."*

This same interviewer made an interesting comparison between the issue of "studies" among the Gadje and that of "marriage" for the Roma:

> *"For us, marriage is as important as studies are for the Belgians. The Belgians want to have a good education, so for that they look for a good school, which means (later) a good job, a good future. It's the same for us regarding marriage. Choosing a good spouse, which means that he or she comes from a good, well-off family, is a guarantee for the future because a good spouse means being faithful, in other words, working hard and succeeding together."*

It should also be remembered that *rom* means married man, and likewise *romni* means married woman, which implies that the Roma are a community of married people. Marriage is crucial for Roma identity, and this explains in large part the fact that in many Romany groups, marriage takes place when they are young (or even very young, at the age of 12-13 years in previously studied villages in Romania[38]).

....

38   Iulia Hasdeu 2007

If it is clear that marriage and the family lie at the heart of social life among Roma groups, speaking specifically about marriage as an essential project in life, in the way this woman does, seems to us typically feminine. We shall return to this in the next chapter.

Men, on the other hand, speak rather about "widening their horizons". Astonishingly, one of the young men applied this vision indifferently to both men and women:

"You know, the Gypsy woman is closed. Her life happens inside the house. She cleans, washes, cooks, watches after the children and goes to bed in the night. In my eyes the woman and the man have to have the same life. She has to work too – because if you work you change your mind, you change your ideas, your inspirations, everything. She sees what another woman says, how she is dressed and so on." (M, 25, Romania, in English).

The issue of "modernity" reappears here but linked to an (ideal) equality between the woman and the man regarding work.

In response to the question of how the Roma foresee their children's educational and professional future, the answers are once more very vague. The women and the men interviewed mostly answered: *"I'll let them go to school as long as they want."* That probably meant that further education had not really been foreseen because both sometimes made this clear: *"I won't make them get married before. They should go to school until they are 18 years old."* The professional plans for children are formulated in very vague ways and the idea of a profession needing prolonged studies is considered bizarre:

Q: How do you see your children's future? What would you like them to become, what would you like them to do in the way of work?
A: I don't know what to say…I'd like my daughter to be a lawyer. (She laughs)
Q: Why are you laughing? Do you think..?
A: I don't know…Not real…
Q: Why not, if she continues school and she is a good pupil, why not?
R: (as if to put an end to the subject) Yes, whatever she wants…" (F, 27, Romania)

It is true that among the sample covered, apart from the two interns at the European Commission, the Roma teacher from Romania, two Roma men with degrees from Kosovo and a young Roma woman from Macedonia who is an interpreter, no other respondent had finished secondary school or begun university studies. One can consider that, apart from a few exceptions, social success does not rely on the certificates of further education as is the case for many in Gadje society. If, for the Gadje, formal diplomas function as titles of nobility (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970) in the acquisition of status and in social mobility, this does not seem to be the case among the Roma. Families do not need educational assets to acquire high social status within their community. In Gadje society, it is not so much having the status that is of interest, but rather the resources that this can procure for them. In this context, at the end of an interview with the young man from Kosovo, we had the following conversation with him:

Q: You think about things a lot and you are a very good analyst. Have you thought about taking up your studies again and going to university here in Belgium?
R: Firstly, having a profile of electro-mechanic acquired in Kosovo means nothing here. Also, going to university means four years. Who would look after my family during that time? You have to know what you want in life. And then, there are things that you don't learn at school.
Q: Yes, of course, there is the example of people who are illiterate but who can be wise. But you are already an intellectual in the way you think…Why not have a diploma?

R: What purpose would a diploma serve? Have a better job, a better salary? I already have a good job and a good salary. I am very happy.

Whilst all of the Roma are not illiterate, an implicit equivalence is established between "being uneducated" and "being Rom":

"My son is 26, he drives a lorry, he is level three in English and level two in computer programming. If you saw him and spoke to him, you would not say that he was a Gypsy." (M, 44, Romania)

4. BOYS AND GIRLS, MEN AND WOMEN – THE DIFFERENCE THAT MAKES *THE* DIFFERENCE

A central preoccupation for the research was to have a better understanding of Roma gender relationships in order to provide elements that could facilitate the implementation of means of support for the women. Questions were therefore asked regarding differences in the roles of men and women within the couple or their ideal life as a couple. We have also included in this chapter part of the analytical conclusions formulated on other occasions, because we believe that, despite the numerous differences that characterize variations between the various Roma groups, the question of gender is a constant on which rests a fair number of similarities.

4.1. Conjugal and parental roles

"To live in fidelity and understanding, work well and succeed together" said an interviewer mentioned earlier. As we stated above, we think that this awareness regarding the role of the couple (more than the marriage that unites two families and which creates economic and political alliances) is typically female. The respective interests of the man and the woman inside marriage are different. Among the Roma, the woman aims for a union and partnership of work; men, for their part, aim for a relationship of sibship with their brothers-in-law, a relationship that is also a long-term business relationship (Stewart 1997). This means that the women experience a tension between the conjugality to which they aspire and the kinship which retains them (Hasdeu, 2008; Olive, 2006). Let us examine specifically, in the couple, what the man does and what the woman does regarding the children. G. (F, 27, Romania), mother of three children said:

> *"If I am not at home, then what I do, he has to do. I mean regarding the children, because for the housework, I have no pretensions…the children, I mean, he has to look after them."*

After the study, an interviewer told us that where the husbands do not assume this responsibility, the women interviewed almost felt it was their responsibility to give a better image of them. It seemed that this was a strategy employed to save the couple's face in front of the interviewer, all the more so since she (the interviewer) was about the same age as them. According to this interviewer, this is due to the fact that customs have changed among the young generation and that there is now more sharing among young couples, between the husband and the wife, of the time devoted to the children. The interviewer told us about how things were shared in her own couple:

> *"When the children were small, I had two children in one year. I was so exhausted that I told him, you must look after them, they are your*

children too, I have to rest too. During the night, we took it in turns to sleep. They are our children, we must look after them together. And he still does it, he is at my sides, I am lucky. Now, he takes the children and he says sshh! Mummy has to rest, he goes out to the park or he stretches out on the bedroom floor and plays with them while I have a rest."

Even amongst the "emancipated" couples, which our interviewer considered to be part of the young generation, even where there is temporal sharing, it is not for this that authority is equitably distributed: if it is a question of behaviour, the mother inculcates behaviour, explains gently and the father reprimands, decides and takes disciplinary action, according to this interviewer. We consider, nevertheless, that this sharing is not an effect of generation as this young woman perceives it, but that it is a characteristic of couples living away from the extended family or where the woman often has activities outside the home to meet the family's needs[39]. One might also consider this vision of sharing as a typically female ideal (taken as reality) that leads one to imagine the couple as strengthened by the tension within the family, as explained above. All in all, if the education of the children is the responsibility of both parents, it is typically the women who formulate, and even claim, the sharing of this responsibility, whilst the men are more anxious to be recognised as having authority for decisions.

4.2. "But so much is expected of a young woman..." The condition of the Roma women

Our interest in understanding the female condition intrinsic to gender relationships and to community and interethnic relations also manifested itself in the questions regarding the differences between boys and girls regarding a school career.

We immediately noticed that girls have less schooling than boys and are less followed in their school career than the boys (F = female, M = male, I = interviewer):

F: We have three children. My son is 12 and I have twin girls aged 17. All three of them go to school.
I: Did they go to school in Bulgaria?
M: A bit.
F: The boy went until the 3rd year of primary school and the girls up to 2nd
I: And here, what year are they in?
F: I don't know.
M: He is in 4th, the girls I don't really know. (M, 43, F, 39, Bulgaria)

Why do the girls occupy second place regarding going to school? As we have already mentioned, the conjugal issue is at the centre of Roma preoccupations and comes before priorities of education and training in terms of priorities.

Q: The eldest, how old is she?
R: 12
Q: When do you think she will get married?
R: Well, I would say 17-18, but if she runs off with a boy, what could I do?
Q: Could she not go to school and be married at the same time?

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39   In other contexts it appears that it is within the couples most deprived of resources that there is more sharing – the higher the living standard, the more the woman is regulated in the domestic space whilst the man is busy outside the home. (Hasdeu, 2007)

R: For us, the Gypsies, it's rare…the men don't accept it…'Either you follow school or you follow me', that's what they say. (F, 28, Romania)

Whilst they recognize that the practice does not always correspond to the norm, all of those seen and heard during the research, irrespective of where they came from and their religion, agreed about the importance of girls' virginity at marriage. This control of female sexuality, and more broadly the control of women, goes together with the central issue of identity, notably being able to create married individuals and preserving other aspects regarding lifestyle – women being, as in other instances, the guardians of customs, the ones who transmit language etc.

Linked thus to the issue of conjugality, honour and respect also pass through the control of sexuality and in particular female sexuality. According to this way of thinking, amorous temptation and sexual harassment haunt every girl or woman outside the home, whilst a system of norms, bans and codes exist to protect them from this danger. This sexual integrity, whilst far from being specific to the Roma, is reinforced within the migratory context and in situations of greater marginality: the respect and honour that men are not given in a society that treats them as foreigners is recuperated in the system of family honour, which is rests on the control of women and becomes extreme.

For the Roma, as for other groups, more than a girl's virginity and a woman's chastity, this seems to be a sexual taboo – like an initiatory secret that polarises energies and binds social links. The parents thus consider that young people, and especially the girls, find themselves at school in a mixed environment regarding gender, where there is no shortage of amorous (sexual) challenges. Knowledge of the content and issues relating to sexual relations prior to marriage through (but not only) lessons of sexual education represents a transgression of this taboo and, implicitly, an attack on family morals and dignity regarding Roma values. For many families the solution for this is to shorten the education of their daughters and to guide them towards marriage from a very early age.

Young people whom we heard during the research think that such control should be substituted by self-control, without this undermining the central role of taboo:

"It's normal that a parent worries about the safety (sexual integrity, virginity) of his/her children (at school). And perhaps especially for the girls. But it's important that the parents talk to their children, that they have confidence in them, that the parents give their children the chance to decide for themselves if they are going to sin. I think that a girl has to learn to take care of herself, to say no to a boy." (F, 29, Romania)

We have already remarked that the women spoke a lot less and with much greater reticence than the men. One of the Roma interviewers explained this in relation to the apprenticeship of silence forced on women.

"For me, it was very difficult to persuade the women to speak. I remember that for one of them, whom I knew very well in fact, I had to insist for about two weeks before she accepted (…) Thanks to these interviews, I gained great experience regarding person to person relationships because among us, yes we discuss, but we don't have many opportunities to enter someone's life like that. I think that (Roma) women don't talk about themselves much. They are closed, they think 'if my husband, if my in-laws hear what I have said, or the police…' or whatever. They are fearful. But what made her (another respondent) express herself like that, was that she had grown up in Europe, in Germany, not in Romania, she got married to an Italian, she's different. But the others, sometimes with the mother-in-law at their side, they were afraid for their voice to be heard. Because, when you

leave home, your mother says (and then your mother-in-law says the same thing) 'be careful about what you say, you must never tell anyone what happens at home, what you live through with your husband and children'. And this apprenticeship gives its fruits if you like. Next, when your mother-in-law says that, she gives you more explanations: 'You mustn't do that'. Full stop. (…) A daughter-in-law tries not to anger the mother-in-law, the father-in-law, the husband. And out of fear of angering them and being criticised, she asks no questions and tries to be perfect, in her behaviour and in her dress. A good daughter-in-law does not speak, she listens, she looks down. The more obedient you are, the more you will be the best (…) That's what the Roma like. They adore going from one village to another to find the best daughter-in-law (…) The Roma women don't express themselves, even in their own homes. And then you wonder why these poor women are depressed or cardiac or paralysed at 40-50. Because they have shut up throughout their lives, they have always accepted everything without saying a word (…) That's why it is good that these girls go to school, to be surrounded by other children, to learn how to defend themselves, to face up to different situations. At home, a child learns good manners, but at school she develops, learns to put into practice what has been learnt at home. And the longer a girl stays at school, the more she will develop. Otherwise she stays with what she has learnt at home."

This explanation casts light on the relatively poor accounts given by the women we interviewed, whom we sometimes found perplexed at the mere idea of giving their opinion, of speaking about themselves or telling us about their daily lives.

Let us be clear about our position on this. In the literature on the Roma, there is a tendency to accentuate the egalitarian aspects of Roma groups (Eycken, 2006; Stewart, 1997; Sutherland, 1977; Williams, 1984). Yet, in the communities studied by these authors, egalitarianism was characteristic of the fraternal-like relationships *between men.* Going out to the bistro, discotheques, celebrating business successes are masculine activities. More broadly, this is the group or the whole network that seems to be marked by egalitarianism: "*Sharing work, food, the language, was thus a way of constantly taking care of each other, a way of constantly reinventing one's existence.* (Stewart 1997: 59) The research presented here, does not explore this egalitarian and equitable dimension between men and between families. Nevertheless, by presupposing its existence, we believe that we should at the same time pay attention to the asymmetry of the relationships between men and women which did indeed emerge from the interviews.

The characteristics that unite the women interviewed, despite their numerous differences, reflect perfectly this system of inequalities: a) all are responsible for the care (domestic and sometimes financial) of their families; and b) they worry specifically about family morality, for which they are the guarantors. All of this constitutes a heavy workload, a great deal of time, social pressure that maintains the system of gender hierarchies and a *status quo* regarding the control of women.

Women thus often feel intellectually inferior to their husband. B. (31, Romania) thinks that her husband is more intelligent than she is: she cannot read or speak (French), so he must know more than she does; it was he who enrolled their daughter at school, who takes the initiative for everything. The interviewer explained that this impression can be reinforced by an objectively better social integration for men:

"I saw that if the child isn't doing well at school, it's the father who takes the child to discuss with him. The father often speaks better French, it's he who goes out most, who knows people, it's he who will go to school to discuss things. I think that the mother should get more involved in the relationship with school, she should be more active, more present. But the problem is that she doesn't always know how to read or write to help the children. She has a hard time expressing herself."

As far as the housework is concerned, a frontier separates the sexes: the men do not touch the most tiresome and repetitive jobs necessary for the upkeep of the house:

> *"You know what women are like. The woman is the woman in the home, she takes care of the house, she prepares (looks after?) everything, she looks after the children. It's like that. It's our religion, it's our custom, do you understand? It's rare for a Gypsy woman to work outside the home. (My wife) She has never worked. She waits for me with the meals ready, she serves me the meal when I get home. She does the washing, the ironing. She has quite a lot of work at home."* (M, 37, Romania)

> *"For us, it's shameful for the men of the house to do the washing up or the ironing."* (W, 35, Romania)

It is important to note the way in which the man quoted above links culture and tradition to the condition of women and to an unequal relationship regarding duties.

The weight of domestic duties and the care of children are not negligible when there is a large family. The case of F. (36, Kosovo), with 6 children, all her dependents, seemed enlightening in this respect. Whilst she was known by social mediators as an 'open-minded woman, changing mentality', F. was in conflict with her eldest 16 year-old daughter who, according to F, would have to stop going to school (the reason for this centred around morality and the sex education lessons etc.). In answer to our question of whether her daughter helped in the home, F replied that, in fact, she helped a lot, because she (F) had been very ill at home and so the eldest daughter had had to take responsibility for the house. So if the daughters stop school relatively early, one should also find out whether the reason for this does not lay the exclusively female responsibilities for housework.

However, being a "woman at home" remains an ideal for the Romany women we interviewed. For B. (31, Romania), a clandestine beggar, having a *"calm and normal life"* meant her husband having a fixed job and revenue, that she took care of her three children at home, and that the children went to school. This was also the desire of women with a higher social position. It is why this social norm (whilst in practice being transgressed) is considered as a pillar of social life and is transposed into discourse as "For us, that's how it is". When all things are considered, this position reserved for women is the difference that makes *the* difference, i.e. a moral pillar which is the foundation of the Roma-Gadje difference in the eyes of the Roma. It is a Romany perspective on an aspect which, in reality, is not so different: among the Gadje, there is no equality either between men and women regarding domestic work.

Nevertheless, whilst domestic work among the Gadje (both housework and parenting) has a secondary status, which is often invisible because it is "naturally" done by women, among the Roma, such work seems to have the status of a real job, on an equal footing with that of the man. The difference between the work of a man and that of a woman seems to be a difference in results, not in nature:

> *"His work is to go to work and support the family, mine is with the children. Cleaning, preparing meals, accompanying the children to school, going to fetch them, and him, he has to work (to earn money)."* (F, 33, Romania)

In practice, however, contrary to a stereotyped representation, the Roma women are not confined to the domestic space. Some of them beg, sell flowers or newspapers, or tell fortunes (though more and more rarely). Others take care of administrative duties, become cultural mediators, some even become interns at the EU. They both intrigue and disturb a certain Roma ethos and the Gadje's expectations because they elude control and the normative image of the woman. This does not stop them from claiming Roma identity. Roma women only exceptionally have employment of the domestic type, because of the stigma attached:

"Once upon a time, I did housework for a woman, but when I told her that I was Gypsy, she very quickly, but without really saying so, managed to get rid of me." (F, 27, Romania)

Not doing hidden work[40], but on the contrary being very visible, Roma women become the target of looks and attitudes of rejection. We think it is this particular presence that intrigues and disturbs insofar as they literally occupy territories at the heart of the most "public" spaces. As we explained in the introduction, they are more visible.

If the women have a long experience of the public space, how can we explain their difficulties in expressing themselves as so clearly described by our interviewer? The explanation for this was given by a young man:

"When she begs, the woman is alone, she is not surrounded by other men with whom she would have any exchanges." (M, 28, Romania)

When the feminine presence is outside the home, the discursive repertory is coded and restrained: the woman is meant to earn money and not experience or deepen any social contact or build a relationship. This corresponds to what Eycken noticed regarding the *Vlach* Roma from the Czech Republic and Okely concerning the Gypsies in Great Britain. In our eyes, this over-visibility of the women and their difficulties in expressing themselves, although apparently contradictory, represent the key to a double domination: Roma and masculine[41] and Gadje and societal.

The quotations above also bear witness to the permanent suspicion of infidelity that hovers over women[42]. It is by demonstrating that they know how, and are able, to control themselves that women hope to be able to escape from such suspicion, gain the respect of their group and assert themselves as people. Thus virginity, chastity and fidelity become positive values, real forms of power for women in their environment. Attachment to religious principles reinforces these values that baptise the pedestal of family honour and, at the same time, very high feminine self-esteem[43]. A young woman is the window and the measure of this honour, as described by one of the interviewers:

"One expects a young man to support his family, that he brings home money for his wife and his children, that he does what is necessary for there to be everything (comfort) at home. That's all. But one expects so much from a young woman (details of behaviour). Even how she walks is observed, how she serves people, how she dresses, how she speaks. So many more things. It's for this reason that it's difficult to imagine having a Gadje daughter-in-law, for fear of her not knowing how to behave, for fear that, through her ignorance, she brings shame on the family, and a critical look will be given especially to the mother-in-law who has not educated her properly. The Gypsies would begin to talk. People are afraid of that."

As we have already observed, it's the status of daughter-in-law that is the most difficult to assume and it is the daughters-in-law who are the most controlled by rules and by violence. The following account shows the moral constraints, the amount of work and the obligation of submission expected of the daughter-in-

40 It should be noted that the legislative measures and public policies rarely target immigrant women who moonlight doing housework, babysitters or home carers. The state tends to discharge itself of its responsibilities towards these workers by closing its eyes to the practices that suit the favoured classes.

41 We have borrowed the notion of masculine domination from Pierre Bourdieu: a « habitus » maintained above all through « symbolic violence », a structure of thought embodied in individuals, «which confers the best share on the man » (Bourdieu, 1998: 39).

42 If the same suspicion hovered above a man, it would be for his glory, not his shame.

43 Thus Pentecostalism has given the Gypsy women encountered by Paloma Gay Y Blasco in Madrid (1997) new forms of power – within, of course, other constraints. They use religion to prevent their husbands from drinking, taking drugs and beating them.

law. If this normative system happily does not manage to break all of the women – and there are those who are not at all submissive – it is nevertheless true that the rules exist, they regulate and are maintained to create the subordination of women by men, thus providing the framework for the Roma's social lives:

"If you go to the Roma's like that, (it's) more strict, you can't say anything, you can't even say 'I'm pregnant' it's shameful. You can't say 'I've had a child'. If that ever comes out, you have to excuse yourself. No, as a Rom you have to pay attention the whole time to what you are saying. If you raise your child in an environment like that, you have to teach him or her everything, because otherwise he'll be the object of the family's shame and he will be excluded…Even if you don't agree, you tell him 'listen, we don't believe in this, but in front of the others, do this'. (…) And among the Gypsies, the woman has no power, she cannot decide…She doesn't have this independence to decide at its head…Gypsy women have no support, nothing, in this environment nobody can support her…She has to be careful of what she says and does the whole time. She can't even sleep, she gets up in them morning, she has to be quick, clean quickly, because the Gypsies come to visit, because you can't say, look, I don't have guests at this time of day, no, it's not done…A Romanian, what she'll say is 'sorry I don't have time this week, come and see me in a week.' How can I tell you? It's difficult to explain. The important thing is to know that for us, among the Gypsies, women are not independent. First of all, you see, women don't work! And if you have no financial independence…If she doesn't work, if she doesn't have any friends, if she knows no-one else, if she's not surrounded by other people, she is afraid if she does something wrong she will be all alone(…) For example, my father said to his daughter-in-law (a Gadjo), 'Get me a tea'. And she went in her pyjamas, you couldn't see her (body), but the idea is that if she was soiled during the night and she hadn't got washed…because that's how they think…So, she prepared the tea and she went in her pyjamas to give my father his tea. My father looked at her strangely and said to her 'So, you serve me my tea wearing your pyjamas? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? And what's more, the tea is cold!' And she replied 'But I couldn't check whether the tea was hot or cold with my finger could I?' That was quite something…You don't have the right to answer back, the Gypsy woman, if someone makes a remark to her, she has to submit to that person and lower her head and…A daughter can reply to her father because she's his daughter, but a daughter-in-law…she must represent the best…

Q: But you too, you were the daughter-in-law of your parents-in-law once weren't you? How was that?

R: Short! There were 20 people in the house, 20 pairs of jeans to wash by hand, out in the cold, in the courtyard… He (the husband) went out with other women, everyone respected him because he had several women, but I had to keep quiet, he beat me, my father-in-law pretended to discipline him, but he did nothing, my mother-in-law did nothing (in the house) because it was the daughter-in-law's job…I think that of all the Gypsy people, the daughter-in-law has the worst destiny (…) For example, when you get up in the morning, you are the first to get up, before everyone else to prepare the food, do the housework etc. So it's only at night that you have any peace… The daughter-in-law has to be ready to do everything. And if you want to live on your own, you can't, because the parents-in-law tell you 'No, you have to wait and save.' But you can't save because the money goes to the clan…And everyone takes advantage of it… For instance, my sister-in-law received family allowance for her child, but it was my father who kept the money. And she told him at a certain moment 'Hang on, don't take my money any more, it's my child's money.'…Oh, la la! She really got it then, she was covered in blood, he beat her terribly hard…Yes, we laugh, but our men are really wicked, if they are angry, you have to hide, because they'll kill you… (…) Now, it should be said that we don't just have one or two children, we have seven, and as well as that you have to clean, prepare the meals. When can you find the time to look after all of these children? Because you can't leave things until tomorrow, because you live with your parents-in-law, where the Gypsies come to visit… (F, 24, Romania)

If the young woman, and above all the daughter-in-law, is responsible for the family setting, destined to gain prestige in an on-going competition with other families, her appearance, her behaviour and her ability to know her place are permanently judged. Dress is one of the symbolic vectors of this control and self-control:

> *Q: Does the Gypsy woman have to dress in a certain way?*
>
> *R: Yes, yes, like that, with skirts and headscarves on your head. But with real (long) skirts, not modern skirts, minis, like the fashion of today, and certainly not trousers, I would never wear trousers. For a married woman with children, that's not possible."* (F, 33, Romania)
>
> *"How should I say? When you aren't married, you can wear what you like, because you haven't got a husband, you are at your parents'... But when you marry a man, everyone is against you wearing trousers, everyone, your mother-in-law, your father-in-law, your brothers-in-law, everyone!"* (F, 27, Romania)

This strictness about clothing, which is often picked up and reinforced by customs linked to attending a religious institution (in particular the Pentecostal Church), is supposed to guarantee that the woman does not show the shape of her body, thereby provoking men's desires, which, in the eyes of our Pentecostal respondents, would be the case if trousers were worn. Nevertheless, trousers are seen by some as a key element of the "modernity" of cultural patterns, and as a strategy for being more invisible, because those wearing them then look more like Gadje women. We met some young Roma women who claimed to have access to this Gadje fashion and to a sort of distinction, saying *"We are not such backward Gypsies", or "I was wearing trousers when my husband met me, he must accept that I continue to wear them"* or *"If I wear a long sweater above the trousers, you can't see my behind"* or *"Look, isn't your bottom more visible if you wear a tight skirt than if you wear normal trousers?"* or *"At home, I always wear a skirt and I only wear trousers when I go out."*

Women must therefore develop so as to present themselves in an arena of competitive and normative female affirmation that occurs within the register of the roles of "daughter of", "daughter-in-law of", "wife of". Study is only marginally part of this capitalisation, the most important element being the accumulated family prestige, the capacity to attract favourable judgements and the capacity of the young women to be purveyors of the family, notably being able to manage in the public space in order to earn money for the family.

In this respect, attention should be paid to the accent our respondents placed on the qualities and faults of a woman in relation to fulfilling the role of daughter-in-law, wife or mother: if, when she is young, she falls under the charm of a boy, she is too naïve, too timid or has not learned enough to defend herself. If she remains silent, it is because she lacks the skills to communicate, if she does not keep quiet, she is too rebellious and lacking in respect. If, on the other hand, she succeeds well in this daily test, it means that she is not afraid to become docile according to the demands of in-laws or a husband:

> *"Only a woman who is not sure of herself will be afraid to be a daughter-in-law. She has no self-confidence, she does not feel prepared."* (F, 29, Romania)

It is thus not only inferior schooling to that of men that is responsible for the discrepancy between men and women, but in large part the delicate position of young women in a system of masculine domination (exercised of course not only by the men, but also by the older women such as the mothers and mothers-in-law). This system, the male-female hierarchy is generalised across a large majority of societies through time and space, although it is very differently accommodated from one society to another (Héritier, 1996).

Within this system of hierarchies, women nevertheless occupy a central place, through the bias of aspects that directly concern them: in certain Roma communities, women are the guardians of ritual purification, through the application of a complex series of purification rules[44], they are the main purveyors of the home, they mediate between the world of the Roma and that of the Gadje. This central place occupied by Roma women cannot, however, question masculine authority nor the gender system that confers on the male a symbolic value that is always greater than that of the woman. We believe that, despite a certain autonomy and affirmation among the women (Eycken, 2006; Okely, 1983; Stewart, 1997), the Roma family structure is of the patriarchal type. Judith Okely (1996) underlines the necessity of distinguishing between "submission" and "subordination", between rebellion and revolution: if the Gypsy women studied were hardly submissive, it did not mean that they were not subordinated. Thinking about the power of women should not blind one to this structural hierarchy.

One can also understand why it is in the interests of the young woman to count on the couple and, eventually, to part from the in-laws. It is nice to be able to express oneself, as the interviewer cited above said, yet without this female affirmation shaking the whole system[45]. What is really important in our eyes, is that Roma women manage to avoid the generalised male control (father, father-in-law, brothers, mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, etc.) by heavily investing in the couple (Hasdeu, 2008). In general, one can say that a permanent tension between conjugality and kinship damages Roma patriarchy, which is very different from that of Mediterranean societies for instance.

An observation that emerged from the interviews is that Roma women tend to be made and make themselves individually responsible for their occasionally difficult situations and this was true even in the most analytical responses we were given. There is, once more, nothing surprising about this, because this type of personal guilt feeling is very widespread among the Gadje too.

One might ask oneself whether the Roma are not more egalitarian than many Gadje regarding men's and women's responsibilities towards their children. We saw (as explained above), that the Roma women interviewed tend to make their men aware of their responsibilities in the education of their children by giving them jobs of caring and looking after the children.

These clarifications taken from an anthropology of Roma and Gypsy groups seemed to us to be necessary in order to define the critical importance of women, both for the Roma and the Gadje. To conclude this section, we should like to draw attention to the fact that the approach which consists of pointing the finger at masculine domination among the Roma is, when all is said and done, pernicious, because it more often than not goes together with an attitude in which we, the Gadje, set ourselves up in an egalitarian society and as saviours of the oppressed Roma women[46]. Such a perspective would be unaware of the reality experienced by Roma men and women, the way in which they both claim different competencies and

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44   *Marimé, maghedo, and spurcat are words that define the ritual pollution among certain Roma: menstruation, sexual relations, giving birth, the dead, are all dirty. According to some interpretations, the Gadje are dirty too. The separation pure/impure is found in the human body where the upper part (notably the mouth) is pure and the lower part (notably the sexual organs) are dirty. Women, who are seen as being more impure than men, are responsible for respecting the rules of ritual purity, such as separate laundry of the clothes covering the upper and lower body. Not all Roma are aware of this system of representations and practices. Our study has not covered these questions.*

45   *This is exactly what Bordieu shows regarding the Kabyle society (1972): women's power does not go against the matrix of domination because they are not exercised in the same spheres or spaces, etc.*

46   *Thirty years of post-colonialist studies argue solidly in favour of this idea.*

specific modes of autonomy and, on the other hand, the paternalism to which we concede in adopting this point of view. This in no way means that we can deny the difficult position of the Roma daughter-in-law, nor the violence which she suffers, but the injustices, exploitation and violence[47] exerted against women are not a phenomenon unique to the Roma. When our interviewer commented that "our men are bad", one should not be led to understand that the others (the Gadje) are not – masculine domination is not found in particular among the Roma or among other minorities. As Christine Delphy points out, *"We must in particular banish from top to bottom the premise of western superiority, because it leads to two different but equally dangerous postures. The first consists of demanding that the "other women" follow strategies developed from our own position, preventing them from starting from their own position. (…) The other, moves logically from this presumption of superiority to postulate that our women are better off."* (Delphy, 2006: 80)

At the same time, it seems to us unavoidable that we question the structural mechanisms of domination. Through homology one can consider that the delicate position of Roma women regarding masculine domination is similar to the position of the Roma within Gadje society (and to all groups dominated by a dominant group): they (the dominated and the dominating) have appropriated the ideas of the dominating in relation to their own need to be dominated. This is what explains the Roma's self-definition by the negative (here the lack of cultural capital) according to the criterion of hierarchical organization between the Gadje and the Roma in relations between the two societies:

> *"The Roma are different from the Gadje because they are not very educated, they have no vocabulary, they can't speak very well, they have no other knowledge than that which they hear within the family." (M, 37, Romania)*

The paternalist and condescending vision that the Gadje have of the Roma is not without its effect on the latter, who then use it on their own account: *"The Roma are used to not understanding things", "the Roma don't understand what happens to them","* the Roma always need some help. You don't have to hesitate, even if it's difficult with the Roma because sometimes they're like children', commented the interviewers. In other respects, adopting the point of view of the dominant group is a component of symbolic violence[48].

The comments given above seem to us to be important when considering the mothers' role in the children's schooling. Already, in the consultation day organized by the King Baudouin Foundation, one of the Roma women participating, who was intrigued, had commented, *"Why only (talk about) the mothers? You have to ask the fathers too, because the woman isn't alone when decisions about the children are taken."* However the comments of the Roma women mentioned in this section show that whilst they have a key place in Roma self-assertion, the woman (and especially the young woman) is linked through definition to a system of complex relationships from which she cannot - and does not want to – isolate herself, through fear of finding herself alone, ostracised and excluded. This is in line with numerous anthropological studies on Gypsy populations across Europe (Gay y Blasco, 1997; Eycken, 2006; Okely, 1996; Stewart, 1997; Williams, 1984).

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47   With the exception of the respondent mentioned earlier, the Roma women who took part in our study did not raise the subject of physical violence. We refer here above all to symbolic violence.

48   Symbolic violence corresponds to the legitimacy of being in a dominant position.

5. THE INTEGRATION OF THE ROMA IN BELGIUM

5.1. A brief description of the institutional fabric and legal framework in Belgium[49]

Competencies relating to immigration, asylum and integration in Belgium are shared between the federal and regional governments. Immigration policy, especially that regarding entry, residence and norms relating to the employment of foreigners are a competency of the federal state. The principal legislative instrument governing public policy regarding immigration is the law of 15 December 1980 relating to entry to the country, residence, settlement and the removal of foreigners. Asylum policy is part of this framework. The main departments responsible for the execution of asylum policy are the Office of Foreigners, the Commission for Refugees and Stateless People, the Council for Foreigners' Disputes and the Fedasil Agency. Competency regarding the policy for the reception and integration of immigrants was formally attributed to the regional governments in 1980[50], but two remarks should, however, clarify the formal competency of the regions in this regard. Firstly, competency regarding the policy of providing help to people, including immigrant reception and integration was split up in French-speaking Belgium[51]. These competencies were transferred from the French Community to the Walloon Region and the Commission of the French Community of the Brussels-Capital Region[52], each of which, since 1993, has developed its own public policies. Secondly, even if the federal state no longer has any specific competency for this policy of reception and integration, it remains competent for those matters where its impact on immigrant integration is important. Thus, the constitution determines the federal legislator's competence for legislation regarding nationality and the granting of political rights. This is where the policy of integration in Belgium originated. The 1980s saw the start of numerous modifications in the legislation relating to nationality that facilitated the acquisition of Belgian nationality. These modifications constituted in Belgium the reply to the claim for immigrants' right to vote (Jacobs, 1998). Federal legislation setting out to curb racism, xenophobia and ethnic and religious discrimination is also a competency of the federal state. The Centre for Equal Opportunities and

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49   Pages 63 to 68 (Section 5.1) have been written by Ilke Adam. For a more detailed description of integration policies of the Belgian federated entities and the history of sharing competencies regarding matters of immigration and integration in Belgium, see: Adam, 2009; Van de Putte and Clément, 2000.

50   Art.8 of the special law of 8 August 1980.

51   Although the decision on transfer had been taken in 1993, it essentially became operational on 1st January 1994.

52   Art. 3, 7° of the Decree of the French Community of 19 July 1993, which attributed the exercise of certain competencies of the French Community to the Walloon Region and to the Commission of the French Community.

the Fight against Racism was set up in 1993 within the framework of this competency. Apart from the struggle against racial discrimination, it was also, from its beginning, given the mission (among others) of dialogue regarding integration. Following the European Directive[53] and the general anti-discrimination law of 25 February 2003[54] that came into force, the competencies of the Centre were widened to encompass other forms of discrimination[55].

A real desire to see immigrant minorities integrated began to make itself felt from the 1980s, and this formed around two principles: individual integration through the acquisition of Belgian nationality, and the fight against poverty and the exclusion of immigrant peoples. Within this vision, "immigration" goes together with "social deprivation" and constantly hesitates between "assimilation" and "the development of a multicultural society". (Rea, 1993, 2003)

The real institutionalisation of immigration policy in Belgium dates from 1989, with the creation of the Royal Commission on Immigrant Policy (RCIP). The creation of this institution and its activities made a deep impression on the policy of integration in Belgium. The Commission was essentially responsible for '*the examination and proposal of measures needed regarding the issue of immigrants'*[56] for a period of four years. It examined and recommended, whilst the government retained the power of decision. By its strong denunciation of the policy of return followed up until then by the government, the RCIP played an important role in public acceptance of the definitive presence of immigrants in Belgium. Its normative definition of the notion of integration also made an essential political contribution. This definition enjoyed broad consensus, although some authors have reproached it for not having made a choice between the various models of integration. From then on, it oriented the policies of integration (Adam, 2009).

From the second half of the 1990s, Flemish policy towards 'immigrants' was broadened into a policy for 'ethno-cultural minorities'[57]. This broader group is defined as '*all allochtones, refugees, nomads and foreigners who do not fall within the previously-cited groups who are residing illegally in Belgium and who seek first entry help because of their precarious situation'*. 'Nomads' are defined as '*persons of a nomadic culture who reside legally in Belgium and who live or have lived according to their tradition in caravans, especially autochtones and Gypsies, as well as those who live with these persons or are first generation descendents."* Roma peoples can, according to their situation, be classified into the four categories mentioned above. A specific public policy is, nevertheless devoted to them, given their nomadic nature. This is essentially a policy of providing sites and measures of intercultural mediation..

Belgian Gypsies are considered as "allochtones" if at least one of their parents or grandparents was born outside Belgium[58], as for other categories of persons of foreign origin. However, according to the

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53   The Council's Directive 2000/78/CE of 27 November 2000 on the creation of a general framework in favour of equality of treatment regarding work and employment.

54   Abolished by the law of 10 May 2007

55   Notably discrimination based on sexual orientation, civil status, birth, age, religious and philosophical convictions, current or future state of health, any handicap or physical characteristic

56   Art.2 of the Royal Decree of 7 March 1989.

57   And this since the implementation of the Strategic Plan of Flemish policy regarding ethnocultural minorities. The legal basis for this categorization of target groups is the adoption of the Decree of 28 April 1998, relating to the Flemish policy regarding ethnocultural minorities.

58   Art 2 § 1 of the Decree of 28 April 1998.

categorisation used by social workers, "nomads" (who no longer travel, but live in caravans on parking lots) are divided into three sub-groups: Flemish Travellers, Manouches who speak sometimes French and sometimes Dutch, and Roma, who speak Romany and French. Some of the Gypsies and Roma have had Belgian nationality for several generations. If it is true that frontiers exist between these three sub-groups, it is also true that the label "allochtone", used only for the Gypsies (Manouches and Roma), creates an addition division and contributes undeniably to the marginalisation of the latter in Flemish society. It is on this terrain (and not only that of "culture") that recently arrived Roma meet the Belgian Roma and Manouches, because all share the condition of being "domestic foreigners" (Asséo, 1994).

Flemish minorities policy is endowed with the means for integration at regional, sub-regional and local levels: the 'Vlaams Minderheden Centrum' (Flemish Minorities Centre), provincial integration centres, local integration centres (in Antwerp and Ghent), local authority integration departments as well as local branches (Carewijn, Ouali, 1998). These institutions implement the policies of emancipation, first entry help and emergency reception. The previous Vlaams Overlegcentrum Woonwagenwerk (Flemish Caravan dwellers Consultation Centre) was absorbed, following the implementation of the 1998 Decree, by the Flemish Minorities Centre supporting the integration centres in their activities for nomadic people[59]. The 1998 Decree also provided for units specialised in work relating to the specific issue of nomadic peoples to be integrated into the centres for integration. The Flemish government has recently decided to change the decree. What is new is that the Minderhedenforum, the spokesperson for ethno-cultural minorities in Flanders and Brussels, has been made responsible for the empowerment and participation of nomadic peoples. The Minderhedenforum provides support principally for (federations of) migrants' organizations (such as the Ons leven association) to enable them to organize themselves better and so that their participation is strengthened.

Without abandoning its multicultural policy, Flanders has, since 2003, initiated a policy of obligatory civic integration (*inburgering*)[60]. Since April 2004, most non-European newly arrived immigrants are obliged to follow Dutch lessons (180 hours) and civic guidance (*maatschappelijke oriëntatie*). Through the new Decree of 14 July 2006 on civic integration, the target of this policy has recently been broadened and the sanctions to be applied have been modified. Moreover, all those following the course of civic integration have, from now on, to pay a guarantee and sometimes pay for their own language lessons. In the near future former immigrants and Belgians of foreign origin[61] will also be required to follow language courses or civic orientation if they are unemployed, receiving official minimum income or have applied for social housing. Most of the Roma population are thus the object of obligatory civic integration. The policy of civic integration is also applied by Flemish institutions in the bilingual region of Brussels Capital, but it allows newly arrived people to choose whether they register for this or not.

Wallonia also has a network of regional centres for integration, following the 1996 Decree covering the integration of foreigners and people of foreign origin. This Decree authorises the creation of regional integration centres for foreigners, which have the mission of promoting cultural, economic and social

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59   Roma associations have thus been supported in Flanders (Ons leven, for instance, in St Niklaas) by VROEM or the minorities policy.

60   Decree of 28 February 2003.

61   Belgians born abroad and having at least one parent born abroad.

participation among immigrants. The implementation itself is left to local interpretation. Integration policy in the Walloon region is delegated almost entirely to these institutions, which are private associations that enjoy public support. In other words, local initiatives of social development targeting immigrants are subsidised. Those targeted by this Decree are limited to foreigners and Belgians of foreign origin who are in Belgium legally. Foreigners who are present illegally and asylum seekers are explicitly excluded. In 2000, the minister responsible for integration was also granted, at his request, responsibility for the reception of Travellers. This policy was subsequently elaborated around two axes: firstly to encourage communes to provide temporary parking financed by regional government and, secondly, support for the communes through the creation of a Travellers' Mediation Centre in Wallonia (Ahkim, 2004), which was the result of a project conducted by the Intercultural Action Centre of Namur[62]. The Mediation Centre provides information about Travellers and acts as mediator between Travellers and local authorities during the creation of a reception area and during their temporary stays. It also provides the resident population with information about the Travellers and acts as mediator in the event of conflict with local residents. It also supports Travellers' associations in their various undertakings and in the conception of projects (Ahkim, 2004).

Despite the willingness of the Walloon legislator to implement positive discrimination in favour of promoting equal opportunity, no steps have been taken to give this notion any content. The budget allocated for this project has also remained rather modest. In the absence of any specific measures, generalist social policies are considered as essential tools for improving participation of immigrants in the social, cultural and economic life of the community.

In Brussels, the French Community Commission has developed its own integration policy since 1994. Between 1994 and 2004, it subsidized various projects of integration and communal living, whose coordination was entrusted to local authorities. This policy was organized around three programmes based on yearly circulars: 'Integration and cohabitation', 'Social integration' and 'Young people's summer'. In 2004, the vote on the decree of 30 April 2004, which brought together these three programmes, marked the institutionalisation of the policy and of the changes in its organizational framework. By basing this decree on the notion of 'social cohesion', the politicians deliberately suppressed all reference to immigration and integration. On the other hand, it is activities in neighbourhoods considered to have socio-economic difficulties that are favoured. In these neighbourhoods it is the entire population that is considered as the target group for the policy, even though, in practice, it is people with an immigrant background who are the main users. For the first five years (2006-2010) priority has been given to providing school support, to tackling illiteracy, providing access to new technologies, to the reception of new immigrants and, in particular, activities for learning French, intergenerational projects and the emancipation of women.

Across the three regions of Belgium, there are a number of charitable associations that take a specific interest in the Roma, notably those specialised in outreach work and the Family and Young People services. Several Roma associations or bodies providing support for them have been created including VROEM vzw[63] (in Hasselt), Amaro Kher (in Ghent), Opré Roma (Ghent), Romano Dzuvdipe (Sint-Niklaas), La Voix

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62   The project saw the light of day on 1st September 2001. The Centre for Mediation for Travellers in Wallonia was officially created on 21 October 2003 (Ahkim).

63   Vlaamse vereniging voor Voyageurs Roms, Roma en Manosjen.

des Roms (Liege) and Roma Phu (Brussels). Their activities usually tend to be centred on well-known people who have devoted a great deal of thought to strategies for integrating the Roma.

As far as the educational policies of the two main linguistic Communities are concerned, some measures have specifically concerned children of other ethnic origins. The two Communities have created 'bridging classes' or 'reception classes' which initially take care of newly arrived pupils, before they are integrated into the ordinary classes. Both Communities have also adopted positive discrimination programmes that grant supplementary subsidies to schools where there is a large proportion of underprivileged children. They have likewise adopted policies regarding discrimination in enrolling children for school. It should be noted that children whose parents are here illegally can be enrolled at school quite normally.

Despite a decentralised educational system (which is different from that in France, for instance), which covers both public and private (mostly Catholic) establishments, as well as networking with other public services and associations, the reality of the figures shows that by the end of primary school, the gap in educational performance is three to four times greater among allochtones than among Belgians[64]. In Flanders, in neighbourhoods with a high concentration of allochtones, schools are described (with a certain ease of language) as being "100% black", where scholastic achievement is below that of other schools and where social and integration problems are particularly worrying for social workers.

The government is also becoming aware of the fact that, in addition to their status as foreigners, which they share with other immigrants, for the Roma there is also the status of being on the fringes of society. In 2002, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg condemned Belgium for having deported in 1998 several Slovak Roma families seeking asylum, without having respected the time that would have enabled them to appeal against the refusal to grant them asylum. This event, a "collective expulsion of foreigners" raised awareness among politicians and Belgian civil society of the presence of the Roma and the difficulties they encountered regarding housing, access to care and integration of their children into the educational system, as well as the racist and anti-Gypsy dimension that existed in police and judicial practices. From that moment, a series of associative activities and political measures were established to support the Roma in Belgium.

Even before a series of reactions against begging appeared in the public domain, some of which proposed punishment measures for parents accompanying minors who were begging, numerous associations had already paid attention to the need to ensure improved educational integration for the Roma children "who should not be in the street". These associations contrast the social solution (the educational integration of the children), which they themselves support, with the legal and repressive solution (a law banning begging) recommended by some public figures[65].

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64 VMC quoted by the Foyer (2004).

65 Lorne Walters (2005) - http://www.observatoirecitoyen.be/IMG/pdf/IntolerableTolerance4_2_.pdf and the proposal for a solution aimed at banning begging by minors under the age of 16 and their being given educational and social support proposed by Mr Denis Ducarme and Mr Jean-Pierre Malmendier, Belgian Chamber of Representatives, 11.04.2007.

5.2. Forms of integration

In our opinion, whilst considering schooling for Roma children as the solution to the problem of integrating the Roma, we must also take into account the Roma's history, which shows us that many Roma children were brought up in families perceived as dangerous because they were asocial (as was the case of the Roma held in French and German internment camps in the 1930s, but also the Roma in Switzerland and Sweden, and this up until the 1980s). The eugenics influence also left its mark on the educational policies of Central European countries, which was added to the old assimilatory policy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire: on the basis of selection used by psychologists, Roma children have been (and in certain places still are) systematically placed in special schools (intended for mentally handicapped or retarded children). At the present time, such schools are mostly Roma and contribute to racially segregated education. Still more recently, in 2004, the Slovakian ambassador to the European Commission proposed that Gypsy children be taken away from their families in order that they might be re-educated (ERIO, cited by CODE, 2004: 191). Nevertheless, since 1990, European and American institutions have been financing educational projects in Eastern Europe designed to close the gap between the Roma and the Gadje: the training of Roma teachers, school mediators for the communities, school curricula that integrate cultural elements of the Roma[66], positive discrimination for places in secondary schools and universities. It is perhaps too soon to evaluate the results of these programmes[67] because, if one was to make an assessment, one would find that the number of Roma holding formal diplomas and qualifications is still very small. As we pointed out, society in these countries remains very segregated along the lines of class and ethnicity. Thus, the distance of the Roma from the social factors that legitimate diplomas is not without a link to the negative experience endured in the educational environment: violence from the teachers, stigmatization in the classroom and so on.

This history of rejection was brought alive by the insistence of the people interviewed in Belgium on the question of status. In many of the interviews, references made to the need for a political status which would furnish them with greater security, dignity and stability was clear:

"Just give us a chance" said a young Roma father.

"If people's status improves, if they are given the right to stay, the right to receive family allowances and social help, then the stress disappears and they (the Roma) can progress, send their children to school, learn French or Dutch, find work" said an interviewer.

The Roma we heard during the research sometimes expressed a rejection of the notion of "integration" in favour of that of "participation":

"Integration. I don't like this word. I'm a Rom and I live in Bulgaria, that's my country, to what do I have to be integrated? I want to PARTICIPATE ». (F. Roma EU intern, aged 26, Bulgaria)

The same sort of idea was expressed by the Director of the Travellers' Mediation Centre in Namur:

"Integration seems to me to have too many semiological limits. Gypsies are part of our society, they are part of our social body just like the toes are part of the human body, unless being part is a privilege…"

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66 *These elements often have a stereotyped and folkloric profile: Indian origin, journey in a caravan, dance and songs around the camp fire.*

67 *There are numerous Internet sources of information about the Roma on this subject (circumstances, progress in support projects providing education for the Roma, Roma NGO networks by country). See especially the REI's (Roma Education Initiative) 2006 report from the Open Society Institute of Budapest http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei/Documents/REI%20Final%20 Report_Final%20Full%20Report.pdf, as well as the national reports on the PNUD site concerning the Roma: http://roma.undp.sk/*

The words of the Roma, forced to wander from place to place both geographically and politically, are astonishingly realistic when asked to relate the really difficult situation that they experience in not being recognized:

> *"Even though I was born there, Romania does not recognize me as one of its citizens. I am not a Romanian citizen, I am not a German citizen, I am nothing at all, so now I have to prove that I am nothing at all. And automatically, if you don't belong to a country, you are stateless, which means you have no papers, no country. So I am stateless, but I have to wait to go before the court to be recognized by Belgium as being stateless. In the mean time, I have no rights in Belgium, I don't have the right to reside here, to work, to have a mutuelle, nothing at all."* (F, 24, Romania)

This woman, the same who had been to three schools to enrol her daughter, wants, like so many other Roma parents, her child to escape from this condition of being a fugitive, of being "nothing at all".

For some of the Roma interviewed, integration meant judicial recognition of their fringe status, through access to an improved political status. Such was the case for the Roma from Romania and Bulgaria, who experience the contradictions brought about entry of their respective countries to the European Union.

The question of status is somewhat different for the Kosovan Roma of Sint-Niklaas, who obtained residence permits following recognition of their having refugee status. Some of these Roma have been in Belgium for about ten years. Most of them live with the help of social security and only a few of the young men under the age of 35 (10-15% out of a population of some 1,000 people) have been able to benefit from a work programme (manual labour, renovation, public works) within the context of short-term (one year) contracts.

Ambivalences are not in short supply. If schooling bears the weight of family souvenirs of poor treatment by the Gadje, if it is affected by migratory journeys, if it is not part of a strategy of social success and if it favours plans for early marriage, it is nevertheless seen by some Roma as the *sine qua non* of integration necessary for their stabilization in Belgium:

> *"If my children do not go to school, they will not be integrated here as Belgians, they will stay Romanians of Roma origin. I don't want my children to live any longer with this label and going into an office and someone saying "Oh, Roma!" This doesn't mean that I want them to hide their origins. No, you must respect tradition, religion and everything, you must affirm your origins, but you also have to be like the others."*

For this interviewer, schooling is a tool of apprenticeship for citizenship that enables you to speak the country's language(s), know about its government and be like the non-Roma, whilst still being a Roma.

Recognition and engagement go together and, in this respect, one of our respondents was critical of the Roma ethnocentrism which was against citizen commitment:

> *"Because we are…we are not backwards, we are too concentrated on what we want! Us, us, us! The others don't count! So here in Belgium we don't take any interest in their politics, we know the name of the social worker but we don't know the name of the King… and I think that that this is important, irrespective of your nationality, to take an interest in what is going on around you… and I think that we, the Gypsies, apart from us, there's nothing (in French) that's what I think."* (F, 24, Romania)

But, we might ask, is this not the situation of lots of first-generation migrants, whatever their origin? Is this not also the manifestation of strong resistance to political engagement that is characteristic of people from ex-communist countries because of a distance from public life excessively politicised during their

childhood? Certainly, school and education seem to play a crucial role in both senses: recognition and engagement[68]. However, we consider that, as a general rule, the state and society should offer and ensure recognition at the same time as engagement is demanded.

The impression we had during the interviews was that the Roma we interviewed believe that their children's schooling ensues from improved recognition as a citizen. What happens when this conception comes face to face with institutional practices of integration?

In Wallonia, the institutional approach to Roma integration, for which the **Travellers' Mediation Centre** in Namur is responsible, is guided by the idea of consultation and intercultural communication:

> *"You have to allow requests, needs, problems to germinate progressively (…) With regard specifically to schooling, our role is not one of control, and even less of repression, but rather one of supporting the families as soon as there is a problem, being aware of the economic and administrative insecurity in which they most often find themselves… Our role is not to force parents to send their children to school. They are a people who do not express themselves in words in public. We respect what they have to say and the form it takes. We are not going to express ourselves on their behalf. But we do try to create the conditions that enable their opinions to emerge."* [69]

For several years, the Centre has supported and trained departments and associations such as Fedasil, the League for Education, NGOs from the Help for Young People sector. Insofar as the methodology of intervention with the Roma is concerned, since September 2007, the Centre intervenes more intensively with the Roma from Central and Eastern Europe, in the diversity of their national origins and in problematic areas (getting help with social assistance, looking for a job, career advice and training, the fight against discrimination, cultural expression and the support of Roma associations).

Flemish institutions leading projects of educational integration, however, consider that this integration does not have to wait for the legal steps and procedures aiming to secure a status, but should begin as soon as the Roma arrive in the Flemish Community. Education is regarded as an emergency:

> *"We aspire to provide a real service for the Roma, encouraging the parents to get their children into school, creating partnership networks to get to grips with urgent problems. You have to deal with all of the problems that prevent children from going to school."* [70]

The Flemish centres for integration concentrate on obligatory schooling. This latter appears to be characterised by a certain legal ambiguity (the associations demand greater clarity regarding the sanctions applied in the case of non-respect of this obligation). This accent on obligatory schooling sometimes transforms itself into coercion which risks stigmatising: *"PINA-18[71] links the granting of family allowances[72] to attending school, an approach that is also practiced by some CPAS in the Brussels Region."* (the CODE, 2004, 111)

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68 *If, overall, the social benefits of education in health and in civic and social involvement are obvious, the statistical data are edifying only for health. It is much more difficult to model the relationship between (school) education and civic and social education, the latter being influenced not only by the number of years studied, but also by the curriculum, the philosophy of the establishment, the types of apprenticeship, the sort of work done in class (individually or as a group). See in this respect Understanding the social impact of education, OECD, 2007.*

69 *Discussion with Ahmed Ahkim, Project Leader at the CMGV (03.07.2007)*

70 *Discussion with Koen Geurts, Unit Project Leader at the Regional Integration Centre Foyer (26.05.2007)*

71 *This is part of the reception office for newly-arrived immigrants in Antwerp.*

72 *This is probably social aid since the allocation of family allowances is the responsibility of ONAFTS, a federal institution.*

Furthermore, and in a somewhat variable manner according to the view that the Roma have of civil servants, the CPAS help Roma families in difficulty by paying the cost of hot meals, school trip expenses and swimming lessons. This aid is seen by the various Flemish project leaders as "stimulating external motivation", to bridge the gaps in the "internal motivation" regarding education (Foyer, 2004).

In September 2007, the **Foyer** engaged two Roma mediators who work with Roma families in Brussels, in order to facilitate communication (translations, explanations) between school and the families and increase school attendance among the children. These mediators (who are of Romanian origin) follow the children and their families individually in this process. The Foyer's Roma and Travellers Service has concentrated its activities among the Roma of Estinted (in Brussels and mainly originating from Romania and ex-Yugoslavia) and nomads (mainly Belgians and French). Around 25 schools in the Brussels-Capital Region call upon the services of the Foyer within the framework of monitoring Roma pupils' schooling.

Similar work is carried out by the **V.L.O.S**.[73] (Sint-Niklaas) by Flemish voluntary workers (there are about forty currently active). Sint-Niklaas is presented as a model of success regarding Roma integration (Machiels, 2007). This success is due to the sharing of competencies and experience (VLOS, OCMW, ODiCe regiohuis Waasland, Romano Dzuvdipe) in the form of local dialogue between Roma and non Roma. It should be noted that almost all of the Roma (around 1,000) have the same national origin (Kosovo) and the Roma have the status of political refugees and receive social security. The town, through its local council, actively supports dialogue between the various institutions mentioned.

Thus, recognition is not only determined by status and rights, but also by the daily functioning of the institutions on which the Roma call as soon as they get to Belgium. We have seen the case of the primary school teacher who devotes as little time as possible to Roma parents (quoted above), as well as that of the young Roma mother who trekked from school to school, where the child was refused entry under the pretext that she had no papers. We have also seen, on the other hand, the mediation work and the support given by VLOS, the *Foyer*, the CMGV and some of the CPAS. Some of these organizations have been extremely efficient in creating a network of encouragement and support for the Roma concerning administrative procedures, school follow-up and material aid. Thus, whilst officially access to a better citizen recognition of the citizen seems to have been forgotten in favour of an assimilatory project of integration (particularly on the Flemish side), if one looks at the practical results in terms of practices, one can see forms of recognition emerging within this framework.

In this respect, we should like to pause to consider two experiments targeted at women and which involve them as actors. The first experiment involves lessons on practical life and social skills (which complement the Dutch lessons) financed by the CPAS and are provided for the Roma women of Sint-Niklaas. At first, these lessons, initiated in 2006, were looked upon with suspicion by the beneficiaries: *"The managers said 'we are going to do something for you' and the women replied 'no, you are going to do something for yourselves'"*, the Roma mediator from Sint-Niklaas remembered. Nevertheless, some twenty Roma women followed the lessons over six months (a third phase is currently under way), their social security being dependent upon their attendance. Only women who had found a solution for child care were admitted to the lessons. A midwife gave the lessons, which included finding their way around town, knowledge about the institutions, civic practices regarding ecology (sorting household rubbish) as well as

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73   *Vluchtelingen Ondersteuning Sint-Niklaas*

medical and family planning information. According to the Roma woman who works as interpreter for these lessons, little by little the Roma women began to open up and express themselves during the lessons and they gradually had more confidence in the interpreter-mediator herself and she began to feel a certain female solidarity. Unfortunately, we were unable to benefit from talking to the Roma who have been the beneficiaries of these lessons.

Secondly, we noted the activities of the *Foyer*, which engaged a Roma interpreter-mediator, in the premises of the gynaecological consultation attached to *Kind en Gezin* (Child and Family) in Molenbeek-Saint-Jean. This practice, dating from the end of the 1990s (prior to this another Roma woman of Romanian origin filled the post) is certainly the origin of recognising the *Foyer* as a place of local support. Such communication between the women seems to provide good support for the questions relating to the children and their schooling.

6. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: A POSSIBLE APPROACH

The research presented here, as you will have already discovered, opens up more avenues of thought and asks more questions than the answers it provides. The report hopes, above all however, to provide some knowledge about the Roma immigrants in Belgium who have come from the CCEE and, importantly, knowledge that has come from the vision of the Roma themselves. In conclusion, three aspects seem to us to be important: firstly to underline the aspects discussed by highlighting possible lines of action; secondly to place the question of the schooling of Roma children in Belgium within a broader debate, and finally to propose a framework of critical reflection.

6.1. The research in brief

It should be remembered that there is no agreement on how to identify the Roma. All the scientific research recognizes that there is no homogenous Roma community. To the absence of a territory of reference, a unitary language, religion or coherent policy, can be added the incessant manipulation of an interethnic frontier which found itself being redefined by recent history (World War II, the proletarianism imposed by communist regimes, the decline of traditional artisanship in the consumer society, massive migration within a Europe that is meant to be more open, etc.). The contradictions and the ambiguities of official categorisations of national and European policies render the situation even more complex (Boscoboinik, 2007; Lemon, 2000). The networks of Roma migrants are not ethnic, but those of clans, territorial and national. The existence of a "Roma" category is only objective (in terms of its members, lifestyle etc.) at local level. Rather than speak of the "Roma" as a people or ethnic group, it is more appropriate to speak of "the Roma from…". The similarities existing between such diverse groups and with long-standing European roots cannot be explained by an Indian origin. If such similarities do exist, these are rather to be found in relations with the Gadje. In this sense, migratory journeys must be considered within the different state contexts of political non-recognition of the Roma, and not just as an escape from destitution and poverty. As we said, we must acknowledge a character of exile, at least in part, for the Roma migration coming from Eastern Europe that took place after 1990.

We also believe that a distinction must be made between identity and culture. "Roma" is an identification used between Roma, to distinguish themselves from the Gadje, as well as an ethnic, administrative and political category in a process of ethnization by naturalisation of difference. In other words, there is a constant construction of difference (by the

Roma and the Gadje), independently of any cultural basis for this difference. In function of the context, the stakes, the users, the label "Roma" sometimes designates a cultural identity, sometimes a social class, or sometimes a reaction of withdrawal in the face of rejection by society, or a migratory network where individuals share a certain number of characteristics. We think that every effort should be made to keep this set of definitions in mind and to contextualise their content, in order to preserve the richness and complexity of the reality experienced by the Roma.

The sample of interviews in the research, albeit random, reflects an empiric finding, whether from quantitative evaluations (CCEE statistics) or from qualitative information (the opinions of social workers): the number of Roma who have continued their schooling beyond primary school is extremely small. We have suggested in this report that, in answer to the question of knowing why, one must look for answers in a subtle imbrication of different cultural habits, in the Roma's historical experience of rejection, and in migration that frequently takes place under very difficult situations (fleeing from war, exile following persecution, poverty and illness etc.).

There is no conscious or strategic resistance to schooling, but this does not prevent us from thinking that, all things considered, within a complex configuration of experience and self-justification, the Roma nevertheless resist (subconsciously) acculturation and assimilation into the society of the Gadje.

To understand this situation, it would appear to us important to take into consideration the idea of intercultural communication. If the level of schooling, the number of adults with formal diplomas and the importance attributed to schooling are all lower among the Roma, this happens in negotiation between the actors. Such negotiation is destined to be communicated between the two parties of the Roma and Gadje, who reciprocally perceive each other as different through ambiguities and misunderstandings. The Gadje think that the Roma do not do enough to educate their children, whilst the Roma think that they do everything possible, given the conditions. Whilst the horizons of expectations are very different, both are in agreement of the necessity of a "push/pull" system (*Foyer*, 2004). However, the content and method of functioning of this system does not appear to be the same for everyone involved.

More precisely, the conclusions to emerge from this research are as follows:

- Institutionalised education is perceived as important in the provision of useful instruction, the content of which is very vague because of the lack of school experience and linguistic comprehension between Roma parents and Gadje managers (head teachers, teachers, social workers). According to the parents, the objective of schooling for Roma children is to provide access to remunerated work and progress (technical and technological, modern customs), as well as an apprenticeship in morality, respect and discipline.

- For many Roma, sending their children to school requires a considerable material investment, given their precarious economic situations. It is for this reason that they appreciate the hot meals and school trips that they are sometimes offered free of charge.

- School ruptures the logic of family childcare for young children and so nursery schools are rarely attended. As a more general rule, the parents, and especially the mothers, want to be certain that their children receive particular care at school: thus compliments and kisses, for instance, are

interpreted as gestures of affection and count for a great deal in the parents' (mother's) positive evaluation of the school.

- Back in the country of origin, the parents' experience of school was under the shadow of the stigma of being "Gypsy". Such violence was not only experienced in the school environment, but across all social frameworks. Its imprint seems to have been transmitted in the family memory, not in the form of a structured story (as among the Jews) but in the form of distrust, distance and suspicion towards the Gadje institutions. The individual attention (and affection) that parents expect from the teaching staff and social workers with regard to their children is a symbolic compensation and at the same time a symptom of the traumas experienced.

- The school career of the parents and children is affected by the migratory journeys: several languages, different methods of teaching also mean difficulties of adaptation and a shattering of expectations, motivation and the whole school project.

- Social success, status and prestige (honour) only have a sense at the level of the Roma community. They are constructed on the axe of the family and are consolidated in marriage. Formal diplomas provided by schools do not count in this register, although a higher level of schooling is nevertheless well-regarded.

- Women have less education than the men, and the girls less than the boys and this difference is part of a system of gender inequality that is in no way specifically Roma. Masculine domination does not preclude an important autonomy among the women, which manifests itself, among other things, in the importance they attach to the couple, to the detriment of the extended family. Within the framework of the couple, women defend sharing the work of caring and the education of the children. We believe that communication between educational and social institutions on the one hand, and the parents on the other hand, would benefit if one took into account female preoccupation with the couple. In our opinion, schools should encourage the simultaneous presence of both parents in situations of dialogue.

- Adult education also seems to be a prospect, a real avenue worth exploring, and which could be targeted in future projects of integration. From this point of view, the lessons given to the women in Sint-Niklaas are of great interest and we suggest that more detailed information regarding these should be collected and their efficacy tested in other fields.

Throughout the entire research project, we have consulted historic and sociological documentation regarding the Roma as well as the institutions responsible for integration in Belgium. We have used as sources both the interviews conducted for this research and our own previous research among other Roma groups. As our main axis of approach we have considered that gender, social class and ethnicity are imbricated in a vaster system of Gadje domination over the Roma, a system, moreover, that should not be lost from sight in discussing the means by which the schooling of Roma children might be improved. From a methodological point of view, our relationship with the Roma mediators (especially the women), who became privileged sources of information and permanent commentators, was crucial. It is thanks to this experience that we can now welcome the recent engagement of Roma mediators by associations working to integrate the Roma in Belgium.

6.2. Acknowledging citizenship

Conscious of the difficulties that Roma parents and their children have in order to feel that they are stakeholders in Belgian society, it is the very notion of "integration" that we must examine. In fact, does "integrate" mean "civilise", "assimilate", "acculturate", "recognize", or "get them to participate"? And what is the aim of this integration? What means have been implemented by the state?

One immediately notices that the integration of the Roma is a question that has only recently become part of the political agenda of states, and this under pressure from the European Union. Is it still necessary to recognize that the means put into place seem to be more symbolic than real? In response to the question of integration of the Roma, there are many concrete answers, but many of them contradictory. One must search more at local level, scrutinizing the coherence between practises in the field and the programmes of integration policies. This reality is even more obvious in Belgium where national divisions are systematically updated and where there are different ways of functioning in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. We were able to observe in Sint-Niklaas for instance a contractual conception linked to the (liberally inspired) concept of *"inburgering"* (nationalisation), at the same time as the implementation of means of (social democracy inspired) assistance and increased participation.

Thus, at the dawn of the third millennium, integration raises the question of recognition and citizen participation of "Others" in *our* society, which is now also *theirs.* It is true that one must look beyond the principle formulated by Axel Honneth *"We must have integrated the normative perspective of a "generalised others", whom we teach other members of the community to recognise as having rights, in order to understand ourselves as legal persons, insofar as we are assured of seeing certain of our demands satisfied within the social framework."* (Honneth, 2002: 132)

Throughout Europe, recognition of the Roma as a minority is strewn with ambiguities. It is true that, as in the case of other minorities, it is a question of recognising equality in difference. However it is difference that poses the problem: on the one hand, it is a social construction and the various Roma groups define it in very different ways; on the other hand, when it is perceived as such and looked upon condescendingly by the Gadje, it is systematically associated with the old fantasy of the "savage".

Whatever the vectors by which this difference is defined, one must consider its recognition not only in terms of criteria, but of social process, educating the attitudes and behaviour of the Gadje towards the Roma. At the same time "equal opportunities" must really be implemented. Even in the absence of a clear objective (which is almost always the case), integration cannot be achieved without the people concerned, without seeing and listening to them. It must be done in such a way that decisions are not taken *for* them, but *with* them. Most of the associations working locally to integrate the Roma have understood this and work in this manner.

From this point of view, the Roma's demand that their children are loved at school, whilst seeming to us somewhat exaggerated at first sight, clearly refers to a desire for recognition because *"only (love) as it results from the refraction of symbiotic unity of partners' reciprocal demarcation, provides the individual with the self-confidence without which he cannot participate in public life."* (Honneth, idem) Of course one must think of love beyond the affection manifested by smiles and kisses, and reassure the parents,

support them, participate in their everyday life[74]. In this sense, the chances of success at school for the Roma children seem to us to raise, above all, over and above pedagogic techniques, before "Push/pull" factors and formulae for intercultural mediation, a real need for respect of the Other, and a respect that is not merely cultural, but also socio-economic.

6.3. Towards (self-)criticism

According to the humanist tradition of the Enlightenment, in the European imagination, the Roma represented a form of radical otherness, the "good savages" that fed fantasies of journeys and liberty, but also to be civilised, recreated and mastered. The relationship with the Roma as Others is evidently not unique to Belgium, but one which characterises Europe. At the same time, and this is well-known, the Roma share this condition with other peoples (the Jews, the Muslims, the Blacks and, more recently, poor immigrants). It is around the treatment of this mythic figure of Otherness, and in particular through the school institution, that we should like to end this report.

The interest shown in the Roma should, in our opinion, reflect the wish to cast a critical and reforming look at the whole of European society today. Thus, if it appears to us, for example, that the Roma exploit the school system, we should also ask ourselves about the way in which the interest groups that constitute our society have themselves been able to exploit school; if the Roma have instituted amongst themselves systems of control of their women and daughters, we must similarly ask ourselves about similar systems put in place by the non-Roma in the majority society, as it is true that they too participate in systems of domination that have characterized the history of our civilizations.

In this regard, we should remember that the central place that school occupies in our society is relatively recent and corresponds to a historic shift in the status of the child. It is, in fact, modernity that invented childhood. Through obligatory primary education, school has become one of the key institutions of social regulation, linked not only to economic but also political transformation. It is the instrument by which the centralized state creates "civilized" individual subjects (Elias, 1982). Obligatory primary education, initiated in the 19th century, is intended to produce a rational and obedient subject, to whom one can transmit the unifying message of the nation state (Gellner, 1994)[75]. Educational failure or success become decisive for

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74 *In this respect, in France, associations have conducted experiments of school rapprochement with Travellers: mobile schools that park on the parking lots, near to the caravans, creating part-private, part-public meeting places – school comes to the people (parents and children), personalizing the human contact, mixing the everyday life of one and the other (Bruggeman 2005). These experiments are nevertheless rather rare, the republican school being somewhat lacking regarding schooling for Gypsies (school segregation, personnel with no experience, etc.) as Marc Bordigoni comments (2005). In another example, in Verona, a "bridging school" was created close to a Roma encampment where children of all ages wee followed individually by trainers with the help of the mothers acting as interpreters (Donzello, Karpati, 1998).*

75 *The nation state is a fiction that emerged from joint German and French thinking at the end of the 18th century. J G Von Herder, through his idea of Volkskunde and E Renan, theorizing the idea of the people-nation unit: one language, one culture, one territory. During the 19th century, the whole of Western Europe set out to achieve these ideals. The decline of empires (Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian) was accompanied by nationalist movements that ended up in the creation of the young nation states in Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the First World War. At the end of the 19th century a Europe of frontiers and national sovereignties existed. The states had constituted administrative, judicial and police systems. As reality did not correspond to this fiction, it was in large measure by constraint that national unity was imposed (France was such an example, where the system of education led to the progressive disappearance of local dialects). In other cases, the federal state conciliated several nations within one state (as was the case for Belgium, Switzerland and later Yugoslavia). This ideology of the purity of the nation (one language, one culture, one territory) remains firmly rooted even today. It is in this sense that Gellner argues throughout his book that nationalism precedes the nation and not the inverse.*

the young individual's life. As Bourdieu shows, in modern society, the level of studies, that is to say formal diplomas, constitutes the mainstay of symbolic capital. In this respect, school sorts and selects, it establishes hierarchies and participates in the reproduction of social class. Despite a system of schooling that became accessible to everyone in the 20th century, the differences between social classes (but also between the sexes) remain substantial and school results have the effect of naturalizing[76] them: *"In a class society, schooling cannot produce equality of opportunity and it participates in a structural process of reproduction."* (De Queiroz, 2006, 28)

If this assertion is true for social classes and for both sexes, it is equally true for ethnic groups and minorities when one examines the school context in which immigrant children develop. A whole series of studies show that if children coming from immigration have a school career of inferior quality, this can be explained by a complex chain of events: contrary to public opinion, it is not only performance and talent that determine success at school. Failure at school, school leaving and then juvenile unemployment take hold in the form of pockets in neighbourhoods with high levels of people of immigrant origins, and social exclusion and "a two-speed society" are spoken of. (Castel, 1995, Paugham, 2001) Within this context, starting in the 1980s, school became a key institution in the provision of equal opportunities, even though its discriminating effects were noticed. How then should one consider multiculturalism, intercultural education and access to managerial positions for young people of foreign origin? It is true that school simultaneously provides the instruments of emancipation and social mobility, it represents an environment of primary socialisation (like the family) where knowledge about the world around, values and the strategies for social success are transmitted. School is also responsible for the creation of elites among cultural minorities. In this respect, it is important that the state and civil society provide the appropriate means to encourage Roma parents to send their children to school more systematically and for longer.

Critical considerations regarding social inequalities (re)produced by school do not put in doubt the need to educate Roma children. We should, nevertheless draw attention to the fact that integration, whatever form it takes, cannot be considered independently of the development of educational systems in western history, nor of the domination that "we" exert over the "others" within the framework of "our" institutions. The question of integration (and schooling) for the Roma must also be re-inscribed within the broad migratory and historical context that makes it possible and the consideration of which alone makes it possible to envisage appropriate responses. We are the inheritors of Enlightenment thinking, which places and maintains the "Other" at a distance, and of evolutionary theories that often merely render the Other inferior. Finally, we have also inherited the nationalist ideology and politics that emerged in the 19th century. This heritage has created the ideological heart of this domination of the "Others. Whilst these "Others", the Roma, are most often seen as a problem, the Gadje should recognize that the history of dominations is also theirs, that they too have been its victims and that everything should be done so that other human groups, such as the Roma, are not caught up by processes that have not been objectivized. Indeed, it is only at this price that the Roma will be recognized as being complex actors in this history and will accede to citizen recognition, benefiting through this to unlimited access to the shared institution of schooling.

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76   An important part of French sociology has studied this over the last fifty years.

RECOM-MENDATIONS

The study conducted for the King Baudouin Foundation is based essentially on the words of Roma parents regarding the schooling of their children. The study's main conclusion is that all action in terms of schooling must be accompanied by citizen recognition and account being taken of the Roma's cultural specificity.

If practice shows a certain distance of the Roma regarding their perceptions of education, this comes from a convergence of socio-economic conditions, the experience of discrimination in their country of origin and a cultural logic that places the priority on other factors (such as marriage). The advantages of schooling are not very convincing in the eyes of the Roma in relation to:

- the importance of a person's collective destiny beyond the individual's school and professional careers (an individual must take his destiny in hand according to models formulated by the family and the community);
- the survival strategy developed by this minority and, further, the major objective that success at family level represents in relation to scholastic success: success at school is not a pre-requisite for success in life; it is not the acquisition of diplomas that confers power.

Furthermore, age-old rejection of Roma minorities outside the field of citizenship and schooling make the latter a distant universe, characterized by abstract content and improbable advantages.

For many Roma, the absence of any administrative status remains an important curb on this objective.

The following recommendations can be drawn from the findings of the study:

⇨ Specifically taking into account the specificity of the target group should lead to the creation of flexible support centres, open to the parents, intermediaries between the reality of the families and the school institution, whose objective is establishing preliminary contact and creating links. Their purpose would be to avoid the abrupt jump from home to educational institution for the child, whose parents are rarely schooled themselves or convinced about school. More concretely, mediators could be used who have been trained in this type of relationship practices.

⇨ The creation of personal and affective links between the school institution and the family should enable the discriminatory dynamic that is structurally introjected by Roma minorities to be counteracted. Such minorities require considerable investment in order to create a belief in equality of opportunity, so providing a link of confidence has priority over the acquisition of knowledge. Such links would reassure the Roma that their children are not in danger, nor exposed to the discrimination that they know so well.

⇨ The involvement of the fathers in a rapprochement with school is important, not only in terms of authority regarding the decisions taken, but also in sharing responsibilities, where they can still have their say, their place and even value their input regarding their child's schooling.

⇨ Adult education and training contribute to a shared family experience of education, which can indirectly help the children to live more serenely within the family.

⇨ Assuming responsibility for expenses such as meals, materials and extra-curricular activities and help in certain steps can undeniably provide material support and reinforce the relationship of confidence since a precarious economic situation as well as the absence of status is a curb on schooling:

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