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EDUCATION, HEGEMONY, AND INEQUALITY. THE CASE OF SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR ROMANIAN ROMA COMMUNITY IN WROCŁAW

Dissertation
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Introduction

Before depicting the aims of my dissertation and summarizing my argument in its consecutive parts, I would like to outline the motives that prompted me to focus on this particular research project. In September 2018, briefly before commencing my PhD program at the University of Lower Silesia, I was invited by the House of Peace Foundation (Polish: Fundacja Dom Pokoju) to join a research team composed of researchers affiliated with the University of Wrocław, Ph.D. candidates, experts, scholars specializing in culturological and sociological urban studies, and specialists in educational sciences and culture organization and promotion. The team had been established in conjunction with the implementation of the Foundation's "Program for the Romanian Roms and Romnis, the residents of Wrocław" (Polish: Program na rzecz Romów i Romni rumuńskich – mieszkańców i mieszkanek Wrocławia). The socio-educational program was envisaged to result in the dismantling of an informal Roma settlement situated in Kamieńskiego Str. in Wrocław and relocating the members of the community to training accommodations rented by the Foundation from private owners, an intervention funded from the budget of the Wrocław Commune. The research team, which as a matter of fact I joined, was tasked with conducting interviews with the members of the Romanian Roma minority with a view to drawing up a report on the cultural and educational needs of their community, especially focusing on the changes in their lifestyle as brought about by the program being carried out by the House of Peace Foundation.

Throughout my prior education stages (BA and MA studies in culturology), I had primarily explored themes of various forms of social, economic, educational, cultural, and spatial exclusion, for example ones involved in unemployment and cross-generational poverty. My BA and MA projects were critically underpinned studies of the long-lasting revitalization process of Nadodrze, a downtown neighborhood in Wrocław. I had been interested in the impact of the policies and actions launched by municipal agencies and NGOs on the ways of life of the Nadodrze population. I had also examined operations of cultural institutions in terms of their educational and emancipatory potential for fostering profound social transformations in this area. I had been particularly dedicated to looking into the issues of power, hegemony, and agency. Time and again, I had found out that the Nadodrze residents had been instrumentally treated within educational, social, and cultural projects which, though envisioned as helpful and advancing their wellbeing, had ultimately aggravated their feeling of alienation and exclusion.

On joining the new research group, these research experiences encouraged me to critically scrutinize the project being implemented by the House of Peace Foundation. I began to ponder on the extent of and limits to the adaptive, integrational, and modernizing capacities of communities such as the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community in liberal democracies and on the equality-promoting potential of various forms of education. Starting with the first interview with the Romanian community members, which I carried out in the second half of 2018, I endeavored to grasp how socio-educational programs for marginalized and minority groups were designed, what consequences they might cause, and how they embodied the hegemonic relations prevalent in the social world. My urgent idea was for my dissertation not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge but also to increase the awareness of the situation of Romanian Roma in Poland. Romanian Roma represent an ethnic minority whose specific way of life (including the ways they earn their livelihoods and their dwelling practices) tends to result in them being passed over in urban image-building strategies that revolve around multiculturality. Their otherness is a multidimensional and "difficult" one, distinctively defined by utter poverty and centuries-long exclusion.

With the increasing social inequality (fueled, among other factors, by the dynamics of the capitalist system) and the progressing crisis of liberal democracy as my background, I seek to examine socio-educational programs for marginalized groups. I am interested in what kind of potential they carry, how they are developed, and in what ways they are implemented. My dissertation focuses on the community of Romanian Roma who have lived in Wrocław since the 1990s. This community is best described as a radically marginalized group susceptible to exclusion due to a combination of multiple factors, such as their descent, skin color, language difference, low education level, and poverty. Additionally, members of this community are exposed to numerous prejudices entrenched in Polish society. I employ the concepts of meritocracy, hegemony, and emancipation and build on discourse theory, the theory of agonistic democracy, and the insights of critical race theory and public pedagogy in order to critically analyze educational interventions for the Romanian Roma carried out by two Wrocław-based non-governmental organizations: the Nomada Association for the integration of Multicultural Society (Polish: Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Integracji Społeczeństwa Wielokulturowego Nomada) and the House of Peace Foundation. In doing so, my aim is to investigate power relations and hegemonic arrangements that are mirrored by and in programs. The research question that I have constructed is: how are the power and hegemonic relations reflected in the socio-educational interventions for the Wrocław-Based Romanian Roma Community conducted by the above-mentioned NGOs? The aim of the dissertation is therefore

to present the ways in which these programs are shaped for minority, marginalized groups, and the effects that they may cause, especially in the context of inequalities and hegemonic relations existing in the social world.

The issues of inequality and education that I predominantly address are not specific to this population group alone. Questions around relegation to a peripheral position in democratic systems (physically in space, linguistically in communication, culturally in modes of conduct, socially in relations, economically in living conditions, and politically in agency) are also relevant to other communities face marginalization as a result of their race, ethnos, religion, economic status, and or origin.

In Chapters One and Two, I depict the theoretical underpinnings and methodological toolbox of my dissertation. The first one outlines the ideas of discourse theory, recounts considerations around agonistic democracy, and highlights a movement within critical pedagogy that has been labeled as public pedagogy. My reasoning is founded on the assumption that the social world is produced through language, because neither a thought nor an action can take place without being named in language. Because language is socially produced and actively contributes to the formation of the social world, I do not regard it as an abstract system of signs. In terms of discourse theory, I fundamentally rely on the concepts developed by Michel Foucault (1972), Jürgen Habermas (1999; 2005), and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001). Laclau and Mouffe's framework is actually the most productive of insightful interpretations in the context of my dissertation. The Belgian-Argentinian duo of theorists insist that social reality is produced in and through discourse. In their definition, discourse comprises both linguistic and non-linguistic elements, with language itself not being an autonomous sphere, as it is subject to social influences. More precisely, language is socially produced, and it changes depending on the historical moment, geographical area, social organization, cultural formation, etc. Consequently, senses and meanings are neither predetermined nor imposed top-down, nor given once and for all. They are prone to a variety of shifts, as are identities. In this context, the concept of hegemony (Laclau 1990), as originating in the thought of Antonio Gramsci (1961; 1971), is of special relevance to me. In Mouffe and Laclau's reworking, hegemony refers to discursive fights over and for the production and legitimization of meanings and represents "the principle of constructing all social identities" (Rasiński 2004, 20), which – like discourse – will never be "ultimately" completed. In Chapter One, I also refer to the ideas of agonistic democracy and radical democracy, which contend that, rather than being symptoms of crisis, conflicts are an intrinsic part of the social world (Mouffe 2005). Tensions between or among opponents do not unsettle the system. Actually, by accepting the notion that stability

and prosperity are premised on consensus, we inevitably impair the interests of one group or another. In this context, conflict is not a negative phenomenon. Rather, it inheres in social life. In Mouffe and Laclau's view, democracy is founded and hinges on pluralism. Emphatically, an ideal democratic society where everybody is completely free and perfectly equal will never come about.

In the last part of Chapter One, I present public pedagogy as part of a broader development of critical pedagogy. I build on the insights of Henry Giroux (2000; 2004) and Gert Biesta (2011; 2012), essentially focusing on the public sphere and on the interrelations of the political and education. This section of the dissertation also dwells on Biesta's (2008) concept of emancipation, which is stems from the repudiation of the distinction between the emancipator and the one being emancipated.

The second part of my dissertation centers on the concept and, in particular, critique of meritocracy and on critical race theory and its uses in the study of education. In the meritocratic model of thinking, good education (confirmed by recognizable credentials, such as certificates, diplomas, and degrees) is a key to achieving a prominent social position (as well as economic success). Given this, whether an individual "makes it" in life or not is supposed to be unrelated by his/her social background, skin color, gender, etc. Education is considered to be the only factor that matters in this respect. According to the critics of meritocracy (Littler 2018; McNamee, Miller 2009), such a standpoint results in the normalization of social inequality and obscures its systemic nature. The impression of illusory equality in society is generated by the insistence that all citizens have equal access to education and that, consequently, it is only on their attitudes and decisions that their success, position, and comfort depend. Grounded in the transposition of free-market mechanisms onto social relations, this model undercuts the democratization of social life and detrimentally affects education, since the principle of competition, which is one of the cornerstones of the meritocratic myth, stands in direct contradiction to communality, collaboration, and cooperation as hallmarks of education.

The critique of meritocracy is also salient in the context of critical race theory. In the section of Chapter Two where I discuss CRT, I revisit its foundational theoretical inspirations and sketch the ways in which it has developed (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Delgado, Stefancic 2001; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman 2011). Although critical race theory was founded and primarily expanded as a field of inquiry pertaining to American society, many of its ideas are universal and applicable to processes unfolding outside the U.S. CRT researchers view race as a human-produced social construct that can be harnessed in the pursuit of multiple goals, including negotiations within the hegemonic game. While critical race theorists do not link race

to genetics and biology, they highlight the fact that social divisions are constructed on the basis of differences between social actors defined in terms of skin color, type of hair, physique, shape of the nose, eyes, etc. In this approach, a range of similarities, such as intelligence, character, and the like, are not taken into account whatsoever. The foregrounding of differences leads to the social production of race and the subsequent consolidation of divisions. The practitioners of CRT are crucially committed to exposing the latent mechanisms rooted in the institutions of power that contribute to maintaining and worsening racial inequality. Among the various fields and processes that lie within the orbit of the interest of CRT scholars, education is counted as a key area. Symptoms and manifestations of race-based systemic inequality are traced, for example, in curricula, assessment system, and desegregation practices. Towards the end of Chapter II, I also address racist mechanisms targeting Roma minorities in the school systems of East and Central Europe.

Chapter Three of my dissertation is devoted to the socio-political situation of Roma, depicting which I focus on the Romanian Roma community that has been living in Wrocław since the end of the 20th century. My depiction offers a short overview of the history of this group and glimpses into an array of cultural cliches and stereotypes that have sprung up and amassed around its members over centuries. In doing this, I build on the findings of researchers affiliated with critical Romani studies (Kledzik, Pawełczyk 2014; Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2014; McGarry 2017). I offer is an alternative to the approach that traditional Romology adopts relating the historical genesis of Roma, reflect on the ascription of a set of features covered by the umbrella term of "Roma-ness" to people of Romani origin, and look into the phenomenon of "Romaphobia," which Aiden McGarry regards as "the last acceptable form of racism" (2017). I also point to the causes of the contemporary socio-political situation of Romanian Roma, which is bound up with their centuries-long experience of violence, ranging from various systemic exclusions to such extreme brutalization as forced sterilization and the Porajmos. In this way, I seek to show that the reasons for Roma's migration from Romania to other European countries are not simply reducible to attempts at improving their economic status.

In the last part of Chapter Three, I sketch the history of the Roma groups that came from Romania to Wrocław. I relate their deportations (in the 1990s), the illegal dismantling of a Roma settlement in Paprotna Str., which resulted in the lawsuit filed by the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community to the European Court of Human Rights, and a court case concerning the eviction of the Roma from the Kamieńskiego barracks, which were finally demolished in connection with the House of Peace Foundation's "Program for Romanian Roms and Romnis, the Residents of Wrocław."

Chapter Four is based on the data generated in the empirical research I carried out. The chapter analyzes and interprets narratives contained in the ten semi-structured interviews I conducted with members of the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community and the current and former members/workers of two NGOs: the House of Peace Foundation and the Nomada Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society. The data collected in these interviews are combined with the information derived from publications released by these two NGOs. In this section of my dissertation, I also depict the research techniques I employed and describe the general pursuits of the Nomada Association and the House of Peace Foundation. Further, I offer a critical analysis of the goals inscribed in the programs for the Romanian Roma community implemented by these two organizations. I describe their methods of work with the Roma community, whereby I especially attend to the housing-first method and family assistance, as well as recounting the genesis of the "Program for Romanian Roms and Romnis, the Residents of Wrocław" launched by the House of Peace Foundation. In my explorations, I critically assess the phenomenon known as "projectosis," which involves transferring the market logic into social, educational, and cultural ventures undertaken by, among other actors, NGOs. In the last part of Chapter Four, I address issues related to the educational experiences of the young Roma. I provide an account of the educational program for the Romani children conducted by members of the Nomada Association and relate the process which made it possible for the youngsters to use their right to education. My inquiry into these issues and developments is geared to identifying and understanding the hegemonic relations, systemic inequality, and exclusions at work in the social world and to revealing how the "correct" involvement of individuals in today's society – a democratic and capitalist one – is envisioned.

Chapter One

Discourse Theory, Agonistic Democracy, and Public Pedagogy

Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of my dissertation. Building on the concepts of discourse theory, the theory of agonistic democracy and the theoretical tenets of public pedagogy, I construct a framework for a critical examination of educational interventions for the Romanian Roma launched by two Wrocław-based NGOs: the "Nomada" Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society (Polish: Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Integracji Społeczeństwa Wielokulturowego Nomada) and the House of Peace Foundation (Polish: Fundacja Dom Pokoju).

In section 1.1, I outline the ideas of discourse theory, sketching out the changes that have taken place in the conceptualizations of language over years. My assumption is that the social world is constructed though language, since one cannot think or do anything that has not been named first. Consequently, I view language not as an abstract system of signs, but as a social production which at the same time contributes to the generation of various areas of the social world. In pointing to differences between various theories of discourse, I focus on the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (which is pivotal to my dissertation) and examine the thought of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas. In this context, the concept of hegemony is crucial to my explorations as it helps critically analyze power relations and the system of forces at work in the social world. I also present the ways in which discourse-theoretical concepts can be and are applied to and in educational research. I also look into the processes known as the pedagogization of the social world and the discursivization of pedagogy.

In section 1.2, I revisit the ideas of Laclau and Mouffe in order to discuss their notions of agonistic democracy and radical democracy. This theoretical perspective is helpful in studying social reality as an ensemble of multiple discourses which are bound to clash and dispute with each other. Essentially, dispute is not negatively marked in this framework. Rather, it represents an inseparable and "natural" part of social life. Actually, it is the fixedness on consensus that may threaten pluralism, on which the proper operations of democracy are premised. While we should all be equal in a democratic system, we should not be the same.

In the last section of this chapter (1.4), I address public pedagogy as one of tendencies within critical pedagogy. My account of public pedagogy is based on the work of Henry Giroux, Stuart Hall, and, notably, Gert Biesta. I particularly attend to their insights into relations between education and the political and to their reflection on the public sphere. I also discuss the concept of emancipation, because my analysis in Chapter Four will follow Biesta, who abandons the division into the emancipator and those being emancipated in order to propose an experimental and non-traditional understanding of emancipation.

The scrutiny of these perspectives and concepts is supposed to support my critical analysis of the data I collected in my empirical research. The reasoning and idiom of Laclau, Mouffe and Biesta will serve me as an interpretive framework for investigating complex educational processes from a perspective that promotes the identification of diversity and multiple hegemonic relations and mutual interdependences.

1.1 Discourse Theory

The notion of discourse is closely associated with the linguistic turn in the human and social sciences, which was fueled by the philosophy of language. First used by the philosopher Gustav Bergman, once a member of the Vienna Circle, in the 1950s, the coinage "linguistic turn" gained a wide currency and was disseminated, among others, by Richard Rorty in the book *The Linguistic Turn* (1992 [1967]). The central idea of the linguistic turn was the claim that "the limits of language represent the limits of thought" (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 21). Nevertheless, despite this shared fundamental conviction, the linguistic turn has impressed itself on such a multiplicity of disciplines and approaches devoted to the study of the modes of representing the world in language that it is next to impossible to sketch out one linear trajectory of this turn. Depending on their perspectives and affiliations, the researchers of the linguistic turn list different theorists and scholars as contributors to its development, with the most notable names including thinkers, such as Johann G. Herder, Alexander von Humboldt, Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles S. Peirce, Ludwig Wittgenstein (in his "early" and "late" philosophy), and Gottlob Frege, along with anthropologists of culture and philosophers, for example, Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf, Willard Van Orman Quine, and Jacques Derrida. What disparate research frameworks affiliated with the linguistic turn have in common is the perception of language as the basic factor that enables people to understand their reality (Rasiński 2009, 7). In the second half of the 20th century, the linguistic turn began to provide the primary vantage point from

which to explore culture and the social order. Language was no longer considered "transparent" or "innocent," and its role in giving shape to the human world was widely recognized. It became commonly acknowledged that "language (signification) is independent of traditional vehicles of meaning, such as forms (concepts) and sensible objects, and […] that language is a social product" (Rasiński 2017, 34). As a result of this conceptual change, language-related issues moved within the orbit of interest of social scientists as their major object of study (ibid., 34). It is in this context that the notion of discourse came to the fore in philosophical conceptions and scientific theories.

Before discussing the theory of discourse developed by Laclau and Mouffe, which is pivotal to my own research as offering the most rewarding interpretive options, a brief outline of other major contributions to discourse theory is in order. Fundamentally, the study of discourse is premised on de Saussure's seminal distinction between language (*langue*) and speaking (*parole*), which together make up speech (*langage*). This triangular model makes it possible to capture differences between language conceived of as a social phenomenon and speaking understood as individual expression: "The two elements of this relationship are interdependent, with speaking being an (individual and specific) enactment of language which is an (abstract and social) idea of speaking" (Heinz 1983, 240, qtd. in Walczak 2013, 66). *Parole* represents the actual use of language, and, as such, it concretizes and instantiates language, which is conceived of as an abstract system. In this arrangement, discourse should be located between *langue* and *parole*, because discourse neither denotes an abstract system of signs and rules for combining them nor refers to individual instances of speech, since discourse does not belong to the person who constructs an enunciation: "Just the other way round, the person belongs to discourse the moment s/he adopts a given social role" (Grzmil-Tylutki 2010, 11) or enters multiple relations of power and hegemonic forces (crucially theorized by Antonio Gramsci, whom I discuss below). Throughout his work, de Saussure reiterated that language was a system, that is, a frame-like whole with a beginning and an end of its own. This system was envisaged as ordering and organizing the linguistic sphere. De Saussure founded a new paradigm that lay the foundation for structuralism, yet this model of conceptualizing language found itself facing an increasing criticism. Even among structuralists, some scholars dismissed the notion of language as a system and defined it strictly in terms of structure alone. This shift surfaces in the thought of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, who modified de Saussure's conception to cancel the idea of language as an enclosed whole. This did not solve the problem, since structures also have their boundaries, which phenomena can only cross accidentally or as a result of "a serious rockburst," that is, catastrophe. Similarly to relocations between structures,

changes within a structure are difficult and only possible in the context of its core (Rasiński 2010, 17-20).

Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language investigated the production of meanings in the social context. One of his central concepts in this respect was the metaphor of "language games" (Wittgenstein 2000), in which language was intimately bound up with actions, practices, and forms of life. For Wittgenstein, a game was a convention – a set of rules that conferred meaning on its elements within a certain shared practice (Rasiński 2017, 38). A word becomes meaningful when it is part of a game and thus operates in relation to the other signs. Subjectivity and objectivity are not deeply relevant, because language possesses an autonomy of its own. At the same time, however, language is tightly interwoven with the social world, because it is not only governed by the rules of logic but also produced within various human forms of life, that is, practices (ibid.). The concept of language games importantly relied on the notion of grammar, which was explored both by de Saussure and by Wittgenstein. They both abandoned the then-dominant understanding of grammar as "legislative activity, often involving the recognition of identity and sovereignty of European nations" (ibid., 37). In classical linguistics, grammar was thought of as a set of rules whose application ensured that language was used "correctly." In Wittgenstein's view, the capacity to use a given language did not involve solely observing grammatical rules when using it. The ability to explain the rules was not the point either. What chiefly mattered was to use language in ways that warranted communication with other language users. Hence, grammar was "a convention grounded in the actual practice of using words" (ibid.). Like in other games, such as cards or sports, there are rules in language, and they have a certain autonomy, while at the same time being imposed top-down on the players; however, departing from them (for any reason) does not mean that one cannot play or – for language games – use language. Both de Saussure and Wittgenstein crucially highlighted the duality of language as, on the one hand, relatively autonomous (exempt from external rules) and, on the other, evidently social and produced in conjunction with the practices of human actors (ibid., 37; see Wittgenstein 1974).

As already mentioned, throughout the 20th century, consecutive generations of scholars investigated language, whereby they drew on, first, de Saussure's thought and, then (starting in the mid-1960s), primarily on Wittgenstein's insights. Building on Lotar Rasiński, I will outline the ideas of some other thinkers whose conceptions have formatively influenced the study of language and the related notion of discourse: Foucault, Habermas and, finally, Laclau and Mouffe. The work of the latter is axial to my argument in this dissertation.

The historian and philosopher Michel Foucault explicitly distanced himself from the formalist and structuralist school of language research. In his view, discourse certainly was much more than language defined as a finite and complete system based on a set of fixed rules. According to Foucault, “discursive events,” that is, enunciations, were best depicted by “archaeology,” by which he obviously did not mean the traditional science dedicated to the study of the material records of the past. Rather, Foucauldian archaeology approached discourse as a relic, as something historical, singular, and incidental that does not hold any unique basis or rule beneath its surface. As observed by Rasiński, Foucault did not offer a lucid explanation of what he meant by an “enunciation,” but he certainly did not mean a logical or grammatical sentence or a speech act: “It is (…) neither empirical nor ideal. At the same time, it is unconcealed because it concerns – articulated, said, or written – things, and an analysis of those cannot possibly refer to the depth of hermeneutic meanings, thoughts, or images buried under the external surface of the enunciation” (Rasiński 2010, 34). The way in which discursive events unfold is what archaeology strives to explain, as it also seeks to elucidate why such and not any other events occur at a given moment and what made them happen. In doing so, archaeology neither inquires about the truth of an utterance nor focuses exclusively on its meaning. An enunciation is certainly not independent of or unrelated to the other discursive events and various fields. It is embedded in a certain materiality, as it must be articulated, written down, or perpetuated in some other way. Foucault was not really interested in everyday, utilitarian utterances, and he was preoccupied with enunciations that had social implications and passed “an *institutional test*, such as the rules of dialectic argumentation or empirical verification” (ibid., 35; italics original). As such, utterances were connected to another of Foucault’s central concepts, that is, knowledge (ibid., 35-36; see Foucault 1972).

Individual enunciations enter into interplays with one another and, in this way, add up to a “discursive formation.” Such a formation is not produced in conformity with a fixed set of rules. Rather, it is composed by and of an ensemble of utterances that do not line up into a recognizable structure, which was the idea still cherished by structuralists. It is the responsibility of an archaeologist – a discourse analyst – to search for “patterns” among them. This is a step toward identifying “formation systems,” which, though not being strictly speaking a Foucauldian science in the context of discourse, are not a loose, that is, disorderly assemblage of truths either: “Archaeology depicts the intermediary level between daily non-discursive practices and formalized disciplines, which Foucault referred to as knowledge” (Rasiński 2010, 36). This level represents the particular moment of science not being sufficiently ordered yet and thus not being fully science, where science primarily refers to the human sciences. The

identification of patterns in discursive formations is a key to re-tracing "the archive," which defines a particular level: that of a practice that causes a multiplicity of statements to emerge as so many regular events, as so many things to be dealt with and manipulated (Foucault 1972, 130). The archive assembles "real" enunciations, that is, those that have not been ignored or considered null and void. It is temporary and historical, and utterances can only be analyzed *post factum*.

In Foucault's framework, discourse is basically identical with "discursive practices," that is, sets of temporally changing rules that determine or essentially affect the ways in which enunciations are formed and work. At the same time, the Foucauldian concept of discourse encompasses non-discursive practices as well (Rasiński 2017, 45). Those fall into two categories: primary (that is, perceivable without reference to any discourse or any discursive object) and secondary (linked to the actions of specific utterance-producing subjects). Nevertheless, as emphasized by Rasiński, who follows Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (2006), Foucault attributes the pivotal role to discursive practices, which means that "if a discourse has particular rules of its own to influence the form, the object or the selection of themes of elocutions along with who produce them and from what position they do it, the discursive formation not only becomes independent of the rules of language or logic, but also eludes any subordination to non-discursive reality" (Rasiński 2010, 39). This way of thinking invites several questions, for example, about the rationale behind and criteria for the division into discursive and non-discursive practices. Foucault does not clearly define how they are interrelated, and though they are supposed to influence each other, it is indeed difficult to specify what exactly this mutual impact consists in. As his work progressed, Foucault abandoned his archaeological project and embarked on genealogical explorations, in this way commencing a long period of research into power relations and their interwovenness with the body and knowledge (ibid., 40).

Habermas, another important thinker in discourse theory, predominantly studied forms and acts of communication in conjunction with rational decision-making processes and social conflicts (see Habermas 1999). While discourse is one of the central notions of his elaborate model, Habermas, surprisingly perhaps, "does not offer any particular definition of his concept of discourse since discourse is not in and by itself an object of his explorations. Rather, Habermas discusses discourse as part of his broader considerations which predominantly concern the justification of moral norms and political decisions made through deliberation" (Rasiński 2017, 47). Habermas's fundamental assumption is that the communicative function is the primary and most important one of all language functions and that it is first and foremost

oriented to reaching an agreement. Communicative action differs from and is superior to what Max Weber (2002) terms instrumental and strategic actions, which are above all geared to achieving the speaker's particular purposes. Habermas grounded his reasoning in the theory of speech acts advanced by John L. Austin (1993), who divided those into tree types: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. Locutionary acts simply encompass speaking, that is, constructing utterances that make sense. Illocutionary acts are performative in the sense of having defined consequences, since articulating them entails the execution of a certain action by the speaker. For their part, perlocutionary acts may bring about certain emotional, thought- or action-responses in listeners or in the speaking subject. To distinguish between illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts is essential to Habermas, because whereas the aims of illocution are explicit, the aims of perlocution can only be identified by fathoming the speaker's motivation. To accomplish this, the listener must understand the communication. If, upon understanding it, the listener accepts it, the perlocutionary act may transform into an illocutionary act, one that directly results in the listener's performing a given activity. In this way, Habermas highlights the centrality of the communicative function as the primary function of language (Rasiński 2010, 62-64), since "in order to become a result-oriented action, it must first become a communicative action, i.e. it must be comprehended" (Rasiński 2017, 47).

Habermas's conception is informed by the idea that all social action should be associated with the inherent human desire to achieve consensus – agreement. This is the principle which, in his view, organizes the operations of the entire social world. The social achievement of agreement is predicated on the basic factors of communication, specifically, on "the acceptance, questioning, and negotiation of claims" (Rasiński 2010, 65). What is at stake here is that speaking and acting people should arrive at an agreement, where consensus cannot possibly be accomplished by imposing one's claims on others. Rather, it is accomplished by mutual persuasion, with the "politics of agreement" proposed as an ideal assumption in this context and achievable through deliberation. Habermas envisions society as a collection of free subjects who use rational arguments. Consequently, for such a society to be actually based on communicative actions – that is, on striving for agreement – "an ethics of discourse" must be instituted. Such an ethics involves a critique of popular knowledge – of beliefs and convictions on which people fall back in "ordinary" communication. These obviousnesses should be questioned if the Habermasian level of deliberativeness is to be achieved. Universal agreement can only be reached through the processes of "justification" and "argumentation," and exclusively the views and concepts that have gone through those can be incorporated into discourse (ibid., 49-50). Habermas's notion of discourse is intimately connected to his concept

of deliberative democracy, where discourse is not hierarchical, does not favor anybody, is open to critique and counter-arguments, does not exclude anybody, and absolutely all the members of society can be included into it. If all these conditions are satisfied, "judgments may be recognized as rational and common on the basis of the principle of universalization and the principle of discourse" (ibid., 50). Essentially, consensus is only achievable if action is intentional, or, to put it differently, agreement cannot possibly emerge as a coincidence.

The communicative perspective founded by Habermas has been highly relevant to the political conceptualization of the European Union as a community and is reflected in its operations on various levels (including legal solutions and educational policies). However, as this study examines programs developed for the community of the Romanian Roma, who do not have their own state, hegemonic and discursive practices along with articulation issues appear to be far more pertinent. Given this, my argument meaningfully draws on the theoretical frameworks propounded by the Argentinian-Belgian duo of theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, whose ideas I outline below. In this context, their conceptions are more rewarding than Foucault's thought, which is based on the historical understanding of discourse and the historical study of institutions, or than Habermas's model with its central notion of consensus. My explorations are geared to identifying contentious points, tensions, and agonisms inscribed in hegemonic relations, rather than to looking for the possibilities of agreement or rational solutions. All the conditions of ideal dialogue can hardly be met when an (radically) excluded group is involved.

Building on the legacy of Karl Marx, de Saussure, Foucault, and Jacques Lacan, Laclau and Mouffe have proposed a new approach to and understanding of discourse. Early forays into this territory are noticeable in Laclau's works from the 1970s, and the project was collaboratively developed by the pair of scholars in the 1980s. Their theory of discourse is a component of a broader conception of agonistic and radical democracy, which I discuss below. Laclau and Mouffe's notion of discourse was powerfully influenced by Derrida's thought, including his critique of the closedness of the language system, which prompted the notion that discourse should be explored in terms of its openness or the impossibility of its ultimate closure. Derrida (1986; 2011) also insisted on deconstructing the structure of language, with deconstruction conceived of not as a method or a particular activity, but rather as "something that takes place in the field where something already exists" (Rasiński 2010, 20). Rasiński compares deconstruction to "textual work" and "double reading." In the first move, one follows the basic interpretation of a text to identify its primary assumptions and the process of argumentation. In the second move, one should scrutinize the modes of understanding and

interpreting that are deemed less significant and, consequently, often remain undiscerned. Thus-conceive deconstruction reveals that the dominant interpretation of a text comes into being as a result of the exclusion of some content. Thereby, converting the excluded interpretation into a dominant one is not exactly the point. Instead, the point is to grasp the complementarity of the two, which is directly related to the idea of "indeterminacy." The notion of indeterminacy is what prompted Derrida to observe that no interpretation could make claims to being the primary or overriding one. When conceptualized in this way, deconstruction explicitly indicates the repudiation of the idea of language as a closed structure that seeks to construct a complete totality and is impregnable to external – that is, non-central – factors. It is only through excluding exteriority that a permanent and coherent linguistic entity could be produced, which Derrida refuses to endorse, because signs may only mean something in the network of interrelatedness with other signs (ibid., 19-22).

As understood by Laclau and Mouffe "the discursive delineates a theoretical horizon which is the condition of possibility of an object as such. Thus, the discursive is not one among the multiple objects we experience, but the *horizon* within which we can experience objects in the first place" (2001, 47, italics original). Laclau and Mouffe explain that it is within discourse that social reality is in fact produced, and that "whatever we do not express discursively does not exist in our consciousness; we do not ponder its nature or meaning" (Przyłęcki 2013, 11). Importantly, because we rely on language with its semantic structure, senses and meanings are not determined top-down or for good. Just the other way round, they are susceptible to all kinds of shifts, and the subjects that effect these shifts are not necessarily empowered in terms of class. This premise marks a departure from the classic Marxist tradition. Essentially, Laclau and Mouffe claim that any given system of forces or power relations is contingent. This randomness does not stem from the structure alone, but it results from the operations of forces partly external to it, an idea which ties in with the critique of the structuralist notion of a closed and self-contained language system. Therefore, as explained by Rasiński, "the notion of discourse is an analytical framework that promotes an investigation of society without dogmatic presuppositions and removes all privileged positions, in this way fostering free hegemonic play" (2004, 18). In this model, discourse is conceived to consist not only of linguistic but also of extra-linguistic components, because in Mouffe and Laclau's view, the very distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic elements is entirely unfounded. Crucially, since in order to think and articulate, we must inevitably rely on the discursive (ibid.), we cannot possibly step out of the discursive sphere. Whatever is social is contained within discourse, while "the non-discursive, as it were, is devoid of form and lies beyond comprehension, as our comprehension

is entirely demarcated by language" (Rasiński 2010, 48). To institute two separate spheres for discursive and non-discursive phenomena would entail drawing a line and excluding some facts from one or the other sphere. Language itself is not entirely autonomous, as it is subject to social influences (Rasiński 2004, 17). It is socially produced and changeable, because it hinges on the historical conjuncture, the geographical area, society, culture, etc. Consequently, discourse – like democracy – is constantly being redefined and replenished, whereby "empty signifiers" (Lefort 1991) are being constructed in strict connection to the openness of discourse. While there may be things outside of discourse, their meanings can solely be constructed within discourse. "An empty signifier is […] a signifier without a signified" (Laclau 1996, 36), and "as such, it serves to signify that which is impossible to signify" (Rasiński 2017, 46). Such spaces are generated, for example, in identity formation, where an emergent identity seeks to construct its own position through denying elements from outside of its discursive field. As these elements are in this way emptied of meaning, room appears for a hegemonic game which is supposed to result in determining and constituting the dominant meaning (Rasiński 2017, 46; Laclau 1996). Examples of "empty signifiers" are marshaled by Paweł Przyłęcki, who lists such concepts as democracy, power of the people, order, justice, etc. Following Laclau, Przyłęcki notes that, for example, what justice means can be debated into infinity, which indicates that notions of this kind are not invested with any concrete conceptual content. They can be understood in multiple ways, which does not make them any less convenient as sites of practicing hegemonic games or any less instrumental for manifesting membership in a given community and facilitating the self-identification of groups which do not necessarily comprise mutually coherent identities (Przyłęcki 2013, 16-17).

Discourse is a space where a panoply of subject-positions – identities – is generated (Howarth 2008). Laclau and Mouffe do not reduce discourse to speech and writing. In their framework, discourse is a sphere where a diverse array of relations is pivotal. Laclau and Mouffe employ the notion of "negative identity" in order to underscore that all identities are always constructed in relation to other beings. Drawing on Gramsci's thought (1961, 1971), they make the concept of "articulation" one of the cornerstones of their conception. Within discursive fields, there are multiple unconnected "elements" that occupy various positions. As Mouffe and Laclau define them, elements are unrelated differences which find themselves within discursive fields. When connections and relations – "nodal points" – emerge between them, articulation takes place and, consequently, new political identities come forth, bound up with various hegemonic configurations. As there are unlimited articulations (new elements may arise, and/or the existing ones may mutate), identities are not given once and for all (Przyłęcki

2013, 15). Building on the thought of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1963; 1965) and Louis Althusser (1983), Mouffe and Laclau's notion of articulation serves to show that society is not organized according to a single dominant principle. They reject the essentialist idea of both the entire social world and its elements, in which they reference Althusser's concept of overdetermination. Rather than a stabilized being, society is constantly mutating, with a variety of conflicts unfolding within it and identities undergoing endless political negotiations. Elements of the social world are interconnected, but none of them permanently plays the primary role. At the same time, relations among them affect respective identities of their component parts: "Articulation is (…) a form of discursive practice which transforms various *elements into moments* of the discursive whole" (Morawski 2016, 94; italics original). Notably, discursive practices in this context are understood as both linguistic phenomena and non-linguistic ones, such as those associated with institutions, rituals, and activities. Consequently, discursive formations also comprise (as a result of articulations) both language-based elements and "social struggles, interests, and subjects" (ibid., 95). Inspired by post-structuralist insights, Mouffe and Laclau do not believe that a perfectly closed discursive system is possible. In any case, closure would contradict the idea of continually morphing identities, because closure would entail the constitution of stable moments, that is, the conversion of "freely drifting signifiers" (ibid., 95) into moments, understood as "stable meanings within a given entity resulting from articulation" (ibid.). Thus, Laclau and Mouffe insist that the social world is a site of negotiations and disputes, where practices do not necessarily operate in ways that repeat or reproduce the existing arrangements. As they vie against each other, political discourses obviously seek to assume the dominant position in order to make the meanings they bear universally valid. However, Laclau and Mouffe claim that such a stabilization is inexorably temporary. Any stabilization there is, according to them, is only partial, and it hinges on so-called "nodal points" (the term also used by Laclau alone). Those can forfeit their dominance at any moment, too. Incompleteness is caused by the impossibility of closure, as articulation only fosters partial connection, which can always be unsettled as a result of the openness of the social world. No matter how strong a discourse is and how advanced hegemony it can accomplish, this discourse is perennially unable to bind absolutely all the elements that make it up. Whatever is not articulated falls among external discursive elements and may be harnessed as a factor contributing to the erosion or the breakdown of a discourse as it is struggles to maintain dominance. Within a discourse, identities are produced in relation not only to other competing discourses but also to the external discursive elements (ibid., 95-97; Laclau, Mouffe 2001).

The framework put forward and developed by Laclau and Mouffe is founded on the concept of hegemony (Laclau, Mouffe 2001; Laclau 1996) as theorized by Gramsci[1] and pertaining not only to politics but also, crucially, to culture. For Gramsci, hegemony is the outcome of a struggle for people's "hearts and minds" that mobilizes "moralising sermons, emotional stimuli, and messianic myths of an awaited golden age, in which all the present contradictions and miseries will be automatically resolved and made well" (Gramsci 1971, 150). In this way, Gramsci departs from Lenin's view of hegemony as the establishment of a class alliance indispensable for building a political strategy and tactics. Gramsci insists that it is impossible to wield political power without instituting cultural hegemony. Such hegemony requires a pact of interest groups under the leadership of a dominant collective that defines the socially endorsed ideology and consciousness. This involves "moral, intellectual and cultural control over subordinate groups" (Wróblewski 2012, 308). In this fashion, the dominant collective imposes a particular mode of understanding reality, interpretive frames, visions, and values on others. What is at stake in this enterprise is not so much bringing the hitherto existing identities in league as rather forging a new collective identity (Rasiński 2010, 90). Crucially, this new identity may stretch over class divides and, thus, assume a more open and democratic form (Morawski 2018, 94), because – unlike in class reductionism – collective wills, instead of social classes, are perceived as political subjects. This also means that hegemony does not depend exclusively on the economy and historical necessity, but also hinges on the state, citizens, and chance. In Gramsci's framework, the social consists of two components: "direct power" invested in the state with its legal structures and "civil society" subsuming individuals, organizations, and institutions (Rasiński 2010, 90-91). The effectiveness of hegemonic practices is essentially predicated on the capacity to step beyond individual interests and to include interests of other collectives: "Every social group or its party that governs or seeks to seize power strives to present its aims and interests not in the form of particularistic corporate claims, but as universal goals that can and should be adopted by dependent groups as their own ones as well" (ibid., 91). Hegemonic practices are expected to secure the seizure of power over the whole of society and over the state boasting uniform economy, politics, and morality. In Gramsci's view, the working class is "naturally" destined to achieve hegemony (Morawski 2018, 94), even though politics is intertwined not only with the economy. While Gramsci abandons concepts such as base, superstructure, and historical necessity, he is aware of the import of the historical context. At the same time, he claims that the social world can follow

[1] Importantly, the notion of hegemony was earlier developed by Russian Marxists and was one of the central ideas cherished by Russian social democrats between the 1890s and 1917 (Morawski 2016, 118).

various paths of development, and its trajectory depends on the human will and practices. The fact that Gramsci heavily relies on the concept of "collective wills," which arise as a result of hegemonic articulations, implies that he ascribes a special status to political practice (Morawski 2016, 123).

As used by Mouffe and Laclau, hegemony refers to the discursive fight for the establishment of meanings (Laclau 1993, 542). It is anchored in the particular-vs.-universal dichotomy, where "on the one hand the particular and the universal cannot exist without each other, but on the other they mutually cancel each other" (Sepczyńska 2006, 289). The particular, in whatever form, is impossible without a reference to the universal (for example, the community of the Wrocław-based Roma cannot be singled out without referring to the quantitatively dominant Polish population). For its part, the universal can only constitute itself in opposition to the particular, whose position in this way changes and becomes dominant as a result of filling "empty signifiers." Thus, "the universal has no specified content and is an empty signifier whose temporary signifieds result from (…) the rivalry of various particularities" (ibid.). Hegemony arises from articulations; however "in order to speak of hegemony, the articulatory moment is not sufficient. It is also necessary that the articulation should take place through a confrontation with antagonistic articulatory practices" (Laclau, Mouffe 2001, 135). Antagonism is produced by the presence of different discursive positions (identities), which are continually engaged in relations and conflicts with each other. Given this, social actors undertake hegemonic practices that aim to exclude from social space the discourse that puts them at risk. As a result, the boundary of the dominant discourse is drawn (Rasiński 2004, 21). In Laclau and Mouffe's framework, hegemony is not simply bound up with class positions (which is how it is traditionally conceptualized in Marxist thought), but it serves as "the principle for constructing all social identities" (ibid., 20), which – like discourse – will never be ultimately "completed."

The hegemonic articulation of elements of the social world can take place as a result of two factors: the operations of antagonistic forces and the instability of division into external and internal elements of discourses. The fact that there are some free elements which have (yet, still, etc.) not undergone articulation makes hegemonic processes possible. Their goal is to dominate all the areas of the social world through appropriating yet-unfilled sites of meaning. To accomplish this, these practices must defend the area dominated by their own discourse and, simultaneously, fight to take over other discursive spaces. Laclau and Mouffe emphasize that the more open and "non-sutured" the social world is, the more intense the hegemonic game becomes. This form of politics gathered momentum at the onset of modernity, as staggering

changes swept across the social world, triggering a profound recasting of identities. As a result, it became all the more difficult to stabilize differences, and the site of possible articulations considerably expanded (Morawski 2016, 127-128). Therefore, "every social identity becomes a meeting point for a multiplicity of articulatory practices, many of them antagonistic" (Laclau, Mouffe 2001, 138). The world today abounds with profuse articulations and with a multiplicity of possible political or identity conflicts. While a so-called "organic crisis" is unfolding, hegemonic practices strive to accomplish stabilization and appropriate free discursive elements in order to assemble them into a dominant whole – "a historical bloc." Mouffe and Laclau, who – unlike Gramsci – do not believe that such wholes can be founded on class divisions, reject the notion of there being a sole hegemonic nodal point and insist that the social world comprises a variety of such points (Morawski 2016, 129-130). In their framework, discourse is "a direct arena of a hegemonic struggle over meaning making, in which the subject's identity is constituted" (Rasiński 2017, 46). New discourses seek not only to make their mark, but also to appropriate the center in order to halt the formation of differences (Przyłęcki 2013, 15).

Hegemony ties in with the concept of antagonisms, another important axis of Laclau and Mouffe's conception. In this context, antagonisms do not denote either conceptual oppositions or physically tangible conflicts. Additionally, antagonisms are conceptualized as discursive constructs, and, as such, they are not to be value-judged as positive or negative. External to a given society, antagonisms primarily attest to the presence of "the Other." It is as a result of this presence that no permanent identity of subjects can be fashioned, which may propel social conflicts. Social conflicts arise when groups or individuals grappling with the impossibility of self-identification produce an image of an enemy. Thus, "the presence of the 'Other' prevents me from being totally myself. The relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution" (Laclau, Mouffe 2001, 125).

Laclau and Mouffe explore the concept of antagonisms in relation to the political, where the political is crucially different from politics. Specifically, "politics refers to the 'ontic' level while 'the political' has to do with the ontological one. This means that the ontic has to do with the manifold practices of conventional politics, while the ontological concerns the very way in which society is instituted" (Mouffe 2005, 8-9). In their investigations, Laclau and Mouffe primarily focus on the political, which – like all things social – is by nature antagonistic. Issues arising within the political tend to compel subjects to side with one or the other party to a dispute. At the same time, the concomitance of disparate perspectives is irremovable, and attempts at eradicating their divergence tend to be informed by violence. It is in such moments that antagonisms palpably appear in social relations. To restate, antagonisms pertain to the

discursive space, where they unfold and make members of societies launch hegemonic actions aimed at achieving their goals and eventually taking possession of the dominant discursive field. This involves an important distinction into “the logic of equivalence” and “the logic of difference.” The former concerns the division of the social world into two opposite blocs, and the latter is implicated in the process of articulation between different social actors that unite against the “Other.” This spawning of splits and confederacies is endemic to our social world today, where the competing power hubs vie against each other for the favor of citizens and at the same time contribute to the production of enemy figures. As Przyłęcki stresses, these two models of logic envision two models of society construction:

> While the *logic of difference* strives to produce the particularism of demands in society, the *logic of equivalence* entails relinquishing these particularisms, for a while at least, as a gesture vis-à-vis a negative identity referred to as the *constitutive outside*. Of course, the *logic of equivalence* means producing an antagonistic line between two sides in society. Thus, the *logic of equivalence* can be said to simplify political space while the *logic of difference* to expand and, consequently, to complicate it. (Przyłęcki 2013, 20; italics original)

Outlined above, Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of discourse will serve throughout this dissertation as a lens through which to scrutinize power relations and hegemonic configurations at work in the situation of the Romanian Roma community living in Wrocław since the 1990s. Laclau and Mouffe’s reflection on the construction and changeability of identity will be helpful in illumining the ways in which the subjectivity of the participants of socio-educational programs is affected by interventions launched for (and with) them. I will examine this in relation both to the Roma and to the NGO educators involved in the implementation of the programs. The fates of the Wrocław-based Romani community exemplify multiple conflicts and varied hegemonic practices undertaken by an array of social actors. Mouffe and Laclau’s theory will help me look into the multi-layered and complex situation of this community without burdening my investigations with value-judgements. As this framework presupposes the mutability of identity and accepts antagonisms as part of the social world, I will be able to avoid pointing out “the good and the bad” or “winners and losers.” Following Mouffe and Laclau, I will examine a broad range of practices without dividing them into discursive and non-discursive ones.

I would also like to refer to the presence of the theory of discourse in pedagogy. To succinctly outline the development directions of educational research that avails itself of discourse theory is no mean a challenge. The difficulty is primarily occasioned by the

multiplicity of ways in which the notion "discourse" can be and, indeed, is understood. Colloquially, discourse denotes conversation, discussion, dialogue, or talk. But it is also defined as "the language as used in/by" (e.g. the discourse of public debate), a specific use of language by a person or a group, as a "communicative event," as bound to particular conditions and circumstances (e.g. in school classrooms and university courses), and as "an ensemble of values and views on a given issue along with a specific mode of expressing those, for example, neoliberal discourse" (Ostrowicka 2014, 49). Researchers who use the concept of discourse seek to reach beyond its understanding embedded in everyday language.

For its part, discourse theory can either serve as an analytic and methodological tool or provide a theoretical framework of investigations (Anderson, Holloway 2018). At the same time, there is no mandatory method for researchers to employ when analyzing discourse. On the one hand, discourse analysis may stand for "a separate social-scientific discipline with a research object and methodology of its own, and on the other it is perceived as a set of research methods, techniques, and procedures that can be freely selected to solve concrete research problems" (Ostrowicka 2014, 51). Importantly, as Anna Horolets observes, "using discourse analysis as a research tool without reflecting on the ontological and epistemological status of discourse may result in failure to fully capitalize on the potential of this method and in uncertainties about the relevance of findings" (2008, 9). Given this, adopting discourse analysis as a research method should entail taking a defined position on the ontology of the social world.

There are three major tendencies in discourse analysis: linguistic, sociological, and critical. Within the linguistic tendency, researchers make the notion of discourse part of their work to expand their field of study onto phenomena that transcend purely linguistic aspects of texts. As a result, their explorations feature a broader perspective on the ways in which actors and groups operate in the social world. It was within the linguistic tendency that critical discourse analysis (CDA) was developed as one of the most popular research approaches. Its founders were inspired by the writings of, among other thinkers, Gramsci, Althusser, Habermas, Foucault, and Mikhail Bakhtin. A group of scholars from the University of East England, notably including Roger Fowler, Bob Hodge, Gunther Kress, and Tony Trew, are recognized as the pioneers of CDA (ibid., 52). Researchers working with critical discourse analysis are explicit in identifying it as their deliberately adopted research methodology (Luke 1995-1996; Rogers 2004; Cahnmann, Rymes, Souto-Manning 2005; Duszak, Fairclough 2008; Czech 2010; Rocha-Schmidt 2010; Zamojska 2010; Czech-Włodarczyk 2012; Starego 2012; Starego 2012a; Boryczko 2015; Popow 2015; Stankiewicz 2016; Szkudlarek 2016; Kopińska 2017; Ostrowicka 2017; Rogers 2017; Starego 2017; Starego 2017a). Studies based on this approach examine,

among other subjects, early education textbooks, higher education, neoliberalism, citizen education, and youth education. As can be seen, CDA underpins not only research on language phenomena but also socially invested inquiry into processes, relations, systems, and structures (see Duszak, Fairclough, 2008). Consequently, the issues addressed also include inequality, power relations, hegemonic configurations, ideologies, and subordination, whereby "the aim of this critical analysis is to establish how the production and consolidation of certain knowledge and values precludes thinking about alterative possibilities or questioning things that appear as necessary and universal" (Ostrowicka 2014, 53). With such premises, discourse is examined in the context of identity production and the social balance of forces. CDA is applied in explorations of social, cultural, and education-related areas alike (ibid.). In its classic model, the critical discourse analysis method proceeds in three stages. Firstly, the structure of a written or oral text is scrutinized and submitted to a linguistic analysis. Secondly, the interpretive layer is inspected, and thirdly, the impact of the text on the social world is studied (Dobrołowicz 2016, 42). Tomasz Szkudlarek lists other principles to be heeded by scholars relying on CDA. First of all, a text must be denaturalized, that is, its ideologically loaded function must be pinpointed in order to locate the position that the subject who constructed the text takes in the social world. This course of analysis makes it possible to identify symptoms and vestiges of various contexts, interconnections, and hegemonic influences. The strategies used to affect the audience in pre-defined ways must also be probed, with a view to detecting the mechanisms that locate and perpetuate the audience's position in social reality by means of constructing a certain world image in the text. In Szkudlarek's view, CDA aims to establish how operations of discourses affect the identity formation of social subjects, and how the mechanisms of social control and power relations work (Szkudlarek 1997, qtd. in Dobrołowicz 2016, 43-44). This model of reflection on discourse is eagerly employed by educators, in particular those affiliated with the critical education movement.

However, several researchers of education who embrace the notion of discourse primarily understand it in the context of communicative acts, that is, as textual analysis, the use of language, or the totality of discussions around education as a discipline (e.g. Nocoń 2009; Wiatrowski 2011; Rypel 2012). There are also survey studies that aim to convey the specificity of education research that employs discourse theory. For example, a multi-author volume edited by Helena Ostrowicka (2018) aspires to disseminate selected concepts in discourse-theoretical research on higher education. Ostrowicka points out that the discursive turn in education sciences, especially in the context of reflection on how universities operate, has fueled studies on the ways of constructing texts and statements about the functioning and image-fashioning

of higher education. This would not have been possible without extending the discursive perspective by adding multidimensional theoretical and methodological frameworks. Notably, two tendencies in using the notion of discourse are discernible, particularly in empirical studies carried out by educators. In one of them, discourse is appointed an auxiliary role and is not explicitly embedded in any particular research tradition. In the other tendency, discourse provides the theoretical and methodological cornerstone of research processes encompassing varied education-related phenomena (Ostrowicka 2018, 13; Martilla 2018, 63).

What has come to be known as the "discursivization of pedagogy" is another relevant process to be taken into account in the study of relations between education sciences and discourse theory (Klus-Stańska, 2009; Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2011; Ostrowicka 2014). This perspective is founded on the idea that "the social world is an outcome of interpretive processes; it is socially constructed. Consequently, all social situations are a domain of meanings. Meanings ascribed to social situations by their participants, all the contexts involved, culture as a collection of symbols and signs by means of which these meanings are attributed, and the processes that condition this attribution" (Nowak-Dziemianowicz 2011, 315) all add up to the basis of this dimension of pedagogy. Such a conceptualization helps researchers drop the concept of discourse as a mere set of texts or utterances to be analyzed for the abstractness of language. Instead, they can focus on grasping a concrete ontology of the social world, which establishes the conceptual frames within which researchers can think in the first place. Importantly, in this context, education as such appears as a discursive discipline. Mirosława Nowak-Dziemianowicz observes that the object of pedagogical research is time and again re-defined by researchers, who "pose educational questions but must also be anchored in the existing meanings conferred on respective manifestations of reality by the members of the disciplinary [research] community" (ibid.). This constant recasting is caused by the operations of the social world, in which meanings and identities are not given or fixed once and for all, but undergo continual transformations.

Karolina Starego explains that "[t]he discursivisation of education (…) has significantly contributed to the 'omnipotentialisation' of education processes" (2017, 286).[2] Clearly, not only the discourses closely linked to education influence the identity formation of social actors. Education discourse is conceived of in very broad terms here, and it is discerned in various domains of life. This discourse serves as "a dominant instrument of social control and the principal agency that formats people's identities" (ibid.). Consequently, discourses that have

[2] For the purpose of this dissertation, the quotations from this paper have been slightly revised for correctness and idiomatic adequacy.

not been regarded as related to education before are now being incorporated into reflection on education. These processes tend to be called educationalization or pedagogization (ibid.; Mikiewicz 2020; Depaepe, Herman, Surmont, van Gorp, Simon 2008).

Education discourse is variously understood in education sciences. Firstly, it stands for discursively produced knowledge about education. In this approach, analysis centers on various statements on education and a range of historically and socially invested discussions on instruction and child-raising. Secondly, education discourse is associated with teaching and learning, that is, with statements and communications characteristic of the school and other educational institutions. This distinction is reflected in empirical research carried out by educators who, depending on their interests, apply different research strategies with a view to ordering the conceptually and otherwise complicated problem field. Varying meanings are conferred on the notion of education discourse by researchers whenever they commence their studies. They must first of all determine whether a given statement is thematically related to education and take into account the affiliation of the speaker/writer, establishing whether s/he is in any way associated with the educational field and looking into his/her institutional situatedness. At the same time, one must bear in mind that the educationalization and pedagogization of the social world have brought about a dilution of traditionally defined pedagogical discourses (in terms of their themes, speakers/writers, and institutions). As a result, "the concept of 'discourse of education' is extended to cover rules that organize and order the discursive practices that, in most general terms (irrespective of any discipline-specific limitation), can be regarded as '*pedagogical*'" (Starego 2017, 288 italics mine). This means that education discourse and the study thereof no longer concern the classically conceived educational processes (i.e., those that are directly linked to schooling) or institutions that have been historically and culturally recognized as associated with education. The concept has been expanded (and it may continue to expand in the future) to cover a variety of communicative acts, mechanisms, relations, and interactions. It also encompasses everything that "can be regarded as education-*themed*," and "it alters the concept of the users – or senders – of '*educational*' discourse" (ibid., 289). Therefore, discourses linked to politics, scholarship, media, business, administration, activism, and initiatives for civil society can be explored as iterations of education discourse as well. In parallel, the group of producers and users of education discourse is not limited to traditionally defined teachers/educators/students anymore, but comprises all individuals who, "as a result of their positioning or locatedness in public discourse and in social discursive practices, act as 'agents of symbolic control'" (ibid.), that is – to use the parlance of Laclau and Mouffe – produce discourses within the ongoing hegemonic

game. With discourse conceptualized in this way, the field of education studies can be augmented by including phenomena that have conventionally fallen outside pedagogical investigations as not related directly to education. This incorporation is based on correlating the discursiveness of educational institutions with the discursiveness of other areas of the social world. This take on pedagogical discourse underlies, for example, the sociolinguistic studies of Basil Bernstein, who integrates the issues of social production and reproduction with the field of education. In this case, "pedagogical discourse means a regulatory rule. It essentially entails recontextualisation, which is held in critical discourse studies to be the condition of possibility of the constitution of any practice in a discourse" (ibid., 258).

In terms of the theme and perspective of my dissertation, relevant studies include those whose authors point out that discourse is a locus of the construction of the social world, power relations, identity formation and meaning-making (Rzeźnicka-Krupa 2007; Szkudlarek 2008; Lewartowska-Zychowicz 2010; Szkudlarek 2011; Ostrowicka 2012; Szkudlarek, Kopciewicz et al. 2102; Szkudlarek, Mendel 2013; Dobrołowicz 2017; Starego 2017a). This species of research is as a rule underpinned by theories propounded by Foucault or by Laclau and Mouffe. As aptly observed by Starego, binging together the pedagogical perspective and discourse understood as a site of both identity production and social control has "shifted the perception of education processes from regarding them as only functionally subordinated to the project of social modernisation in Western style to recognising them as the very core of this project" (Starego 2017, 286; see Depaepe, Smeyers, 2008).

1.2 The Theory of Agonistic Democracy

As already mentioned, discourse theory has essentially informed Mouffe's work on the project of agonistic democracy. Mouffe has been developing this project over several decades, with her position evolving in the course of years. The early period of her explorations of democracy and agonism was marked by a fascination with Gramsci's writings at the end of the 1970s. Gramsci's conception of hegemony propped her considerations on the urgency of expanding the idea of politics in ways channeling effective responses to the transformations at hand, for example, the increasing representation of previously ignored groups – such as women and ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities – in political space. In Mouffe's view, the Marxist concepts of production, economy, and class division did not suffice to adequately capture and convey these changes. She was also influenced by the thought of Althusser. All these inspirations were

meaningfully brought together and picked up in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, coauthored by Mouffe and Laclau and published in 1985, a study often appreciated as a breakthrough publication for the development of the so-called New Left. Mouffe's project was continued in *The Democratic Paradox* against the background of a revision of Marxist thought, discussions on the future of the world in the wake of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the crisis of democracy. Mouffe's major point was that the dissolution of the USSR heralded the end of the bipolar world as known during the Cold War. In her view, the removal of the division into the democratic and the communist worlds severely undercut the identity of liberal democracy as a political system. As the oppositional model of the political championed by the Soviet bloc disappeared, the "constitutive outside," on which the durability and form of democratic identity had hinged, vanished as well. The liberal world had failed to perceive (ethnic, national, religious, and other) conflicts proliferating within it, and it no longer fostered collective identities as broad as those based on the democracy-vs.-communism opposition. All these processes and developments prompted Mouffe to advocate the expediency of attending to conflicts and the potential inherent in them (Biały 2018, 48-55).

To this purpose, Mouffe overcame ethical qualms and made use of the works of Carl Schmitt, a German theorist of law and politics who collaborated with the Third Reich in the 1930s. She built on his concept of "the political," which he had considered impossible to ponder without taking antagonisms into account. Thereby, she crucially modified Schmitt's position by eschewing the enemy-friend dichotomy and adopting the notion of opponents instead. An opponent is not somebody to be destroyed. Rather, an opponent is a natural and indispensable element of democracy: "The notion of the enemy is not eliminated; rather, it is reconsidered to denote exclusively those who do not accept the democratic rules of the game" (Biały 2018, 55).

Mouffe warns that the liberal striving after consensus is perilous since the members of the public are unable to identify with the parties to the political conflict (the left wing and the right wing). This leads to constructing oppositions founded on the criteria of ethnic background, nationality, or religion, which may trigger acts of hostility, hatred, and an urge to remove the "Other" from the discursive field. Given this, Mouffe puts a supreme value on enabling as many actors as possible to speak out and on accepting the fact that various interests are involved in disputes. The agonistic pluralism championed by Mouffe veers from the Marxian model, as agonism does not seek to ultimately resolve conflict, that is, to put class struggle to an end. Just the opposite, in her view, if conflict were entirely eliminated, the democratic system would collapse as a result of having the space of dispute between disparate political positions taken away from it. This is exactly what "the democratic paradox" is all about (Biały 2018, 56).

The reason behind Mouffe's critique of liberal democracy is a significant issue. In her view, the history of the liberal democratic system goes back to the French Revolution, yet its "liberal and democratic components in fact became interlocked by accident" (ibid., 62). Since they put rather different values at their respective centers (equality and the people's rule in democracy; individual liberty and human rights in liberalism), they inevitably clash with each other time and again, which was once recognized, but today tends to be overlooked: "Mouffe believes that the West is currently an arena of neoliberal hegemony, which subordinates democratic values to the ideas of liberalism and imposes a specific interpretation of human rights and freedom" (ibid.). While she insists that democracy requires some kind of social cohesion, it does not have to entail a unification of citizens, the uniform endorsement of the same religion, or observing the same moral and cultural principles. Instead of homogeneity, the sense of communality should be promoted and bolstered; this, however, is premised on the acknowledgement of there being a hegemonic game at hand. In fact, hegemonic game is crucial to identity formation, which tends to be based on the we/they and familiar/strange dichotomies in liberal democracy. If the space in which to engage in conflict is dismantled, there will be no way to abandon this model of democracy (ibid., 63-64).

Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe, Rasiński defines social reality as "an ensemble of diverse discourses that claim to interpret reality and cannot but find themselves in conflict with each other" (2010, 10). Therefore, as already mentioned, incessantly surfacing antagonisms represent one of the fundamental characteristics of the world in which we are immersed. As such, this is inevitably true for politics as well. The fundamental aim of the democratic system is not so much to abolish these antagonisms as rather to "civilize" them. Consequently, conflict is endemic to agonistic democracy and does not stand as a symptom of crisis. Tensions between opponents do not undercut the system. If we assume that consensus is the only way to achieving stability and prosperity, we inexorably belittle the interests of one or another group. Hence, agonistic democracy does not aspire to find "a common ground for conflicting views for the sake of eliminating all conflict" (Koczanowicz 2005, 15).

Mouffe repudiates the notion of rational consensus. The idea that dialogue is a tool for finding solutions satisfying to all the parties involved stems from the so-called aggregation model of political theory. In the mid-20th century, political and economic theorists, such as Joseph Schumpeter and Anthony Downs, put forward a conception of politics which held that citizens give priority to particular interests rather than to moral issues, an approach that instrumentalized the political sphere. This approach sparked vehement protests from the upholders of the normative model of politics, for example, John Rawls, who called for the return

to the perception of democracy in terms of morality rather than utilitarianism: “Only if liberal democracy reclaimed its moral dimension and if consensus were achieved beyond a mere agreement about procedures could threats to liberal values be eliminated” (Biały 2018, 63). Both Rawls and Habermas were philosophers whom Mouffe recognized as adherents of deliberative democracy. In this framework of thought, the democratic system must be founded on dialogue (language communication of social actors who use rational arguments) that leads to instituting proper and accepted legal regulations. Civic self-government is made possible, as communication morphs into legislation in processes in which individual informal opinions merge with public institutionalized debates, citizens undertake collective actions for the sake of the community, and law is produced. All this adds up to a form of citizens wielding authority over themselves. Deliberation is essentially about clashes among social actors who hold different views, yet seek to develop shared positions, whereby individuals’ initial judgments are inevitably altered. Discussion is the foundational locus of community. Negotiating and arriving at a uniform judgment and mutual persuasion are supposed to exclude extreme stances and thus alleviate conflicts. This can only be accomplished if discourse participants are capable of taking rational arguments into account (Łapaj-Kucharska 2016, 46-47).

In Mouffe’s view, the methods proposed by deliberative democracy are not enough for society members to embrace democratic values as their own. Rationality is not a sufficient condition in this context. Neither does Mouffe endorse the idea that social actors are subjects capable of disentangling themselves – for the sake of deliberation – from a mesh of factors that irresistibly affect them, such as culture, power relations, and social practices. The appreciation of democratic values and institutions is only possible in the context of real conflicts at hand (Biały 2018, 64).

As envisioned by Mouffe, the ideal political arena should promote the expression of all views and claims, irrespective of citizens’ age, gender, sexual orientation, skin color, and ethnic background: “the more diverse voices appear on the political scene, the greater the chance for overcoming the already existing hegemony and, consequently, for consolidating pluralism, which is a prerequisite for the emergence of alternative visions of the social world” (Koczanowicz 2005, 11-12). Fundamentally, Mouffe’s framework presupposes that “the more pluralism, the more democracy” (ibid., 16). The greater inclusion, the more diverse voices, and the more definitive farewells to the dream of the mythic consensus extolled in deliberative democracies (Rawls 1998; Habermas 2005) there are, the more room opens for accommodating various ways of life. In this way, the need for diversity can be satisfied, the foundations of democracy buttressed, and the threat of populism and illiberality fended off. The model of

agonistic democracy proposed by Mouffe hinges on pluralism as an essential boundary condition, because it “entails antagonism” and “is an indelible element of politics” (Biały 2018, 64). The political has at its core these unavoidable conflicts which, by default, cause opponents to appear. Crucially, however, one must eschew Schmitt’s approach in which relations with opponents are informed by the binary division into “us” and “them,” or “friends” and “enemies.” To abandon such categories in describing parties to the conflict and to start thinking in terms of “opponents” are among the major challenges posed by agonistic democracy. Admittedly difficult, such determination makes it possible to preclude thinking in terms of “destroying” the enemy, a disastrous mindset for democratic system as it is, and to accept mutual differences, which cannot happen if deliberative modes of thinking are applied. Importantly, Mouffe defines the “opponent” as “a person whose right to stand up for his/her own views we recognize” (ibid.). Liberal democracy revolves around the conflict over the exercise of power and not around efforts to remodel relations among contestants. For its part, agonistic democracy is resolved to transform antagonisms into agonisms, that is, to pass from conflicts in which one of the parties must be “destroyed” to acceptance that there are various views and positions, and that this kind of pluralism should not be removed from the social world.

Mouffe observes that the advocates of deliberative and liberal democracies ignore citizens’ affective desire to become part of a larger social collective. People are governed by two kinds of instinct: on the one hand, they want to be individual subjects, but on the other they crave the sense of belonging to a group with which to identify. The latter urge must not be overlooked, because this may induce socially pernicious collective attitudes informed by, for example, membership in a national community. Mouffe believes that the operations of the democratic system are importantly predicated on the classic left-right division, and she does not subscribe to the idea that we live in a post-political era, where this distinction is attenuated and no longer essentially relevant. More than that, she warns that such a notion is in fact a threat as it nurtures populist sentiments. In her (and not only her) view, populismis a very real and serious danger to democracy. Additionally, the split into freedom-minded democrats and extreme (usually right-wing) populists is informed by moral allegiances, which makes it impossible to pass from hostile antagonisms to irremovable agonisms. This continues to fuel mutual hatred anchored in the “we” vs. “they” binary (ibid., 65-67).

One of Mouffe’s major points is that active participants in social life should include not only political parties or entrenched social movements, but also members of marginalized groups, whose agency tends to be suppressed and constrained in liberal democracy. She

explains that a greater inclusiveness involving an augmented range of voices fosters conditions conducive to finding proper solutions and thus bolstering democracy. Today the opposite trend is observable, as instead of increasing plurality and dispute within agonistic democracy, citizens more and more frequently surrender to uniformization. Without a doubt, we are witnessing a crisis of democracy which not only is manifest in the collapse of certain modes of institutional operations but also affects the very foundations of social life. As a result, a new political development, referred to as "illiberal democracy" (Zakaria 2018) is being more and more often recognized.

The Wrocław-based Romanian Roma are a group marginalized in several respects. They speak Romani, a language incomprehensible to the majority, abide by the principles inscribed in Romanipen, and until 2018 they lived together as one big community in an informal built environment, with their children rarely engaging in compulsory education (importantly, a considerable proportion of Romani adults can neither read nor write). They often fall victim to racist and xenophobic violence. Their lifestyle starkly differs from what most residents of contemporary urban hubs regard as "normal." As citizens of the European Union, Roma should be capable of using a set of privilege and rights. Nevertheless, their otherness relegates them to the margin of capitalist and democratic societies. They "do not fit," as it were, in the system of liberal democracy, let alone of illiberal democracy, which is spreading across the world today. Pluralism, which Mouffe erects into the foundation and condition of agonistic democracy, must also concern groups that face such a strong exclusion. They should be recognized not only as citizens eligible to vote in general, presidential, and local elections, but also as citizens whose opinions matter. Without including different ways of life within the social imaginary, illiberal democracy and raging populism are bound to morph into authoritarianism soon. At the same time, Mouffe does not believe that the ideal balance in the world is possible or, consequently, that all exclusion and inequality can be eliminated. Thereby, she relies on the post-structuralist tradition, which legitimizes thinking in terms of irreducible plurality (2000, 33), and emphasizes that "[i]nstead of trying to erase the traces of power and exclusion, democratic politics requires us to bring them to the fore, to make them visible so that they can enter the terrain of contestation" (ibid., 33-34). Thus-conceptualized democracy develops institutions as spaces for "being visible" and for engagement in disputes in conditions of security, where the construction of enemies in place of opponents is prevented, and the foregrounding of differences is promoted, instead of hiding them in order to forge some ideal homogeneity. The socio-educational programs I will be discussing below can be viewed as a miniature version of

the world in which a hegemonic game is constantly unfolding, while identities engage in a variety of relations and conflicts in discursive space.

As already mentioned, both Mouffe and Laclau point to the French Revolution as pivotal for the rise of Western democratic awareness. Following Tocqueville, they refer to this historical moment as a "democratic revolution." The contemporary Left should not only continue but also extend and strengthen the process commenced over two hundred years ago, and the most effective way to do so would be by implementing the vision of radical democracy. The leftist circles must relinquish their former view of social conflicts as ensuing from and rooted in class struggle and, instead, recognize and support conflicts among varied social groups. In this way, the liberal-democratic model stands a chance of consolidating and radicalizing. As clarified by Karol Morawski, "it is not the revolutionary Left anymore. Laclau and Mouffe call for constructing and extending – within the existing system of liberal democracy – chains of equivalences between various social struggles in order to radically and profoundly realize the idea of freedom and equality. (…) Classism, statism, and economism must be discarded, along with the notion of revolution *cast in the Jacobin form*" (Morawski 2016, 132; italics original).

The French Revolution also represents the last moment in history when society was clearly divided into two factions embodied in the people and the *ancien regime*, respectively. Since its collapse, the social world has been and still is subject to proliferating splits. As the dividing line between the inside and the outside is no longer there, the hegemonic game has aggravated. Marx developed his theory in order to draw this line anew on the basis of class struggle and thus to reinstate the old mode of the polarization of the social world. However, class conflict has proved unable to produce a dichotomy as powerful as the pre-revolutionary one. In their writings, Mouffe and Laclau vehemently object to the vision of a workers' (or any other) revolution as a single nodal point aimed at thoroughly reorganizing the social world. This vision contradicts the idea of agonistic democracy, one replete with divergent viewpoints and steeped in pluralism. Rather, they view demands and processes that arose with the onset of socialist ideas as just one of "internal moments" in the ongoing democratic revolution (underway since the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen) and not as a separate historical and political movement. Today, the standard of the democratic revolution, as they see it, is flown by so-called new social movements, whose activities center not only around economic issues but also around other forms of discrimination. These movements sprouted in the aftermath of World War Two as a result of changes in social relations and the emergence of a new imaginary with liberal-democratic discourse as its axis

(ibid., 133-135): “As compared to the old social movements (*the old anti-systemic movements*, as Wallerstein puts it), they emphasize the *internal democracy* of their structures and often mint a new conception of the democratic system, one alternative to liberal democracy and the parliamentary system” (ibid., 135; italics original). Their pursuits concern a panoply of spheres, for example ecology, urban space, feminism, and ethnicity. Their loyalties may be anti-capitalist, antiracist, locality-bound, or related to the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. The new forms of activity these movements practice and the new areas to which they are committed contribute to the production of a new language of political protests. This new idiom more often than not expresses protest against various modes of subjection, for example resulting from relations dictated by the logic of capitalism or caused by the constant generation of new needs and thus the commodification of several phenomena and areas of the social world. All these developments are of course conducive to the burgeoning not only of inequalities but also of new antagonisms and conflicts, as well as struggles for the rights of various marginalized groups. New conflicts also arise as resistance is mounting to progressing bureaucratization imposed by power structures and exacerbating control over more and more spheres of life, including those that have been considered private before. The third and last sphere on Mouffe and Laclau’s list is the development of mass culture, which they primarily explore in conjunction with identity formation among the young. This social world has little in common with the clear-cut Marxist division into homogeneous social classes. Laclau and Mouffe do not dream of returning to the 19th-century model of society and regard the “teeming” of antagonisms as an opportunity for the expansion of the democratic revolution. This state of affairs perfectly dovetails with their vision of pluralism as a mandatory component of democracy. Importantly, “Laclau and Mouffe dispense with the notion of the working class as a single, privileged class, and prefer talking about *new working classes*, underscoring their role in the intensification of the democratic process” (ibid., 137, italics original). Their outlook on this issue is derived from observations of the ways in which resistance is mobilized against the structures of the capitalist system, as this opposition targets not only the relations of production. This obviously ties in with the mushrooming of antagonisms and agonisms in the contemporary social world and their constant enmeshment in the hegemonic game. The current social struggles are not fought with, against, or between permanent and clearly delineated identities. While the boundaries of and participants in conflicts were once well visible, today the hegemonic facet of politics can play out with increasing intensity, as the identities of social actors are open and fluid (ibid., 138-139).

The tasks that Laclau and Mouffe ascribe to the contemporary Left crucially include efforts to deepen and extend liberal democracy by means of facilitating the interlinking of groups and social movements dedicated to combating various forms of oppression. Notably, the discourse of the left wing itself is far from uniform and abounds with disputes. Under the project of radical democracy, the left side of the political scene is must commit to fighting all forms of social injustice and to enhancing opposition to power: "Radical democracy should extend the chains of equivalences such that they encompass various social groups and struggles, without making any of them a privileged foundation vis-à-vis other ones" (ibid., 139). What is envisaged here is the formation of a new "historical bloc" within which demands of respective groups become articulated with those of other groups, without any of these demands having greater (or lesser) prominence awarded to them. This is the core of democratic pluralism, the necessity of which Mouffe restates time and again. Crucially, equality must be coupled with freedom as not simply enjoyed by individuals, but, more importantly, made real across the social world and its inherent relations. The existence and operations of a society referred to as democratic stem from the will of the people and are certainly not linked to transcendental sources of power. At the same time, its members are prepared to constantly monitor and question power (ibid., 140-141). Essential to the development of democracy, the will of the people was obviously first evoked under the French Revolution and involves cultivating values such as equality and communality.

Jacob Torfing (1999) aptly observes that the term "radical," which Mouffe and Laclau use to describe democracy, is polysemous. It can refer to radical pluralism, which should characterize democracy, since it means, as already mentioned, accepting a range of differing identities, none of which is given once and for all, and agonisms sparked by their interplays. At the same time, "radical" can be understood as accentuating the extension of efforts for freedom and equality onto all the spheres of the social world, including both the economy and private life. This is undoubtedly a holistic vision. Emphatically, the economic sphere is no longer viewed as freedom-triggering and dependent on individuals' decisions, which marks a definitive departure of radical democracy from the claims of liberal democracy and the principles of the free market. The socialist dimension of Mouffe and Laclau's conception is visible in their exhortation to undercut and, eventually, dismantle capitalism, which is the source of social inequalities. At the same time, they neither place socialism at the center of their political project nor consider it an ideal mode of the functioning of the social world (Rasiński 2010, 55-56). Importantly, Mouffe and Laclau "do not tout the implementation of radical and pluralist democracy as the ultimate goal that must be achieved at all costs" (ibid., 57). This

reveals their awareness that ideal – that is fully equal and free – democratic society simply does not exist. It is in this context that Slavoj Žižek (2001) proposes one more understanding of "radical" as meaning pure and genuine democracy that makes the ideal democratic essence a reality. Crucially, what is indicated here is also the radical impossibility of such a project (Rasiński 2010, 57).

1.3 Public Pedagogy

Associated with critical pedagogy, public pedagogy is a field of inquiry focused on educational processes that also take place outside of typical schooling institutions (Skrzypczak 2016, 20). Public pedagogy is anchored in critical theory and the thought of the Frankfurt School (e.g., Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Walter Benjamin). As pointed out by Szkudlarek (2003), this critical investment is propelled by protest against injustice in the social world, the adoption of plural thought-perspectives, and dedication to constructing broadly contextualized interpretations of the problems under study. The employment of critical theory in pedagogy is caused by the belief that education is implicated in social inequalities. Critical pedagogues perceive education as closely intertwined with the political. While education instils in learners an acceptance of the principles at work in the social world and, thus, perpetuates the status quo, education may also stimulate learners to make change and pursue emancipation. Hence, "education enslaves, but liberation requires education" (ibid., 366). Critical pedagogy "looks for the most adequate assessment of domination and violence mechanisms inscribed in the operations of educational institutions (and, more broadly, social and cultural practices of control of human minds and behavior) and designs educational interventions that may contribute to expanding individual and collective freedom" (ibid.). This viewpoint is crucial indeed, especially when scrutinizing educational programs for marginalized groups, such as the Romanian Roma in this dissertation. The advocates of critical pedagogy believe that critical education should foster citizens' readiness to undertake action for changing the social world so as to abolish inequality and injustice. What is also at stake is exposing hegemonic mechanisms in various education systems, both in schooling and beyond it. These mechanism are linked to cultural reproduction, which harnesses institutions, including the school, to perpetuate inequalities and the division into practices desirable and undesirable in democracy. According to critical pedagogues, the continued prevalence of these cultural practices consolidates inequalities and cements the advantage of traditionally dominant groups, which thwarts and

even precludes changes that the social world needs. At the same time, education is paradoxically the necessary condition of change and of prosperity in the lives of individuals (ibid., 366-370).

It is in critical pedagogy that public pedagogy is rooted. The term "public pedagogy" was first used in 1894, which implies how long a tradition (especially among American researchers) this school of thought on learning, including its informal and non-formal varieties, boasts.[3] Public pedagogy primarily attends to and scrutinizes areas such as public space, informal learning/teaching settings, social activism, popular culture, everyday life, dominant discursive formations, and citizenship. Its focal issues include the political dimension of cultural influence and of extra-scholastic – both informal and non-formal – education (Skrzypczak 2016, 20). Importantly, the distinction that pedagogy makes between non-formal and informal education is rather fluid. In practice, the two areas often overlap and complement each other. Both denote forms of learning that take place outside of the classic system of formal education. They can be practiced on their own or as a part of a larger enterprise. At the same time, they are complementary in relation to formal education. They are also intimately connected to pedagogical reflection on lifelong learning and adult education. Informal education unfolds throughout an individual's lifetime and affects the formation of people's attitudes and value systems, their acquisition of new skills and the generation of knowledge. It does not involve an organized process of instruction. It is founded on experience and influences from the environment, including the mass media (see Kolb 1983). That a person has gone through this education and/or gained new skills is not certified in any way. It may be a learner's volitional process or an incidental and contingent development (Fatyga 2005, 19-21). Because this kind of education rarely happens through typical classes or training, it does not involve a traditional teacher figure; in any case, one can learn from virtually everybody (Szlęk 2014, 17-20).

While non-formal education takes place besides compulsory schooling (for children and adolescents) or, in more general terms, outside of the classic education system, it is not as spontaneous as informal education. Though non-formal, it has its pre-defined aims and established structures, which as a rule target adults. It differs from formal education in being considerably flexible, as its curricula, methods of knowledge transmission, and tools can change, depending above all on the needs of learners. Teachers are usually part of the process, but their responsibilities do not encompass classifying or selecting students. This type of

[3] Researchers affiliated with public pedagogy explore educational processes in school-based education (e.g., the progressing privatization of schooling), as well as in non-formal and informal education. Given the research focus of my dissertation, I will mainly draw on public-pedagogical reflection on the educational activities of NGOs.

instruction does not have to culminate in receiving a degree or a diploma, and certificates of various kinds are a more popular form of its "validation." Non-formal education activities are as a rule offered as part of staff development programs, by NGOs, clubs, associations, museums, cultural centers, libraries, etc. (Pierścieniak 2009, 85, 92). This type of learning is often incorporated into schemes funded by the European Union. Crucially, it represents one of the basic elements of continued education and directly and unambiguously improves the quality of "human capital" (Stalończyk 2014, 326). The so-called third sector is where the most robust development of non-formal education is observable. It is in this context that Paweł Rudnicki uses the coinage "educational non-governmental organizations" (see Rudnicki 2016), whose work he views as offering an alternative to mainstream formal education.

To come back to public pedagogy, this framework of thought and practice is bound up not only with critical pedagogy but also with early cultural studies. These ties have resulted in the ascription of a significant educational role to popular culture (Sandlin, Schultz, Burdick 2010, 2). This way of reasoning has been substantially advanced by Henry A. Giroux, who insists that learning settings are to be found outside of the school as well, and that central to learning is the stimulation of active citizen attitudes, along with the establishment of new educational institutions. Giroux's theory assigns the central role to culture, which is the fundamental factor in constructing the social imaginary both through producing narratives, metaphors, and visualizations and by determining people's self-perceptions and relations with others. Learning and scholarship are not dissociated from or independent of this imaginary. Giroux emphasizes their influence on the generation and/or reinforcement of democratic values among society members. They are strongly connected to the public sphere and also concern the sphere of politics (ibid., 21-22). Resistance, which ties in with the discourse of radical pedagogy, is another important concept in Giroux's thought. The point is that the classic schooling system is invariably a site where discrimination against all groups marginalized due to background, race, ethnic origin, gender, culture, etc. is highlighted and reproduced. The school is a scene of clashes between discourses and of the operations of hegemonic forces, marked by an ongoing conflict between the power apparatus (institution) and subordinated individuals or groups. Resistance is essential insofar that, in Giroux's view, it offers a chance for a radical transformation as its creative potential makes it possible at least to imaginatively envision freedom. This imaginary is the first step toward making society more democratic (Zańko 2020, 84-86). In Giroux's framework, public pedagogy is "a practice that encompasses the varied forms in which culture works as a space of debate within the production, distribution, and regulation of power" (ibid., 88). Culture is analyzed in terms of the areas it affects, in

particular those related to education, politics, and economy, with the influence of culture considered on both the institutional and symbolic levels (Giroux 2004, 87). Giroux's thought has proven powerfully inspirational to other public-pedagogy researchers, encouraging them to explore popular culture for its actual or potential subversive practices. Consequently, popular culture is no longer thought of as merely "the opium for the people," directly mustered and exploited in hegemonic practices dominant at a given moment. Rather, popular culture is now appreciated as a viable site of critique of the system of forces in place, a locus of counter-hegemonic actions, and the fruitful soil of experimental thought on social justice and democracy (Sandlin, Schultz, Burdick 2010, 3).

To clarify the distinctiveness of public pedagogy, Giroux resorts to the notion of permanent education as theorized by Raymond Williams. The concept envisages education in very broad terms as the totality of social and cultural experiences of individuals and groups. Crucially, people learn not only formally, but also informally and non-formally. People's learning is mediated by the entire social world, its relationships, and its institutions (Savage 2010, 107). Highlighting the changes that sweep across the social world as a result of the progressing consolidation of neoliberalism, Giroux argues that democracy is subject to a kind of "redundantizing" and the public sphere, which lies at the core of democracy as the sine qua non of its proper functioning, is being more and more extensively commodified and privatized. Consequently, it comes to be governed by the rules of the free market with its principle of demand and supply. Discourses are becoming private, and the public area is shrinking. These processes impede the development of democratic societies (Savage 2010, 106).

In one of his papers, Giroux (2000) seeks to capture the nature of the public pedagogy movement by referencing the ideas of Stuart Hall, a sociologist, theorist of culture and cultural studies scholar. According to Hall, it is as a consequence of its cultural embedment that education is linked to and molded by the political. The ways in which people learn and, above all, what people learn are intimately related to hegemonic forces. Neither culture nor education can be possibly investigated without taking into account the operations of power. At the same time, Hall stresses that public pedagogy and cultural politics are deeply interconnected, if not mutually conditioned. In his view, this way of conceptualizing education is bound up with issues of identity construction, if not struggles for identity, and consequently investigates the ways of producing ideas such as communality, belonging, and (civic) responsibility at various moments in history and in various then-prevalent discourses. In his discussion of interconnectedness between learning and social change, Hall stresses that culture is a battlefield for equality, freedom, and the rights of all oppressed groups. Crucially, while culture is neither

stable nor unchangeable, it is not entirely autonomous either (ibid., 352-353): “in the broadest sense, culture offers both the symbolic and material resources as well as the context and content for the negotiation of knowledge and skills. Through this negotiation, culture enables a critical reading of the world from a position of agency and possibility, although within unequal relations of power” (ibid., 353). Hall emphasizes that culture is a site of both the production of and the struggle for power. Consequently, his framework for conceptualizing power is interdisciplinary and engaged in the reiterated crossing of borders and contestation of the power relations and authorities in place. The development and implementation of Hall’s vision are supposed to be primarily fueled by citizens’ empathy and social responsibility, both of which are indispensable for strengthening democracy (including its economic component), buttressing agency, and supporting previously excluded or marginalized actors. The concept of public pedagogy insists that learning is absolutely necessary in the process of social change. For its part, social change is viewed as the prerequisite of initiating political change toward radical, non-hierarchical democracy (ibid., 354-356). Hall’s model perfectly embodies the complexities of public pedagogy with its layered entwinement with areas that have not been at the center of scholarly inquiry into classically defined education. His ideas make it clear that learning – also as related to shoring up democracy – must not be conceived as dissociated from other parts of the social world. Boasting a potential to liberate, but often working to constrain, education is intimately connected both to culture and to power,

Gert Biesta (2012) is another prominent contributor to the movement of public pedagogy. Similarly to Hall’s and Giroux’s, his conception foregrounds the enmeshment of the political and education, Focusing on the role of the public sphere, Biesta observes that several public spaces are today subject to privatization and depoliticization. He discerns the like processes at work in education, where the privatizing lens is applied with an increasing intensity, and learning is more and more often treated as profitable to the learner, rather than to a group or a collective. This results from the dominance of “market logic” over “public logic.” Social actors today tend to use public services without committing themselves to sustaining the social good. Biesta follows Don Mitchell and David Marquand in envisioning the public sphere as a network of institutions and activities geared to mediating in the power-citizen relations. It is in the public sphere that actors can meet as equal members of society, dodging influences spawned by privatized or commercial areas. The public sphere is necessary “to define the public interest and to produce public goods. This implies that the values ‘that sustain, and are sustained by, the public domain’ are not the values of self-interest but of collective interest” (Biesta 2012, 685). While the production of public interest may not dovetail with the interests of a particular

social actor, democracy-building often requires "diminishing" the import of particularistic goals, which is not always easy to accept. In this framework, the public sphere is understood not only as a "tangible" physical space but also as a domain where various social interactions unfold. These interactions differ from those that take place in private lives or corporate/market activities. For the thus-conceived public sphere to exist, it must be located in public space. Importantly, not all non-private spaces are counted as public space. Public space is one that makes political actions possible or at least does not prohibit them. Biesta cites shopping malls as examples of "quasi-public" spaces, because they are by definition open and invite everybody inside, yet they are constantly monitored to detect unwelcome people and undesirable behavior. These are the ramifications of divesting public spaces of all functions other than recreation and consumption (ibid., 685-686).

Biesta is preoccupied with the production of the public sphere and collective actions that may bring forth, consolidate, and develop freedom and with educational practices that promote such civic involvement. He examines the political power of education as fundamentally related to public pedagogy, in which he identifies three forms: *pedagogy for the public*, *pedagogy of the public*, and *pedagogy in the interest of publicness* (see ibid.). Pedagogy for the public views the world as a huge school where teachers provide their students with guidance on how one should act and what a human being one should be. Education is thus founded on instruction as delivered from those teaching to those learning. This mode of thinking inexorably leads to wiping out various discourses and differences among the members of the public. As such, it is damaging to pluralism, which is indispensable for sustaining and developing democratic systems. As Laclau, Mouffe and others insist, democracy cannot work without differences in the social world. Institutions of power "produce" citizens that replicate a pre-defined, desirable model. This happens when the representatives of power command citizens to observe the law and employ various means to persuade them to adopt xenophobic and nationalistic attitudes, availing themselves of multiple reward-and-punishment systems instrumental in shaping desirable worldviews. Biesta stresses that "the main problem with this interpretation lies in the fundamental difference between the 'logic' of schooling and the 'logic' of democracy. From a democratic angle it is therefore important to remind ourselves that the world is not a school and also should not become a school" (2012, 692). In this form, pedagogy for the public is a threat to the forms of communality which accommodate freedom, pluralism, and democracy.

As opposed to pedagogy for the public, *pedagogy of the public* is the cornerstone of democratic discourse, since within its framework educational practices are located among

practices aimed at consolidating and advancing democracy. They are essentially about fostering the capacity of critical thinking and critical consciousness in society members. In this context, the world is envisaged as a huge classroom of leaning adults, rather than as a huge school, with the teacher being replaced by a facilitator. Though far closer to pluralism than pedagogy for the public, pedagogy of the public does not entirely elude the "teaching regime," because it inscribes democracy in the curriculum. As a result, it presupposes a particular development trajectory as the right one, but does not radically limit the diversity of paths through which to arrive at this political vision of the social world. Importantly, this mode of learning is linked to political agency, whose condition of possibility, in this context, is political understanding that precedes action. The educator as facilitator is tasked with prompting individuals' emancipation-conducive explorations, because emancipation processes are to be initiated internally rather than externally. Nonetheless, pedagogy of the public insists that citizens should learn in order to "become (better) political actors" (ibid.).

In Biesta's view, the democratization of society is best furthered by the third type of public pedagogy, one that essentially nourishes "the public quality of human togetherness" and people's capacity to create the public sphere and transform into a civic community. When understood in this way, public pedagogy is located between education and politics, without being ensnared in the teaching regime with its central "tendency to turn social and political problems into learning problems, so that, through this, they become the responsibility of individuals rather than that they are seen as the concern of the collective" (ibid., 693). Thus, pedagogy in the interest of publicness is geared to enhancing the communality of the members of the public and to enabling social actors to act in the public sphere through constructing sites of interaction, collaboration, and nurturing democracy. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's thought, Biesta argues that relocating people (not only physically) from the private to the public sphere makes it possible to actualize the core of pluralism, that is, to construct a community in which people can be free and engage in action. In this case, the educator morphs into a pedagogue-provocateur whose responsibility it is to "knock" citizens out of their taken-for-granted everyday routines and entrenched interplays of hegemonic forces, compelling them to differentiate. Rather than "good citizens," the members of the public are pictured as "ignorant citizens" unfamiliar with the valid and desired models of conduct and thought. As a consequence, social actors do not learn either what they should be like or how they should learn, but are invited "to keep open the opportunities for becoming public or, in Arendtian terms, to keep open the possibility of a space where freedom can appear" (ibid.). This kind of "ignorance" enables them to think more freely and to avoid embracing automatically, as it were, pre-

determined identities imposed on them top-down. This project does not seek to unleash total anarchy or to negate norms and values. The very process of perspective-shifting is supposed to be democratizing, as it changes perceptions of the social world and democracy itself. Democratic processes do not heave to unfold in clearly defined directions. On the contrary, they may be errant and open-ended. In Biesta's model, this kind of public pedagogy does not strive to make people assimilate specific skills and a pre-established portion of knowledge designed to transform community members into enlightened citizens. Genuinely pluralizing effects are achieved by helping citizens come in touch with each other, have a representation in the public sphere, and participate in democratic experimentation (Zańko 2020, 88–91).

When investigating the community of the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma, whose legal, political, economic, and educational situation will be discussed in Chapters III and IV, one should first and foremost examine how the educational process initiated by the House of Peace Foundation and the Nomada Association is unfolding. Pivotal in this context are the presence and representation of this minority in public space. The ideas of and discussions around public pedagogy offer a helpful starting point for a critical scrutiny of the methods used by these NGOs vis-à-vis the Roma. I will use public pedagogy, an important movement within critical pedagogy, as a lens though which to look into the educational programs for the Roma and, at the same time, as a basis for conceptualizing education as an emancipatory and liberating process that crucially contributes to the consolidation and advancement of democracy.

Before doing so, a short discussion of the notion of emancipation is in order. Colloquially meaning liberation from another's power and shaking off enslavement, emancipation is among central concepts both in philosophy and in various pedagogical movements. Biesta explains that it originated in the Roman law, where it denoted freeing a son or a wife from the legal control of the head of the family. Literally, it denoted "giving away ownership" and, more broadly, "relinquishing one's authority over someone." Over centuries, the term came to be used in a variety of contexts, referring, for example, to the emancipation of slaves, workers, and women. Biesta emphasizes that emancipation has always been essentially connected to education since, for example, "the Roman use of the term already indicates the link with education, in that emancipation marks the moment when and the process through which the (dependent) child becomes an (independent) adult" (Biesta 2008, 169). The concept of emancipation gained considerable traction in the Enlightenment, known as the age of reason and the autonomization of subjects. According to Immanuel Kant, it was through education that people could become rational, and the enlightenment itself was then conceptualized as an emancipatory process.

One of the most well-known emancipatory projects, the Marxian vision has a total dimension to it as, ideally, it encompasses the whole of humanity. For Marx, emancipation can never take place exclusively on the individual level. He is not satisfied with the liberation of "a human being as a citizen and making him/her equal with other citizens" (Walentowicz 2018, 19) and views this merely as a starting point. He believes that "civic" liberation does not abolish inequalities springing from class struggle and that "it is only through the overcoming of economic coercion, which degrades the human as a producer, and through extending equality beyond the political sphere onto the totality of interhuman relations in life that full – social – emancipation can be achieved" (ibid.). In the Marxian tradition, emancipation is unattainable without first obtaining an insight into the operations of power. Vital in this context, demystification has become a highly meaningful concept in critical pedagogy.

Discussed above as theorists of discourse and agonistic and radical democracy, Laclau and Mouffe have also influentially addressed emancipation. In doing so, they have revised and complemented Marx's thought by insisting that there is no single or universal model of emancipation, but that pursuits of emancipation may differ, depending on cultural and historical factors. They also argue that the economic status is not the sole determinant of a person's position in the world (Koczanowicz 2005, 12). This proposition is anchored in the view that "because the social world, which we seek to understand, is neither fully transparent nor fully rational, we are unable either to precisely pinpoint by what means it is to be repaired or to predict how these means will actually be employed and in which direction they will propel the development of societies" (Rasiński 2004, 9). Therefore, it is pointless to attempt to devise invariable principles of emancipation. Laclau claims that emancipation understood as a complete liberation from power is unfeasible. However, he emphasizes at the same time that emancipation becomes possible owing to endeavors to achieve it. For their part, such endeavors are made possible by the openness of democracy. Nevertheless, as there is no ideal democracy, there is no ideal emancipation either. Still, the very desire for, vision or fantasy of democracy is essential as a stimulus for action and an encouragement to look at the world differently than before. This is the first step toward improving democracy and initiating emancipation (ibid., 11).

As his own contribution, Biesta proposes a "new logic" of emancipation informed by the ideas of Jacques Rancière and Foucault. Biesta states that "[t]he idea of emancipation plays a central role in modern educations" (Biesta 2008, 169). He encourages relinquishing the model of thought based on the fundamental inequality intrinsic to the division into the emancipator and those being emancipated. In this model, emancipation "requires an emancipation from the

outside; an intervention, moreover, by someone who is not subjected to the power that needs to be overcome" (ibid., 172), while equality remains a vague and distant vision of the future. The idea that emancipation cannot happen without an intervention of an emancipator who is furnished with knowledge and experience necessary to explain to an individual or a group "the truth" about their position and situation is bound up with pedagogy for the public, where, as discussed above, the teacher (emancipator) is already possessed of all of the needed knowledge along with the valid and desired patterns on the basis of which to educate learners (those being emancipated). Biesta wonders when this relationship of dependence will be put to an end and aptly observes that "we can say, therefore, that the logic of emancipation is also the logic of a particular pedagogy" (ibid.).

He also notes that the logic of emancipation is not free from internal contradictions. Although it professes to pursue equality, freedom, and autonomy, it has relations of power at its core. If the emancipator takes a different and "superior" position vis-à-vis those being emancipated and, moreover, initiates the intervention, it is unclear when and how this relationship of dependence may conclusively run its course and cease to be. Biesta ponders what happens to the emancipator-emancipated relations when the process is completed and points out that this relationship is founded not only on dependence but also on "a fundamental inequality between the emancipator and the one to be emancipated" (ibid.).

Biesta argues that Laclau and Foucault are on the mark to claim that emancipation is not an idealized escape from power, and that it is worthwhile to adopt this standpoint. He builds on Foucault to stress that there is no innocent knowledge. Knowledge is always and multifariously entangled with power, so it is impossible to demystify the mechanisms of power by recourse to pure knowledge. Consequently, it does not make sense to pit the two fields – knowledge and power – against each other. The only method for continuing to envisage possibilities of change lies in relinquishing the Enlightenment mode of thinking. All this does not mean that the human being is permanently entrapped by power; for example, Laclau regards endless conflicts and the hegemonic game as basic elements of the social reality we inhabit. Invented in modernity, "old" emancipation seeks, in Biesta's view, to detect and reveal hidden structures and to make social actors aware of the latent workings of power. The exposure and explanation are effectuated by an emancipator, who knows and understands more that those being emancipated. "New" emancipation is depicted by Biesta as "a move — from one particular power/knowledge constellation to another. This other power/knowledge constellation might in some respects be better, but it is not itself beyond power" (ibid., 175). The accomplishment of this transition means that the prior subordination was not a necessity but

one of multiple contingent possibilities. All this leads us to conclude that “new emancipation is not something that is done to people but instead is something that is done by people. Hence new emancipation no longer relies on a relationship of dependency” (ibid.). Thus Biesta assumes that emancipation starts from the postulate of equality, as a result of which everybody may make their move without waiting for interest from the classically conceived emancipator. However, this assumption does not entail universal social equality and simply serves “to take away from the logic of emancipation the idea that there is a fundamental, almost ontological inequality that only can be overcome through the interventions of the emancipator” (ibid.). In this approach, emancipation is not preoccupied with demystification. Instead of looking for and unveiling hidden mechanisms and agendas, it privileges attending to varied experiences and appearances, and treating them as “real,” no matter to whom they belong. Adopting such a logic of emancipation can yield interesting insights, particularly when examining educational programs for the excluded. Biesta’s framework helps abandon the traditional concept of emancipation and, consequently, invigorate reflection on emancipation in the social and political sciences. However, as Biesta himself notes, the social world and thus educational practices as well are so thoroughly saturated with the “old” idea of emancipation that we must realize that time is needed to change this state of affairs. Nevertheless, without thought experiments, no innovation in praxis stands a chance of success.

Chapter Two

Meritocracy, Critical Race Theory, and Education

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss other components of the theoretical-methodological framework I have constructed for my dissertation. In pursuing the scholarly goals of my research, I will not only build on discourse theory, concepts of agonistic democracy, and public pedagogy approaches, but also rely on critical reflection on meritocracy and critical race theory, especially as related to education. These ideas and notions will help me capture and look into various systemic inequalities that the Wrocław-based community of Romanian Roma experience on a daily basis. They also offer valid critical perspectives on the social world and shed light on the close entwinement of the public scene, the capitalist system, and neoliberalism.

Subchapter 2.1 discusses the concept of meritocracy and outlines critiques it has provoked. I briefly sketch the history of meritocracy along with the modifications and refashionings to which it has been exposed over years, as multifarious political groupings have incorporated it into their agendas and used it for their ulterior purposes. I describe the dominant understanding of meritocracy as a social system based on the notion that individuals' intelligence, competencies, and education (validated by proper credentials) are the surest avenue to their prosperity and high standing in the social stratification system. In this context, I present insightful criticisms of meritocracy, the idea of which has become deeply ingrained in the contemporary public scene. In doing this, I refer to the studies of, among other scholars, Jo Littler, Stephen J. McNamee, and Robert K. Miller Jr. The myth of meritocracy has contributed to normalizing social inequalities through spreading the idea that sole responsibility for failure or success in life rests with individuals. In this way, the capitalist free-market mode of thinking has been transplanted onto social relations. Meritocracy tends to be cited by governments to justify the social hierarchy in place, to create an illusion of the equality of citizens, and thus to render the actual inequalities invisible.

In subchapter 2.2, I discuss the ideas of critical race theory (CRT). I present both the initial theoretical inspirations that drove the founders of CRT and the lines along which this

movement developed. The concept of race is viewed here as a social construct that has been vastly instrumental in shaping contemporary U.S. society. In this discussion, I again refer to the censure of meritocracy as one of the pillars of CTR. I also depict hidden mechanisms anchored in the institutions of power that sustain and even aggravate racial inequality in the U.S. I conclude this section by addressing the concept of color-blind racism along with critical judgments on it. Color-blind racism is currently pervasive in U.S. society. My argument in part 2.2 primarily draws on the work of Margaret M. Zamudio, Caskey Russell, Francisco A. Ross, Jacquelyn L. Bridgeman, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Richard Delgado, and Jean Stefancic.

The last subchapter (2.3) specifically ponders critical race theory in connection to education. Schooling is among the focal fields studied by researchers affiliated with CRT, who examine education in terms of expressions of racial inequality. In this section, I address a range of concrete issues that lie at the center of CRT education scholars' attention, such as curriculum, the assessment system, and desegregation. I also cite recent events and developments that mark the emergence and rise of an anti-CRT movement, whose activities bring about detrimental changes in the ways racial inequality is addressed and handled in the U.S. public schooling system. At the end of this part, I examine similar processes unfolding in East-Central Europe in relation to the educational situation of the Romani minority.

The critique of meritocracy and the insights of critical race theory (especially regarding education) will help me portray the social world in which the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community is embedded. The approaches and ideas embraced in these two frameworks will help me identify and depict mechanisms that maintain and sometimes exacerbate social inequalities constructed on the basis of ethnic, racial, and cultural factors.

2.1 Meritocracy and Its Critique

The term "meritocracy" is generally considered to have been coined by Michael Young, a British sociologist and political activist, in his satirical *The Rise of the Meritocracy: An Essay on Education and Equality* in 1958. However, David Kynaston clarifies in *Modernity Britain: Opening the Box, 1957-59* (2013) that the moniker had already featured in Alan Fox's "Class and Equality," whose publication predated Young's book by two years. In his paper, Fox addressed social inequality, predominantly focusing on a range of political and ideological strategies that promoted the production and consolidation of social stratification systems. In his view, meritocracy was a vehicle of several negative meanings and was associated with adverse

developments. His point was that talented and ambitious individuals, whom he additionally described as "ruthless," were rewarded for their skills and/or achievements in ways that propelled the inordinate amassment of their economic and symbolic capital. Fox emphasized that the merits for which these individuals obtained gratifications were not always admirable, and that the rewards offered to them often appeared disproportionate vis-à-vis their accomplishments. This excess, Fox argued, contributed to an unequal distribution of goods in society. Needless to say, the unwarranted rewards were correlated with a high social status. As a consequence, the achievements of people from the lower social classes went unnoticed and unrewarded. Thus, "meritocracy" as used by Fox was charged with critical views nourished by the socialist ideals of the struggle for abolishing social inequality (Littler 2018, 32-33).

For its part, Young's *The Rise of the Meritocracy* paints a dystopian vision of the United Kingdom in the 2030s, when the country is governed by experts, that is, people who possess proper competencies for governance, rather than just hailing from the elite (Woźniak 2012, 99). While the book can be classified as a science-fiction novel, it offers highly relevant insights into what meritocracy essentially is and how it works. Young defines meritocracy by encapsulating it in the "I + E = M" formula, which stands for "Intelligence combined with Effort equals Merit." The book is divided in two parts. The first part deals with the collapse of a nepotistic class society, in which social, economic, and political advantage hingers on the proper blood bonds. This world is overthrown by social movements advocating the establishment of social equality. The second part portrays a new world, whose onset grievously failed to herald the removal of social stratification, because the former leverage-ensuring criterion of background was just replaced by the intelligence quotient. The story ends with the battle of Peterloo in 2034, in which the allied forces of "populists" and housewives launch an attack on meritocracy.

Initially rejected by several publishers, *The Rise of the Meritocracy* eventually became a bestseller in the UK. Young's picture of meritocracy is profoundly critical. It certainly does not come across as an ideal to be pursued by today's societies. Rather, it is presented as an ideology or a set of rules for organizing the social world, principles that only inflate the unequal distribution of power and social stratification. Thus, the book warns against new "criteria" for social divisions and, at the same time, criticizes the idea of overestimating inborn skills and talents as this may also found new modes of hierarchization (Littler 2018, 34-35). As time went by, Young's vision of the future was garnering more and more popularity both in the social sciences and in political debates. Meritocracy has tended to be superficially understood as a social system based on good education, intelligence, and competencies, all of which are an

avenue to prosperity and high social standing. Crucially, these qualities must be validated by certificates, degrees, and diplomas issued by prestigious educational facilities; this is one proof of success. Time and again, meritocracy "is believed to be a panacea capable of guaranteeing the quality of elites and, at the same time, ensuring an equal opportunity for individuals possessed of different cultural legacies" (Woźniak 2012, 97). This conception is rarely, if ever, seriously interrogated in public debates. Meanwhile, Young himself has often engaged in polemics with the unexamined and uncritical endorsement of meritocracy and admonished against the pernicious consequences of implementing meritocratic principles in real societies. For example, in the 1990s, Tony Blair put meritocracy on the agenda of his pro-market "New Labour" policy. In Young's view, Blair reductively understood meritocracy as limited to the segregation of social actors in terms of their degrees, which only aggravated social stratification (ibid., 98; Littler 2018, 35).

The reception of the idea of meritocracy has also been meaningfully impacted by Daniel Bell, an American social scientist and Young's friend. If Young espoused the social-democratic position, Bell has departed from it in his texts, though he has continued to believe in the welfare potential of the capitalist state. In his 1973 book entitled *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, Bell argues that "the post-industrial society, in its logic, is a meritocracy" (Bell 1976, 409; qtd. in Littler 2018, 39), an observation that refers to transformations unfolding in West-European societies as a result of the moral revolution, equality campaigning and freedom advocacy following the end of the Fordian epoch and to the related emergence of new social mobility forms. This means that Bell divests meritocracy of the dystopian aspect, which was pronounced in Young's approach. Bell also ponders the gap between equal opportunities and equal outcomes. He claims that, in a "fair" meritocracy, those that deserve their positions are appreciated, whereas in an "unfair" meritocracy, the underappreciated ones are abused and humiliated. Meritocracy as understood by Bell is a positively charged notion that captures the "opportunities" enjoyed by social actors. He proposes perceiving meritocracy as a system of "fair" rewards and privileges that can be offered for various accomplishments, including those in business and politics. Above all, Bell hopes that the expansion of the capitalist system will be controlled by state agencies and that meritocracy will thus avoid morphing into a new system of social stratification (which is what Young envisaged) and will instead stimulate the development of affluent, dynamic, and equitable societies. Bell's framework does not account for the risks addressed by Fox and Young, but it presupposes a strong welfare state capable of preventing or offsetting social inequalities. With such tenets, which were informed by the economic conjuncture of the day, meritocracy could fuel the proliferation and consolidation of

social mobility forms and therefore contribute to undercutting the class system, while at the same time having a part in multiplying the wealth of the state (ibid., 39-41).

Meritocracy features in an array of political discourses. As shown above, it has been critiqued from the leftist perspective and affirmed in the context of the development of the capitalist system. In the 1990s, the notion started to be evoked in the narratives spun by the neoliberal circles in the UK. For example, Adrian Wooldridge referred to meritocracy in order to criticize the welfare state with its education for all, grants for students, and other social benefits:

> Meritocracy in Woolridge's version then is explicitly bound up with the logic of a capitalist market and with entrepreneurialism and very much against the collective provision of social democracy and the welfare state. Here meritocracy fully embraces the liberal idea of equality of opportunity and renders it synonymous with economic growth, capitalist competition and marketisation. Meritocracy is marketised, and marketisation is good. (ibid., 42)

While Woolridge approved of considerable social stratification, he also assumed that individual social actors could navigate the social ladder and cross its rungs by virtue of their talents and merits. At the same time, he explicitly opposed universal education, which he accused of producing uniform and "inert" masses. In his view, meritocracy was founded on competition rather than on collaboration. As such, it was an engine powering the strong position of neoliberalism. In this perspective, personal achievement, talent, and smartness were construed as a kind of "fair" competition, which reflected the logic of the market (ibid., 42-43).

As can be seen, meritocracy boasts a 60-year-long history. Over this period, the notion has been morphing and taking on different meanings and connotations. Nevertheless, since the 1980s, it has mostly been understood as a positively marked vision of the social world. It is used in a range of political discourses and appears in popular culture. At the same time, a critique of meritocracy is continually being developed in the social sciences (see e.g., Frank 2016; Littler 2018; McNamee, Miller 2009; Markovits 2019).

Contemporary discussions on meritocracy presuppose that all members of the public enjoy equal access to affordances for success. Everything is up to individuals – up to their intelligence, predispositions, commitment, and effort: "While 'merit is a characteristic of individuals, 'meritocracy' is a characteristic of societies as a whole. Meritocracy refers to a social system as a whole in which individuals get ahead and earn rewards in direct proportion to their individual efforts and abilities" (McNamee, Miller 2009, 2). In this context, the schoolings system is regarded as an instrument for eradicating all inequalities if only students

invest sufficiently hard and perseverant work in their education. One ramification of this belief is that if one fails to achieve success, the failure is deemed to be “one’s own fault.” Apparently, one has not tapped into the available possibilities or has simply been lazy. The belief that access to universal education furnishes all citizens with an equal opportunity to achieve lies at the core of meritocratic societies (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman 2011, 11-12, 16-17). Acknowledging solely individuals’ merits and talents without taking into account from what background they come, how they have been able to develop their competencies, and how much work they have had to put into acquiring them results in “legitimating the inequality of achievement as a status quo that ensues from unequal merit rather than from unequal opportunity” (Woźniak 2012, 105-106). This means that dropping out of the education system or entering it too late has basically a “lifelong effect” (ibid., 106).

Meritocracy is as much of a social myth as the American Dream is. Both visions are thoroughly informed by the “ideology of inequality,” and they are dedicated to engineering various explanations and rationales with a view to legitimizing social inequalities. It is not sufficient to simply normalize the observation that “some have more, and others have less.” The point is to convince people situated at the lowest rungs of the social ladder that those above them have found themselves there rightly and justly. The starker the inequalities become, the more persuasive these justifications must be. In the past, when the feudal system or slavery were in place, arguments based on people’s origin and thus their innate superiority/inferiority were customarily advanced. In our times, inequalities are explained away and normalized with recourse to meritocratic rationalizations. Essentially, argumentations contrived by the hegemonic forces do not have to be “true” in order to effectively fulfill their function. This is vividly exemplified by justifications for racism or for circumscribing women’s rights, which are in both cases founded on the claims of the intrinsic inferiority of race or gender. Such justifications can of course be challenged by protest movements devoted to fighting for social equality. Therefore, as a result of pressures exerted as part of the ongoing hegemonic game, some arguments of this kind may and do become obsolete (McNamee, Miller 2009, 1-3).

Advocates of meritocracy underscore that it makes sure that society operates in ways that enable everybody, regardless of where or what class they hail from, to change their social position: “to combine ‘talent’ with ‘effort’ in order to ‘rise to the top’” (Littler 2018, 1). For their part, detractors of meritocracy, such as Jo Littler, emphasize that meritocracy is a fundamental tool for sustaining and reinforcing plutocracy. Wealthy elites, which powerfully influence political processes (nationally and globally), harness meritocratic ideas to legitimize not only their own privileged position, but also the entire capitalist system, which multiplies

the wealth of the richest, while often entailing inequalities, limited access to education, and reduced possibility to benefit from various aspects of, for example, globalization for the less affluent social groups. Paradoxically, champions of meritocracy (for example, politicians) have performed a cultural interception of the discourse and practices of the mid-20th-century emancipation and equality movements. The meritocratic mode of thinking pivots on producing an illusion that there is "greater equality of opportunity for more people than ever before" (ibid., 2). Factors such as social background, gender, skin color, sexual orientation, and the like are thus supposed not to hamper anybody's success in whatever field. As already mentioned, hard work and showcasing one's talent are purportedly enough to "make it" to the very top. Notably, the individualism of competing social actors is foregrounded in this context, and the public scene is recognized as governed by principles directly derived from the free-market mechanisms (ibid.). This obscures systemic inequalities, which prevent social actors from transcending the limits bound up with their background, race, gender, etc. In this way, responsibility is shifted onto individuals, whom the meritocratic framework portrays as beginning their lives entirely "unencumbered." If they "don't make it," they are to blame as unable to capitalize on their talents, sluggish, and/or indolent.

Meritocracy is commonly symbolized by a ladder. Its rungs are supposed to epitomize multiple opportunities, which can freely be used by all members of a society. However, as early as in 1958, Raymond Williams thought of a ladder as actually emblematizing the bourgeoisie and their impact on how the social world functioned. He pointed out that one could only climb a ladder alone, which was damaging to community. Additionally, the ladder symbol was contrived, so to speak, to improve the image of the hierarchical social structure, as the rule of the bourgeoisie propounded the idea of advancement by merit, rather than by wealth or family connections. All this reverberates in meritocracy, where ample possibilities of social mobility are extolled, while the elimination of social divisions and consequently of inequality is certainly not on the cards. Media have long been instrumental in disseminating the ladder symbol as such and, above all, the meritocratic ideas. Individuals that are recognized as successful and making their way up the purported ladder are cast as protagonists of media narratives. They have the status of authority conferred upon them, and their attitudes and ways are held up as a model to be imitated. Hence, so-called talent shows are thriving, along with entrepreneurship training courses and workshops, motivational meetings with billionaires, coaching, and a range of related practices. The reinforcement of meritocracy by means of such instruments brings about an erasure of issues pertaining to the value of work – such as negative (downward) social

mobility, collectivism, welfare, and the like – from the dominant media coverage (ibid., 3; Littler 2018a, 4).

The logic of meritocracy is founded on the idea that all social individuals possess their innate talents or intelligence. If so, everybody can "make it" if only they suitably manage their inborn resources. Importantly, "intelligence" tends to be misrepresented as an individual and pre-existent property measurable by IQ scores, which cannot arise and be developed in varied, non-linear ways (Littler 2013, 54). IQ tests have often been used to provide "scientific" evidence for the natural superiority or inferiority of certain groups of people, singled out on the basis of skin color, gender, and/or social background. For example, in the early 1920s, the U.S. government used IQ test to restrict the migration of South- and East-Central European nationals to the U.S. Tellingly, the regulations were issued on the basis of scores reported by illiterate people who did not have an adequate command of the English language. Considerable controversy over the IQ notion was stirred up by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, published in 1994. Herrnstein and Murray sought to prove that intelligence was first and foremost genetically inherited and fundamentally accounted for both financial and social success. They argued that social advancement in the U.S. was only possible through innate talent, which prompted the emergence of the "cognitive elite." The book provoked a great deal of criticism, with its detractors finding fault both with its methodological inaccuracies and with its disputable findings. Their censure was primarily lavished upon the authors for belittling the impact of social conditions and amplifying the significance of inborn intelligence in the context of social mobility. These objections were vindicated when the data collected by Herrnstein and Murray were re-examined in 2005. When measurement errors were eliminated, the intelligence quotient was found to have only a negligent effect on the income of the respondents, whereas their background, education, race, and inherited economic status proved to be strong determining factors. The basic issue that arises from such discussions concerns the nature and significance of innate or "raw" intelligence. This begs a series of questions: Does such intelligence have multiple dimensions to it? Can it/they be measured and if so, how? Does it always develop in the same way? The fact is that there are plentiful statements, behaviors, and decisions that are socially appraised as signs of intelligence, but not necessarily reflected in IQ test scores (McNamee, Miller 2009, 25-27).

Inborn talent is another pillar on which the meritocratic framework rests. Individuals who have achieved success in arts or sports and financially benefited from this achievement are usually cited as evidence for the right functioning of meritocracy. Music, film, and sports stars

that come from modest backgrounds are erected into symbols. If they have succeeded and climbed up the social ladder owing to their talent alone, all other individuals are expected to be capable of a like feat. Emphatically, however, socio-economic hardships may prevent individual talents from ever being noticed. Besides, talents need to be practiced, trained, and developed, which as a rule entails – often considerable – spending on instructor fees, equipment, etc. A child may be gifted with an exceptional hearing or voice, but if his/her parents are not in the position to properly take care of these capacities, they will not automatically lead to social promotion. Adherents of meritocracy usually add "having the right attitude" to the innate intelligence-talent combo, meaning that success is fostered by cultivating an appropriate approach, composed of high aspirations, exceptional energy, strong motivation, perseverance in striving after one's goals, etc. Therefore, "making it to the top" can be precluded by sloth, deficient self-discipline, unreliability, and the lack of courage to take up new challenges. Still, it remains unclear which attitudes are decisive factors for success in particular professions or particular positions. The qualities listed above may rather be linked to socio-economic success or even result from it. They certainly do not determine the possibility of achieving it. Besides, such attitudes are instilled in socialization and education, rather than being inborn. While, in the ongoing hegemonic game, they may be trumpeted as desirable and expected by employers, they may at the same time have little to do with the actual effectiveness of one's performance in a job (ibid., 28-38). "Hard work" is the last major factor requisite for success, as claimed by believers in meritocracy, who nevertheless never precisely define what this hard work actually is. It is thus ultimately unclear whether what is meant is the amount of time spent laboring or perhaps very burdensome working conditions. At the same time, "[p]eople claim that they deserve their success because they work hard. Yet, deservedness is not equivalent to hard work, and as has been repeatedly shown, many people who work hard are not especially successful" (ibid., 39). Notably, among the wealthiest people in the world there is a sizeable group of those who basically do not have to work at all, as their income stems from stocks, shares, bonds, property, and investment. For their wealth to increase, they simply need to pay others who work to multiply their revenue. Consequently "[w]hen people cite hard work as a factor in getting ahead, they really mean hard work in *combination* with other factors, especially opportunity and acquired skills, both of which are more related to social background than individual capacities" (ibid.).

According to meritocrats, this ensemble of characteristics and attitudes guarantees socio-economic success for all individuals, whatever their social background, race, and/or gender. At the same time, however, this ideal is impossible to be made a reality. Littler identifies

five essential problems with meritocracy, asking very straightforwardly: “What is wrong with meritocracy?” (Littler 2018). First of all, the idea of meritocracy is based on the competition principle and the hierarchical system, which will by default always consist of those “superior” and those “inferior.” Not everybody has an opportunity to nurture their talent, and not everybody is furnished with the “right attitude.” The continual encouragement to compete for positions detrimentally affects the development or reinforcement of community-centered thinking based on care and cooperation, In this way, the illusory fairness of an equal opportunity for all makes it possible to prevent problems bound up with systemic inequalities from becoming visible. Another problem inheres in the intrinsic quality of intelligence and talent. This way of thinking bears a risk of instituting social divisions based on genetic factors, which, as history has shown, never leads to anything good. Intelligence should be approached in terms of diversity as, rather than being given in one form, once and for all at the moment of birth, it can evolve in various fashions and directions. Additionally, “making it up the ladder” is replete with barely surmountable difficulties for some individuals. These challenges include, for example, the historical conjuncture, social background, limited access to education, health conditions, etc. Another point raised by Littler is that social statuses are hierarchized in conjunction with jobs. The professions regarded as prestigious and worth aspiring to vary across time. Since doctors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs are counted among such respected professions today, the question arises why these particular occupations are actually deemed superior and more important than the work of nurses, shop assistants, or construction workers. Littler notes that discussions on this issue are very rare in the mainstream media and culture. If it is difficult to pinpoint the reasons why a lawyer’s work is ranked as more prestigious than a nurse’s work, it is also difficult to explain what factors boost social mobility and how. In today’s meritocracy, the upper middle class and its values are put forward as a model to emulate, while the relevance of the working strata is deprecated (ibid., 3-7): “Contemporary neoliberal discourses of meritocracy, however, assume that all progressive movement must happen upwards and, in the process, contribute to the positioning of working-class cultures as the ‘underclass’, as abject zones and as lives to flee from” (ibidem, 7). Instead, corporate power and culture are appreciated, and the free-market principles are transplanted onto the public scene as a whole, with competition elevated into the central rule for ordering life. The last of Littler’s five issues concerns the grounds for the popularity and durability of meritocracy in the context of its considerable contribution to obscuring and, at the same time, aggravating social and economic inequalities. Meritocracy is regularly brought up by governments to justify and normalize social stratification with all its harmful effects. The entire focus is thus on the effort that individuals

must make in order to "succeed," while their initial living conditions fall off the radar. Therefore, meritocratic reasoning crafts validations of the model in which the social world is based on capitalist principles and ubiquitous greed, while the ideas of community, equality, and welfare are sidelined from the circulation of ideas (ibid., 7-8):

> The dominant meaning of meritocracy in circulation today might therefore be broadly characterised as a potent blend of an essentialised and exclusionary notion of 'talent', competitive individualism and the need for social mobility. Neoliberal meritocracy promotes the idea of individualistic, competitive success, symbolised by the ladder of opportunity. (ibid., 8)

Meritocratic narratives accord a considerable role to education. In 1954 Hannah Arendt published her essay "The Crisis in Education" (Arendt 1954), in which she addressed American media comments on the decrease of schooling standards. She also looked at the social differences between the education systems in Europe and in the U.S. She noted parents' rather passive attitude, as they failed either to build their authority in the eyes of their children or to engage in their education. Education should instill in future adults the belief that they must commit to creating a social world that is good for all. According to Arendt, the British schooling system was aligned with meritocratic ideas, as it availed itself of complicated exams that served the purpose of selecting students upon completion of primary schools. Meritocracy, as the essay argued, tied in with oligarchy, founded on the primacy of wealth or social background, which underpinned the production of stratified societies. In Arendt's view, what happened in a meritocratic system was a simple shift from the affluence criterion to the talent criterion. As a result, democracy did not function properly in England, because meritocracy fed the oligarchic mechanism of government, which contradicted the principle of equality of all members of society. Interestingly, she believed that hierarchization founded on the division based on individuals' capacities would be impossible in the American schooling system (ibid., 176-193; Littler 2018, 37-38).

Meritocracy is closely interwoven with modern education, since degrees and certificates confirming the completion of schools, HEIs, and courses are instruments for determining people's position in the social hierarchy. These credentials are, as it were, passes to prestigious jobs and well-paid positions. Education is supposed to work as a "magical" equalizer, eliminating social inequalities and divisions, and to enable all members of the public, regardless of their class, gender, race, etc., to achieve "success" (Sobczak 2018, 158). Diplomas and degrees are to channel the distribution of the "social rewards" of affluence, recognition, and prestige in the way that purportedly hinges on individual effort and ability and is thus

considered fair. Additionally, certificates attest to people's education and suitable skilling, which make them attractive to potential employers (Melosik 2013, 22). Zbyszko Melosik explains the logic behind this model of education:

> [A]t its core lies measuring the educational *achievements of individuals* on the consecutive levels of the schooling system, as a result of which these individuals are successively *sorted* (with groups of them *dropping out* of the system one by one). The underlying belief is that *individual differences* in learning outcomes result from differences in people's aptitudes and motivations, with the central assumption being that, at the start, all children should have an *equal opportunity* to succeed. (ibid.)

Champions of meritocracy presume that all people receive the same treatment in the education system, which should theoretically be regarded as its virtue. At the same time, the meritocratic logic holds this factor to be the foundation of its vision of social mobility and of education as an instrument for egalitarianizing society. However, they conceive of equality in neoliberal terms, as all individuals can take part in rivalry (since this is supposed to be based on people's talents and motivations to succeed, rather than on their background, etc.), but not all of them can win it. Meritocracy is associated with a strong belief in progress, which is informed by trust in and a positive or affirmative view of education and its role in shaping a fair, democratic, and tolerant society. In the meritocratic approach, learning is an investment, and the more educational stages individuals manage to go through, the more they can achieve later in life (ibid., 23-24).

A critique of the meritocratic influence on the education system is offered by opponents of credentialism. They critically assess the deployment of certificates and degrees confirming educational achievements ("credentials") as a tool of "social selection." They also question the idea that educational investments eliminate social divisions and fuel economic development, a notion embraced in meritocracy and human-capital thinking. Rather, they point out that, deplorably, education has been reduced to a "credential mill" that "grinds" learners and produces inequalities among them. There is no simple correlation between an increase in the number of degree-holders and the rise of social prosperity. Credentials merely evince possibilities to achieve a considerable income or a high position in the social hierarchy. Thus, anti-credentialists insist that "the main function of diplomas is to *maintain the social stratification as it is*, because different social groups inexorably have different access to credentials" (ibid., 26). Degrees also tend to be described as a legacy – a species of property handed down from generation to generation in order to preserve the high station of particular individuals and families. These observations make it clear that an ideal meritocratic system

cannot possibly be put in place, as people who enjoy better positions in the social hierarchy will strive to retain equally privileged positions for their children, either by exercising their (both economic and social) influence or by bequeathing cultural capital to their offspring. As a result, inequalities are constantly reproduced, reinforced, and generated (ibid.; McNamee, Miller 2009, 111-113).

One more aspect of interconnectedness between meritocracy and education deserves attention. If meritocracy indeed were not a myth but had its ideal reflection in social reality, educational achievements of learners from various social, economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds would not differ. In meritocratic logic, differences could be explained away by resorting to the notion that an initial equal opportunity is marred by flawed resolve coupled with a failure to use talents, which results in worse school performance. However, this reasoning does not sound sufficient if the mechanisms of marginalization and social exclusion are taken into account. Differences in school achievements of people hailing from, for example, different ethnic backgrounds are very often bound up with entrenched and structural differences. As meritocratic schooling places people's individual responsibility for success at its center, education mutates into a factory that produces "better" and "worse" graduates, whereby the effect is supposed to depend on the graduates themselves. As already reiterated, this vision of learning dovetails with the logic of the free market. Consequently, the school loses it potential of supporting human collaboration for the democratization of the world and for combating social inequality and other divisions. Instead of being based on community, cooperation, and joint action, the school is based on and promotes competition (Crawford 2010, 7, 10).

I will reference the meritocratic approach to the social world and the critique of this framework in Chapter Four of this study. In the case of groups as radically excluded as the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community, it is imperative to bear in mind that inequalities stem for the defective systems of education, economy, and social policy. Meritocracy, which amplifies inequalities and divisions instead of erasing them, makes for an important point of reference when examining socio-educational programs targeting this community.

2.2 Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) came into being in jurisprudence disciplines, but it was soon picked up in a range of other fields, including education sciences. It tends to be depicted as a movement involving activists and scholars devoted to studying and refashioning the nexus of race, racism, and power. Critical race theory pertains to the areas explored not only by ethnicity studies and citizen rights studies, but also by economy and history. As one of its axial distinctive features, CRT questions the foundations of the liberal order, including its theory of equality and the purported neutrality of law. Crucially, CRT has an activist dimension to it, as it does not stop at producing reflection, but robustly seeks to initiate change (Delgado, Stefancic 2001, 2-3). Developed chiefly in the U.S., it holds that racism is a salient and basically permanent feature of American society This does not mean that CRT is supposed to be used exclusively by scholars whose research focuses on the U.S.

The beginnings of CRT date back to the mid-1970s, when American scholars, lawyers, and activists realized that issues of the human rights and equality struggle were no longer being advanced in the legislation, and that some of them had actually stopped being articulated altogether. It became obvious that new models and methods of thought must urgently be devised to expose and combat novel and often less visible forms of racism. It was in such circumstances that Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado joined forces to address the problem. The first conference of the group that later went on to found critical race theory was held in 1989. It commenced a long series of meetings, workshops, and discussions, in this way forging a space in which to construct new conceptualizations of racism, including its latent variety, and to design strategies for opposing it.

As explained by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001), CRT largely drew on two chronologically earlier movements: critical legal studies and radical feminism. The founders of CRT also drew inspiration from the writings of Antonio Gramsci, Jacques Derrida, Frederick Douglas, César Chávez, and Martin Luther King Jr. They built on the ideas of the movements launched in the 1960s and the early 1970s, including Black Power and Chicano. Their fundamental borrowing from legal studies is represented by the idea of “legal indeterminacy,” which holds that not all cases brought to court can be settled in one correct and fair manner. Both the prosecution and the defense can develop multiple narrative lines, which are as a rule adjusted to the hegemonic discourse in place at a given moment. They can also try to break this discourse. The founders of CRT were also inspired by the feminist thought on the interplay of power and the production of social roles and by insights into the harnessing of habits and social

models in the generation of domination forms (above all patriarchy). Derrick Bell (1973), Professor of Law at New York University, is credited as the father of CRT; he taught and did research until his death in 2011. Alan Freeman, another key contributor to the development of CRT, authored the movement's key papers, in which he showed, among other things, that the case-law of the U.S. Supreme Court legitimized racism. Emphatically, CRT covers issues pertaining not only to African-Americans but also to Indian, Latino, and Asian populations (Delgado, Stefancic 2001, 2-6).

The upholders of CRT identify the "normalization" of racism as its fundamental problem. In brief, this means that racism is taken for granted as a part of the social world. It tends not to be noticed or to be obscured, as a result of which law can effectively handle solely its most glaring manifestations. Additionally, the domination of white people is not "innocent" either materially or mentally. Critical race theorists underscore that racism supports the interests of the white elite, a phenomenon which is sometimes labelled as the "interest convergence" and "material determinism." They understand the concept of race itself as a social construct fabricated in order to achieve a range of goals, including while involved in the hegemonic game. Rather than linking race to genetics or biology, they argue that differential racialization – that is, the production of social divisions based on race – is a historical process. This observation helps them examine contemporary divisions by reference to past practices, first and foremost the colonization of both Americas, Africa, and parts of Asia by Europeans. These developments initiated the distinction into the colonizers and the colonized, whites and non-whites, masters and the servants, all of which continue to affect social divisions today. Subsequently, the process of legitimizing colonization began, with schooling having a part in it by normalizing the colonial narrative and muffling minority voices. According to critical race theorists, such practices have led to recognizing race differences as neutral and obvious.

Critical race theorists are committed to the study of mechanisms by which differences among society members are instituted on the basis of selected physical features such as skin color, body build, and hair texture, while similarities and common features, such as intelligence, personality, etc., are by and large overlooked. If differences are prioritized and foregrounded, races are socially produced and divisions are consolidated. Notably, majority society racializes different groups at different moments. For example, depending on fluctuations of the labor market's demand for workers, racist narratives tend to be attenuated to facilitate filling vacancies with non-white migrants. Representations and stereotypes of minorities are mutable as well. These transformations are reflected, among others, in the productions of popular culture. CRT researchers emphasize that social identities are extremely complicated, and a

single, uniform identity of a social actor is very rarely to be isolated. As highlighted in a somewhat different, albeit in many ways affiliated, theoretical context by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001), identities are never complete and find themselves in constant flux. Critical race theory clearly shows that despite the impression of racism subsiding, it still haunts American and other societies. The persistence of racism surfaces on the level of interconnectedness of racism and economic oppression, and of race and class. This is exemplified in obstacles that people of color confront when applying for a bank loan, seeking a job, and/or renting an apartment. The poverty rate in black populations is far higher than in white populations. The life expectancy of people of color is shorter, and they have access to lower-standard schooling and healthcare than whites do. All these factors do not result from genetic causes, but are brought about by systemic inequalities (Delgado, Stefancic 2001, 7-11; Zamudio, Russel, Rios Bridgeman 2011, 4).

Critical race theory "provides students and practitioners with a model to frame and interpret society. The frame, much like a photographer's picture, captures essential aspects of an image while blocking out less relevant details. Thus, we often hear that a picture tells a story. Theory works in the same way" (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman 2011, 2). The concept of race is a tool that helps CRT practitioners investigate and interpret the public scene. Even though the slavery of black people in the U.S. and the slavery of Roma in what is now Romania[4] was abolished a long time ago, race-based inequalities are still profuse in a range of spheres, including the legislation, private life (disapproval of mixed marriages), urban space (white and black communities considerably differ in living standards), and schooling (differences in access to schools and in learning outcomes); white males continue to be a dominant force in the accumulation of economic capital. Perhaps even more significantly,

> [r]ace permeates much of our system of beliefs and ideologies as well. The very notion that race no longer matters is part of an ideology that justifies and legitimates racial inequality in society. Subtle beliefs about racial superiority and inferiority serve to elevate the traditions, art, languages, literature, and ways of being and knowing of some groups while disparaging the contributions of others. (ibid., 3)

Mandatory school reading lists are predominantly compiled from Western literature, and a similar bias pervades art education. Stereotypically, establishing an individual's race is supposed to "help" us fathom his/her personality traits, which we often believe is the case despite our awareness that race is a socially produced concept. Such tendencies result, among

[4] I discuss this issue in more detail in the following chapter.

other sources, from the construction of the education system and from the content circulating in popular culture. Critical race theorists aim to lay bare a plethora of mechanisms mobilized to craft "an all-encompassing web of race" with a view to highlighting and grasping how social inequalities operate (ibid.).

A critique of meritocracy, including in the education context, is a constitutive part of critical race theory. CRT adherents argue that education frequently neither emancipates nor contributes to reducing inequalities; on the contrary, it exacerbates them, reinforcing racism. The hierarchically organized schools, with their practices of encouraging some students to only train their technical skills, their requirement of obedience, their deference to authority, and their subjection to liberal discourse, do not promote the individual and personal development of learners. Instead, the school often proves a machine geared to buttressing the capitalist system. Critical race theorists also study schooling from the historical perspective as an institution that has consistently helped keep in place and reproduce unequal relations of power (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman 2011, 11-12, 16-17):

> Schools in particular have played a powerful role in creating racial inequality. Readers may recall learning how African Americans were severely punished if not killed for learning to read or how Native American children were sent to boarding schools. What is often not learned is that these children were forcibly removed from their families and communities and sent to schools with the sole purpose of stripping away their identities. (ibid., 4)

The purpose of such investigations is to bring into relief the operations of the schooling system that have disadvantaged and continue to disadvantage other-than-white learners. Removing the most blatant forms of racism from schools does not entail the complete elimination of inequality-legitimizing practices from educational facilities (ibid.).[5]

Researchers affiliated with critical race theory are as a rule divided into two groups: "realists" and "idealists." This does not depict any rigorous split into two opposing and distinct camps. Rather, this captures complementary approaches that stem from the same core and pursue the same goal. Associated with poststructuralism, the realists attend to tangible manifestations of racism. They use this lens to scrutinize not only schools, but also activities of other public institutions, governments, companies, and entire political-economic systems. They examine policies, practices, and structures that work to consolidate inequality, racism, and racialization. They define their research field in rather broad terms and apply themselves to

[5] Critical race theory and education are further discussed in the next sub-chapter.

unveiling racist mechanisms even on the level of macrostructures, such as capitalism understood as a system organizing not only the economic sphere, but also the social world as a whole. In their view, the most urgent task lies in devising solutions for changing the treatment of people of color. For their part, the idealists espouse the standpoint powerfully influenced by postmodernist thought and discourse theory. Their mindset has thus been shaped by reflection on concepts such as ideology and discourse, and these two are the focal points of their CRT inquiries. They look for structures, cultural productions, narratives, etc. that serve to justify racism. Their scrutiny encompasses an array of widely circulating content, ranging from master narratives to advertising jingles, song lyrics, conspiracy theories, movie scripts, etc. They have a sharp eye for stereotyping, which is one of the strategies for producing discourses that subordinate various groups, for example, people of color. The idealists insist that social life is pervaded by hegemony. There are various hegemonies, which means that "white power" comes in a range of iterations. Change can be made through critiquing the discourses that are vehicles of inequality and racism and convey multiple justifications of those (ibid., 9-10).

Pivotal to the theoretical toolkit of critical race theorists, whether they side with the realist or with the idealist approach, is what they call an "oppositional voice." This essentially involves giving prominence to the narratives informed by minority perspectives, that is, those constructed from the viewpoint of the oppressed. This method helps bring contradictions between dominant and minority narratives into spotlight. Emphatically, no narratives are neutral, but history is as a rule related from the dominant group's angle. By giving voice to non-whites, non-males, etc., it is possible to undermine "mainstream" narratives. The idea of objectivity tends to be employed to legitimize and entrench majority narratives:

> To be objective effectively limits one's basis of knowledge to commonly held beliefs about what is true and the accepted means for deriving those truths. Objectivity takes a position which serves to silence. Alternately, critical race theorists give voice to the experiences and truths of those without power while simultaneously asking citizens to question the master narratives we have come to believe. (ibid., 5)

To restate, identity is not construed as closed and linear by CRT researchers. Instead, they endorse intersectionality, that is, the mode of thought that looks into race along with gender, class, ethnic or national background, sexual orientation, and interconnections among these factors, which shift depending on the social individual's current situation. Critical race theorists insist that one should not theorize the position of people of color without taking into account that some of them are encumbered by more than one "oppression criterion." Attending to the situation of intersectionally vulnerable people helps CRT practitioners develop

conceptual frameworks encompassing larger oppressed groups and, thus, avoid simplifying human experiences. They also inquire into essentialist and anti-essentialist takes on the points or features shared by all the oppressed, since while oppression is a universal condition in their case, the forms and consequences of oppression may and do vary widely. Given this, strategies used in the struggles of movements devoted to advocacy for particular oppressed groups will differ as well. When engaging in a struggle for social change, people may naturally wish and strive to define the goals of their actions as lucidly and explicitly as possible. Such clarity is most easily achieved with recourse to essentialism, which facilitates persuading people that a given kind of struggle makes sense and designating the groups or areas it is supposed to benefit. In other words, the point is to crystallize the group/problem around which a political movement forms and thus, as it were, to uniformize the oppressed group. This is an intrinsically political process. The larger (and more numerous) the fighting group will be, the greater its chances for having its voice heard and heeded. However, CRT researchers explain that overlooking people whose identities represent more than one oppressed group may have adverse implications and insist that struggles for removing racist mechanisms must employ radical strategies. In their view, changes must be universal and concern all the areas of oppression. If a modest revision is accomplished, it will, so to speak, eclipse the purposefulness of further efforts and, as a result, compromise chances for making structural changes. Consequently, critical race theorists embrace intersectionality and anti-essentialism. They repudiate "half-measures," since they want to avoid further injustice for those already oppressed but not belonging to the most numerous marginalized groups (Delgado, Stefancic 2001, 51-58).

CRT adherents give precedence to exposing control mechanisms implicated in racial ordering. These mechanisms came into being and continue to work as a result of vying for white hegemony and power (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman 2011, 10). The point is thus to show that white dominance has become something accepted and, at the same time, latent as a result of racism, which has saturated the public scene for centuries. The rise of civil rights and equality movements was supposed to alter this state of affairs, but both realist and idealist critical race theorists are unanimous in demonstrating that this process has not come to pass yet. They blame this "overpass" on a lack of the critique of liberalism, which embraces meritocracy (outlined in the preceding subchapter), cements the image of society as fair and egalitarian, and accepts inequality as an element of daily competition among individuals: there will always be winners and losers, though – according to meritocrats – everybody enters this contest with equal prospects of victory. In a world steeped in liberalism, the structural causes of inequality are obfuscated, and only those inhering in individuals are recognized. The prioritization of

individual rights is so overwhelming that it precludes minority rights from being acknowledged. As a result, freedom and equality cannot be achieved without a criticism of liberalism, as CRT researchers claim. Liberalism is to be understood here as equating human rights with political, economic, and property rights of the individual. Although values such as freedom and equality are declaratively attributed to liberalism, liberalism is not the concept that can lead to their ideal implementation, because it endorses competition as directly derived from the free-market principles and disperses it across the social world. If liberalism accords preeminence to the individual and individual rights, it does not leave much, if any, room for legal instruments protecting minority groups. Supposing that liberal reality is based on individual merit, there should be no oppression related to race, ethnic/social background, religion, and gender. Consequently, there is no need to combat social inequalities, because they are supposed to ensue from the choices and actions of individual social actors. Besides, genuinely eliminating inequality would entail changes in the division of power, a vista that may understandably give governments some serious jitters (ibid., 15-16; Delgado, Stefancic 2001, 21-25). As CRT explains:

> Ultimately, the liberal perspective fails to consider the multiple power relationships that give some individuals much greater advantage over others, and that allow some people to be freer than others. (…) As a society, we have never practiced justice and liberty for all. Liberal societies use the slogans of equality to benefit an exclusive, privileged group. And while over the years liberal societies have extended legal and political rights to a greater number of people, they have never addressed the fundamental material inequality passed down through generations of modern capitalist development. (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman 2011, 16)

As already emphasized, race is a social construct whose meanings have historically influenced and continue to influence ideas, relations, and interactions. One of conspicuous phenomena addressed in reflection on race and racism is so-called color-blind racism. Color-blind racism is a standpoint that holds that skin color is no longer a meaningful factor in today's social world. As such, it embodies a kind of racial "blindness," both in the sense of deliberately disregarding skin color when assessing members of the public (everybody is supposed to be "equal" at the start) and in the sense of denying that there is any institutional racism. This mode of thinking results in claims that civil rights have progressed so far that everybody is treated in the same way (equally) now, whatever their race. In this reasoning, social parity is equated with political rights. If no legal provisions are formally in place to exclude people of color, inequality cannot actually exist, according to color-blind racism. As a result, a range of spheres in which

racism is very much at work become overlooked, which only contributes to consolidating and sustaining the existing social inequalities (Neville, Gallardo, Sue 2016, 6).

Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) reports that, if asked whether they are racists, very few U.S. citizens will answer in the affirmative today (excepting perhaps, champions of white supremacy). Most of them will claim that "they don't see any color, just people." This belief often comes with the notion that minority groups are in fact responsible for producing racial divisions. Such outlooks are coupled with negating the need to implement equal opportunity programs (economic, political, educational, social, etc.) designed for people of color, such as affirmative action,[6] and with complaints that non-whites tend to "play the race card" and to indiscriminately brandish accusations of racism: "Most whites believe that if blacks and other minorities would just stop thinking about the past, work hard, and complain less (particularly about racial discrimination), then Americans of all hues could *all get along*" (Bonilla-Silva 2006, 1). However, the fact is that members of racial minorities in the U.S. have lower incomes than whites, and black-owned real estate/housing units are valued at a fraction of white-owned property. It is often simply a sheer impossibility for blacks and Latinos to settle and dwell in several neighborhoods of American cities. Non-whites have impaired access to quality education and healthcare, and they fall victim to what has come to be called racial profiling, in which people of color are more frequently targeted as suspects by the police than whites are. This is exacerbated by the "racialization" of the American judiciary system, which results in a disproportionately high number of non-white detentions and convictions. This raises the question of why despite countless glaring examples of the oppression suffered by people of color, majority society persists in professing that race does not matter. In explaining this, Bonilla-Silva points out that, for decades, whites have contrived an array of justifications and grounds for this status quo, as a result of which they have come to believe that they are not responsible for non-white lives and fates. According to Bonilla-Silva, all these explanations are thoroughly informed by color-blind racism, a mindset that became pronounced at the end of the 1960s. In this approach, explanations are sought that attribute the observable inequalities to other-than-racial factors instead of to skin color. Unlike in the past, when the genetic and moral inferiority of blacks was propounded, today such factors comprise, for example, the circumstances of the labor-market and the real-estate market,[7] cultural conditioning, in-group

[6] Schemes implemented by the local authorities, universities, and companies in the U.S. to provide equal opportunity for discriminated-against minority groups on the labor marked and/or in educational settings.

[7] This is accompanied by the conviction that the labor market and the housing market are autonomous and self-operating areas of the social world and, as such, develop entirely on their own.

preferences to dwell in a color-uniform community,[8] etc. All this adds up to "new" racism, in which the old explicit use of sings and labels to mark off separate spaces for whites and blacks (as under apartheid in the Republic of South Africa) has been ousted by the subtle and invisible institutional reproduction of exclusionary mechanisms that discriminate against non-whites in various covert ways. American housing policies are a perfect case in point as, rather than having all the property for sale or rent presented to them, non-white customers are pointedly offered apartments situated in distinctly black-, Latino-, or other minority-populated urban areas. Similar processes pervade the labor market: some jobs are mainly advertised in the media tailored for white audiences, college-educated people of color are employed in low-paid positions, and their promotion possibilities are severely restricted. Such "quotidian," "customary," and formally uncodified practices perpetuate the lower social standing of non-whites in the U.S. While the civil-right campaigning for minority groups has pushed forward the issue of civil liberties for non-whites, the abiding problem is that these achievements are often cited as evidence for there being no racism anymore (in the "traditional" sense of the term). Thus color-blind racism works to maintain white domination and related white privilege without patently discriminating against people of color. If changes in the legislation have erased literally defined inequality, laws have proved insufficient to alter the actual *praxis* (ibid., 1-4). As the title of Bonilla-Silva's 2016 book vividly and poignantly puts it, a species of "racism without racists" has been fashioned, where, in line with what adherents of color blindness proclaim, if skin color no longer matters, "whites enunciate positions that safeguard their racial interests without sounding *racist*. Shielded by color blindness, whites can express resentment toward minorities; criticize their morality, values, and work ethic; and even claim to be the victims of *reverse racism*" (ibid., 4).

Responding go color-blind racism, critical race theorists emphasize that laws developed in the liberal-capitalist circumstances cannot possibly wipe out the past of slavery (in the U.S) and any other forms of oppression of minority groups (in a wider geopolitical context). They point out that exclusionary mechanisms are still strong across the practices exercised on the contemporary public scene. It is impossible to erase and forget all loaded phrases, conceptual associations, clichés, and stereotyping they cause simply by altering or amending legal acts. As the concept of race has been socially constructed, its meanings are affected both by the past and by the present developments. It also continues to resonate in and with the current social

[8] This argument is advanced to ground segregationist practices in the housing industry.

relations, ideas, the political, and the interactions in which race is (explicitly or implicitly) entangled.

According to CRT researchers, color-blind racism should be called for what it is: an "active form of racism." It not only sustains white domination and white privilege resulting from it, but also aims to make white privilege invisible and to undo the achievements of movements that fought for civil rights for racial minorities in the 1950s and 60s. Color-blind racism vehemently reviles schemes put in place to promote equal opportunity for the groups oppressed on the basis of skin color vis-à-vis majority society. Critical race theorists insist that it is in this criticism that the most active dimension of color-blind racism surfaces. Affirmative programs are most fiercely attacked by those on the conservative side of the American political scene, who seek to thwart endeavors for desegregation and bilingual education. At the same time, practitioners of CRT argue that affirmative actions must not be the sole instrument utilized in the struggle for complete racial justice, even though these are still among the most effective tools for eliminating racism (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman 2011, 22, 29-30). CRT practitioners emphatically observe that

> [c]olorblind racism abuses the discourse of the Civil Rights Movement. An argument suggesting that racism is a thing of the past or that awarding an American Indian a scholarship, for example, constitutes reverse discrimination serves to reverse the few gains of the Civil Rights Movement, the very gains that made it possible for a black man to become president of the United States. (ibid. 30)

Conservative discourse is directly implicated in reinforcing white interests in the hegemonic game and in marginalizing the needs of non-whites. Some CRT scholars denounce the conservative movement as an "organized assault" on people of color under the guise of color blindness (ibid.).

Before concluding this subchapter, let us revisit the critical race-theoretical stance on meritocracy. Proponents of CRT warn that the combination of color-blind racism and the myth of meritocracy breeds baleful effects (not only) for minority groups. For example, in terms of access to education, the notion is often proffered that black children attend poor quality schools as a result of their/their parents' individual choices and not because of systemic discrimination. By extolling people who find themselves at the top of the social ladder, meritocrats condemn those at its lowest rungs, justify social inequality (resulting, for example, from racial divisions), and make individuals and their choices entirely responsible for this. Importantly, ages-long mechanisms of treating non-whites differently than and as "inferior" to whites must have benefitted those classified as "superior" – that is, whites – in some ways. First and foremost,

"white" wealth was augmented, while at the same time the deprivation of racial minorities deepened. Rampant in the past, this process has by no means abated today, which is reflected in differences between the average income and life expectancy of the white and non-white U.S. populations. Admittedly, the income gap between blacks and whites has shrunk since the 1960s, but this does not concern wealth as a more relevant category of comparison in this case. While income denotes, for example, monthly earnings from a job or money from social welfare, wealth stands for the totality of what an individual or a family already owns. Consequently, "wealth" comprises everything that a family has accumulated not only within its own lifetime but also across those of the past generations. Additionally, wealth means "owning power," that is, the exercise of financial control over the property resources one possesses. It is only the combination of wealth and income that enables one to shape and secure one's life and that of one's loved ones in terms of education, work, health, etc. The wealth disparity between white and black people is still considerable in the U.S. As critical race theorists point out, this chasm is a direct consequence of racial exploitation (ibid., 26-29). Given this, meritocrats are wrong to claim that individual members of the public have an equal opportunity "at the start." This is certainly not the case, and race is not the only differentiating factor, since the mesh of inequalities is also woven of social background, gender, religion, language, culture, etc.

Critical race theorists argue that color-blind racism as the most widespread form of racism today (especially in the U.S.) can only be debunked if the existence of racism is acknowledge along with admitting that this benefits and privileges white people in a number of ways. Thus, the work of CRT-inspired researchers itself contributes to such a demystification, because it reveals and illumines new racist mechanisms. Crucially, "[f]or CRT scholars, intentionality of racism is not of the greatest importance. Rather, the impact of ideologies and institutional structures that result in social inequality are racist" (ibid., 30).

As already highlighted, critical race theory is mainly developed in and in relation to U.S. society. This does not make many of its elements irrelevant or inapplicable to conceptualizing racism in Europe, either historically or regarding the present conjuncture. For one, migrations to European countries certainly form a problem field the study of which can be fruitfully furthered by the CRT toolkit, seeing that migratory flows voluminously include non-white people. In Poland, racism has mainly been discussed in the context of hate crimes in recent years. As a result of several processes, ranging from economic migration and student exchange programs to the expansion of international corporations, the proportion of foreigners in Polish urban populations is growing, though the country still remains remarkably homogeneous in terms of its ethnic composition. Given this, the problem of race and racism

officially is not an issue in Poland. Nevertheless, it is in fact patent in numerous histories of other-than-white people who have come to live in Poland, Romanian Roma being one of such groups. Given this, I build on the ideas of critical race theorists in Chapter Four, where I employ their insights into color-blind racism and meritocracy in order to explore the situation of Romanian Roma in Poland.

2.3 Critical Race Theory in Education

Outlined in the previous subchapter, critical race theory of course did not spring up in "a vacuum." Its founders built on Marxism, feminism, and studies on colonialism (including internal colonialism) and were inspired by the history of the civil rights movement. Their primary aim was to use philosophical, social-scientific, and humanistic scholarship in order to develop a new language and reflection on race, racism, and civil rights.

In this subchapter, I discuss relations between critical race theory and education. In 1995, a conference of the American Education Research Association was held during which Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate IV called on the participants to increase efforts for developing a framework in which to address the interplay of race and education. By common consensus, their presentation is regarded as a turning point for incorporating educational reflection into critical race theory. Ladson-Billings and Tate IV's appeal was sparked by their disillusionment with the scant application of the concept and theories of race in the research that American educators were carrying out. Ladson-Billings and Tate IV rued that their fellow education researchers predominantly and reductively understood race either as an "objective condition" or as an "ideological construct." In the former case, they suggested, pernicious generalizations were being spawned that reinforced stereotypes about people with a given skin color or any other biological, physically visible trait regarded as a race attribute. In the latter case, Ladson-Billings and Tate IV claimed that distorted beliefs were instigated, such as that black children were reluctant to study. Furthermore, the "ideological-construct" approach did not offer any explanation of how social inequality emerged or how it operated. Neither the "objective" nor the "ideological" model directly referred to the ubiquitous racialization of the American public scene. Consequently, educators' inquiries were not supposed to examine historical or contemporary modes in which race and racism worked. They did not investigate the ways of legitimizing and institutionalizing them, either. By contrast, far more attention was devoted to class- and gender-related school inequalities.

Ladson-Billings and Tate IV noted that a far more comprehensive take on the concept of race was to be found in some jurisprudence writings (specifically, in critical legal studies) and regarded those as a model that education sciences should follow in penetrating this thematic field. At the 1995 conference, they urged education scholars to adopt these works as a point of departure for engineering a framework within which to approach racial inequality in schooling. They envisaged the development of pedagogical research in which, in line with the tenets of CRT, attention to race and racism would be regarded as a prerequisite for understanding how inequality – in particular across the levels of the education system – was generated and perpetuated. A number of scholars responded to this challenge (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman 2011, 22, 7-9).

Critical race theorists are still committed to investigating education and its abundant systemic inequalities. In doing so, they not only scrutinize formal education within institutional classrooms, but also look into a range of other educational practices and policies. Like CRT as a whole, its education-focused sector comprises not only theoretical work but also engagement in *praxis*. The reasoning is that: "Assumptions frame a picture that CRT practitioners all agree include relevant details. A concept provides practitioners with a sharper focus. A practitioner examining racial inequality might focus on a particular set of details to better define the picture. CRT concepts capture the bundle of details that highlight a particular aspect of the picture we call racial inequality" (ibid., 11). Understanding this race-based inequality is channeled by the deconstruction of narratives and ideologies inscribed in and enveloping educational practices. Notably, meritocracy is again among the key phenomena deconstructed and critiqued by CRT researchers in this respect. The myth of meritocracy powerfully affects educational thought and ideas about education. According to meritocrats, universal education is supposed to guarantee equal opportunity for all citizens who go to school. The underlying assumption is that education wipes out any inequality. If one "does not make it," it is exclusively one's fault. From the meritocratic point of view, individuals who have failed to succeed at school have not put enough effort into studying and only have themselves to blame. CRT and education researchers work to question and uncloak the meritocratic myth. They stress that it not only produces an illusion of equal opportunity for all but also conserves various inequalities, including race-related ones. Placing entire responsibility on learners may result in obscuring the fact that educational institutions employ an array of strategies to systemically support some of them in pursuing success, while either failing to encourage or even hampering the remaining ones. Such strategies are scrutinized by education researchers using CRT. They deconstruct the meritocratic narrative in order to undermine the legitimacy of the American schooling system

the way it is structured now and to inquire why other-than-white students consistently find themselves at the bottom of the educational ladder in public schools (ibid., 11-12). Interestingly, black children are as a rule successful in American non-public educational facilities. While liberals would explain this contrast by pointing out that not only students of color perform worse in public schools, critical race theorists emphasize that black poverty is caused by the cultural preservation of white domination, which is reflected in the condition of schooling as well (Ladson-Billings, Tate IV 2006, 19).

Therefore, critical race theorists dissect curriculum, which they regard as a "culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script" (Ladson-Billings 1999, 21). The reason behind this appraisal is that school curricula are largely permeated by male, white, upper-class outlooks and values. Knowledge transmitted via texts by or testimonies of people of such provenance has become "standard" and "fundamental." The voices and standpoints of non-dominant groups, that is, women, people of color, less monied classes, and non-heterosexual individuals, are neither as much foregrounded nor even gestured at in curricula. Constructed in this way, curricula reduce the meaningfulness of, for instance, African American experiences, as they do not dovetail with the central "master script." Such arrangements are usually justified by evoking and idolizing a "race-neutral perspective," that is, the viewpoint characteristic of color-blind racism as discussed in the previous subchapter. CRT education researchers also pay attention to instruction itself. A considerable proportion of American teachers presume in advance that black students have lower competencies than their white peers. Given this, educators tend to search for and design special support strategies to equip the teaching staff with instruction methodologies for African Americans. As opposed to this, CRT insists that instruction should only be modified to meet a child's individual needs and not because of presuppositions directly related to students' skin color. Critical race theorists also examine the ways in which students are assessed. They note that while classic assessment systems show what students did not know when doing a test or sitting an exam, they do not reflect what students actually know and can do. CRT education researchers decisively oppose IQ tests and similar measures, which, as them claim, only serve to hatch ("scientifically" grounded) explanations for racial inequality and the lower social positioning of people of color.

The funding of American schools is what best reflects the scale and gravity of structural racism in education in the view of critical race theorists. Reflection on this issue was formatively affected by Jonathan Kozol's (1991) already classic *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. Kozol depicted the conditions and relations characteristic of urban schools in the U.S. (Chicago, Washington, New York, and Cincinnati), wherein his primary

focus was on inequalities among students resulting from their race and social class. His investigations inspected the funding of these educational facilities. In the U.S., schools are mostly funded from state budgets, which to a large degree consist of taxes paid by the residents of respective states. How much of the state budget is allocated to schooling considerably varies across the U.S. Critical race theorists claim that this is closely intertwined with the wealth of individual states, the overall pattern being that the more wealth (mainly located in property) a state possesses, the more money is spent on public schooling. Importantly, state divisions correspond to the skin color of their residents. The opponents of acknowledging racial inequality counter-argue that the amount of school spending has little bearing on the quality of educational provision, because the hindrances which hinder individuals' performance at school stem form "family effects" or are generated by their own conduct. As a response, CRT practitioners note that if that were really the case, there would be no reason why children of color should be sent to overcrowded, unheated, and dilapidated schools, while white children attended far better furnished institutions. They also add that if the amount of funding indeed does not matter, it is unclear why most of the resources are distributed among whites (Ladson-Billings 1999, 21-24). Given this, "CRT takes to task shoo1 reformers who fail to recognize that property is a powerful determiner of academic advantage. Without a commitment to redesign funding formulas, one of the basic inequities of schooling will remain in place and virtually guarantee the reproduction of the status quo" (ibid., 25). This status quo involves the preservation and prolongation of inequality as a glaring testament to color-blind racism. Non-white students may never experience a racist assault (physical or mental violence) at school, but they are anyway continually exposed to the impacts of structural racism. These problems are supposed to be solved, among other means, by the desegregation of schools. While not all schools are desegregated, desegregation is the experience of a considerable part of American students. However, critical race theorists claim that instead of eliminating the problem, desegregation represents in fact another mechanism for reinforcing white domination. This view is corroborated by research that shows that desegregation as a rule does not lead to improved learning outcomes of black students (ibid., 25-26).

According to CRT education researchers, the fundamental flaw in attempts at dismantling racism and redressing its ramifications lies in that reformers predominantly focus on capturing and remedying deficiencies in non-white students, instead of raising the public's consciousness of racial justice and equality. Affirmative action, desegregation, and bilingual instruction have mainly been preoccupied with facilitating access to schooling for minorities, whereas the quality of education has slipped from the agenda. Critical race theorists insist that

traditional educational policies (devised under pressure of the civil rights movement) cannot really be correctly implemented, and that their very construction precludes accomplishing their supreme goal of racial quality across the stages of education.

A critique of liberalism is another major education-related issue raised by critical race theorists. Liberalism substantially affects the structuring of the social world, in particular economic relations, which are one of the basic sources of social inequalities. Adherents of CRT point out that schools are part of a system that not only sustains these inequalities but also supports capitalism, which engenders them. It is the liberal-market dimension of education that they blame for thwarting, if not entirely ruling out, effective reforms for racial equality. Students of color can use public schooling, but as emphasized by Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman, their position and rights in the classroom are not identical with those of their white schoolmates. Non-white students are forced to grapple with the same burden of stereotypes and prejudice both in and out of school. Unlike their white peers, their stature is not that of social agents, but of racial minority members, which remarkably influences their peer relations and not infrequently their rapport with the teaching staff as well. They are often faced with curricula which do not feature the voices of minority groups, an omission that may make some of the curricular content – for example, certain historical narratives – extremely confusing to them. CRT holds that such school experiences will inexorably linger on unless the social scene in its entirety is reformed for removal of racism (ibid., 16-19).

In the case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka in 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that schools must not be "separate but equal" (García 2020). The unanimous verdict was that racial segregation in school was unconstitutional. It was therefore banned, which meant that white and black children were not to be separated in public educational facilities. Before this ruling, the legislation in several states allowed having separate schools for white students and students of color, respectively. The landmark decision was one of the paramount breakthroughs for the development of the civil rights movement, which pursued equal rights for all U.S. citizens, regardless of their skin color (Duignan 2021). Nevertheless, as already mentioned, research reveals that despite the implementation of equal-opportunity programs and legislative changes, American schooling is still replete with racial divisions. According to the estimates of the National Center for Education Statistics' National Assessment of Educational Progress concerning U.S. eighth-graders, as much as 69.2% of non-white children attend schools where non-white students predominate. Non-white individuals are understood in this context as blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans. Importantly, a staggering 72.4% of black people study at schools with a high rate of poverty, that is, schools in which between 51%

and 100% of students are eligible for free or discount meals. Black children usually frequent schools of a specific ethno-economic composition: six out of ten black students (60%) go to schools with high poverty rates where most of their schoolmates are people of color. The corresponding proportion for white children is 8.4%. Additionally, merely 3.1% of blacks study at schools where the majority of students are black and affluent. For white students, the corresponding percentage stands at 23.5%. In these statistics, school performance was quantified on the basis of scores in standardized math tests. In schools mainly attended by black students (i.e., those with high poverty rates and mostly non-white student populations), these test scores were markedly lower than in low-poverty schools with a majority of white students. The scores differed by twenty points on average (255.4 points vs. 275.3 points). Black students scored higher if they studied at high-poverty schools where most students were white. This indicates that if black children can use schools with mostly white student populations, their perform better academically. These data clearly imply that the economic situation and skin color are significant factors in the U.S. public schooling system. Most black students attend schools where their learning outcomes are worse than those of their white peers. Differences in school achievement, particularly in final exam scores, affect further choice opportunities regarding education and work. Even though racial segregation has been illegal for more than sixty years now in the U.S., it continues to make its mark on American public schooling (García 2020).

To return to critical race theory in education, the movement still provokes a rather stringent opposition in the U.S. In 2021, CRT was demonized as extremely injurious both by information media and in political campaigns. Opponents of CRT vociferously complained that it framed each and every white person as an oppressor and each and every person of color as a helpless victim. In fact, however, the thought developed by critical race theorists revolves around the practices of American institutions implicated in power relations, the ways in which the legislation is produced and enacted, the content circulating in popular culture, etc. The objections advanced by detractors of CRT indicate that they are unable to differentiate between individuals and the liberal and capitalist systems, which shape the social world. They also dispute the inclusion of racism-related elements into the narrative on the U.S., since they believe that their country is fully democratic and, as such, cannot possibly endorse any racial inequality (Ray, Gibbons 2021).

In autumn 2021, conservative Republican Glenn Youngkin was elected governor of Virginia. His election campaign revolved around a deprecation of critical race theory and thus interlocked with the surging political mobilization of white U.S. citizens, which incited and spread anxiety about the purported threat posed to white status and interests by the increasing

importance of African Americans in the U.S. As part of this backlash, the idea that racial equality was "dangerous" was promulgated. With this rhetoric gaining more and more currency, school programs for promoting knowledge about racial equality were suspended or scrapped. Youngkin directly pledged to ban critical race theory on his first day in power (he also made such promises at "Parents Matter" rallies, in this way immediately appealing to the parents and guardians of American children). His voters prominently included families inhabiting "white suburbs," whom this kind of rhetoric made afraid of letting children attend lessons on racial inequality. The Democrats failed to design a strategy effective enough to halt this campaign of disinformation. Relying on logic, which is rarely efficient in clashes with such political discourses, they only tried to explain that reverse racism, that is, restricting the rights of white children's parents, was neither a real component of the American public scene nor a goal pursued by critical race theory (Kreiss, Marwick, Tripodi 2021).

Emphatically, the anti-CRT rhetoric not only saturates politicians' speeches or media talk. It is also reflected in the new legislation. In eight U.S. states,[9] laws have been adopted to forbid disseminating ideas that some conservatives attribute to CRT at schools. The legislation passed in Idaho and North Dakota directly cited "critical race theory," while the laws in other states referenced it only indirectly. Specifically, the new regulations ban "the discussion, training, and/or orientation that the U.S. is inherently racist as well as any discussions about conscious and unconscious bias, privilege, discrimination, and oppression. These parameters also extend beyond race to include gender lectures and discussions" (Ray, Gibbons 2021). Other state agencies in Montana and South Dakota also opposed including the issues tackled by CRT in school curricula. The state educational authorities of Florida, Georgia, Utah, and Alabama prohibited discussing critical race theory, and a few other states expressed a similar disapproval of it. Some states plan to establish their own regulations phrased in the same tone and having the same effect. For example, the new regulations forbid teachers to address race, racism, gender, and sexism in classrooms. In Wisconsin, books and educational resources featuring terms such as patriarchy, racial prejudice, intersectionality, and structural inequality have been banned from schools. These notions and the phenomena they describe must not be talked about with students. This results not just in halting the progress of racial justice, but even in a regression in this matter. In view of these developments, it is all the more difficult to find fault with critical race theorists' observation that racism is entrenched in American law. If anything,

[9] Such legislation was initially adopted in nine states: Idaho, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Arizona, and North Dakota, but the Supreme Court of Arizona rescinded this law in November 2021.

the cited legislation adopted in 2021 substantiates this notion. Media discourse scholars argue that these practices should be viewed as part of a disinformation campaign aimed at making it impossible – within school education – to call the U.S. history to account for racism or to examine contemporary racial inequality. One argument marshaled by the orchestrators of this campaign is that CRT is used to promote reverse racism at schools, which instils guilt for their skin color in white children. This is claimed to aggravate divisions among citizens instead of strengthening their community feelings. Although such claims are untrue, the concerted activity of media and Republican politicians sways more and more white U.S. citizens to share such views (Kreiss, Marwick, Tripodi 2021). As a result, fewer and fewer public-school students will have an opportunity to learn about the history of race and racism in America or to understand the reasons behind the racial stratification of the social world they inhabit. For their part, teachers risk facing severe professional and legal consequences if they foster the knowledge of racial justice. These developments gravely enhance the inequality in place and all the more reinforce the position of white U.S. citizens.

As already mentioned, Chapter Four of this study employs the lens of critical race theory to explore the ways in which Romanian Roma function in the Polish education system. Before doing this, a look at the fact that Romani children have limited possibility – or none at all – to use their right to education in Europe[10] is in order. These circumstances, in many senses, bring to mind the insights of CRT. I by no means believe that the situation of people of color in the U.S. directly translates into or represents a one-to-one correlation with the position of the Roma community in Europe. However, the Romani minority,[11] which consists of ca. 10-12 million people living in various European countries, has been beset by cultural prejudice for centuries, with the anti-Roma bias reaching its apex in gruesome acts of hatred, such as slavery, extermination, pogroms, and forced sterilization.[12] All these past (often not very remote) experiences still affect Roma's legal, economic, and social standing. Formally speaking, Roma are not discriminated against because of their race, yet their lived social reality is far from equal vis-à-vis majority society. Corresponding mechanisms have been described above in the context of race and the position of non-white people in the U.S. The race-based inequality of the Romani minority is certainly observable in the schooling system. If the systemic inequality is to be eliminated, Romani children must obtain equal educational opportunity. The

[10] In subchapter 3.1, I offer an in-depth discussion of the complexities of Roma identity. At this point, I depict the situation of Romani children "in general" as the central point of reference is provided here by the concept of race as grounded on biological features, such as the color of skin, eyes, and hair.
[11] Roma are the largest minority in Europe.
[12] All these points are discussed more comprehensively in the following chapter.

segregation of Romani students is one of the greatest problems in this area, one which in terms of the legal regulations in force should not be there in the first place, which parallels the illegal, yet persisting, segregation of American white and non-white school children. Young Roma are separated from their white peers either by being placed in different educational facilities or by being clustered in "dedicated" Romani classrooms. Sometimes school-heads impede the enrollment of Romani children at their institutions either for fear of failing to handle the education of students from an ethnic minority (which is primarily the case in countries with nationally-homogeneous populations, where working standards for teaching foreigners' children have not been developed yet) or prompted by racism and xenophobia. Young Roma are not infrequently consigned to special schools not because their special learning needs require this, but because they begin their formal education relatively late and exhibit serious competence deficits, which could be remedied at regular schools if only proper measures were applied. As a result of such segregation, Romani children's school performance is worse (as compared to non-Roma), and their social exclusion deepens, reducing their integration chances (Russinov 2013).

Of course, no regulations or provisions indicative of or authorizing racial segregation in education are to be found in the European legal system. Despite this, 70% of young Roma in Bulgaria attend separate schooling institutions situated in Romani neighborhoods. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, between 70% and 80% of all Romani children go to special schools, in which they account for the majority of the student population. In several countries of East-Central Europe (e.g., in Croatia, Romania, Serbia, and Hungary), there are schools to which non-Roma explicitly refer as "Gipsy schools" or "ghetto schools." Such monikers are used to denote educational institutions in which most or all students are of Romani origin. These facilities are typically underfunded, poorly equipped, and run-down and provide low-quality education (ibid.). Crucially, many of the policies and measures undertaken by governments and other decision-making bodies coexist with a very strong stereotype saying that Roma are reluctant to send their children to school and/or that they do not want their children to study. This ingrained view tends to breed the belief that the poor education of the Roma population is not to be blamed on the system; rather, Roma themselves bear the responsibility for this. This narrative has very clear meritocratic and neoliberal undertones. It is in this context that the initiators and implementers of these policies and measures focus on retaining Romani children at school, if they have found their way to school in the first place, instead of creating opportunities for them to leave ghettoized facilities and establishing integrative learning settings. Again, such solutions for the schooling of Romani children have failed to bring about

improved education levels of the Roma minority. The pursuits of the Bulgarian Roma-run NGO DROM are often cited as a model of good practices in desegregating Roma schools. In 2000, several hundred Romani children stopped attending a school in the Roma ghetto and registered at public schools in the town of Vidin. At the same time, DROM members launched motivational actions for Romani parents, made sure that the students obtained support in catching up and integrating with their peers, and held consciousness-raising campaigns to educate the local community about Roma's way of life and education-related systemic issues. The first round of the program was so successful that the project was prolonged and extended to include more Romani children. Such practices effectively make majority society realize that Romani children are perfectly capable of studying, do not need to be isolated or placed in special schools, and Romani parents put value on the education of their offspring (ibid.).

Pressures exerted by the European Union and the Council of Europe since the early 2000s have made Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria define the desegregation of schools as one of their major targets to be met for improving the educational situation of Roma (ibid.). Crucially, desegregation will not be accomplished through local, isolated actions alone. For such actions to transform into long-standing processes capable of making real change, a considerable commitment of national governments and local authorities is requisite. As critical race theorists explain, it is impossible to achieve full social justice in terms of race, without deconstructing and reforming the entire social world, complete with its mechanisms of race and racism.

The dislike of Roma and ages-long prejudice against them are still conspicuous in a number of European countries. In order to name this phenomenon, Aidan McGarry coined the notion "Romaphobia" and described it as the "last acceptable form of racism."[13] Emphatically, racism is rarely mentioned when the attitude of majority society to the Roma minority is depicted, especially in political and media discourses. Rather, "xenophobia" and "aversion" are go-to terms in such contexts. However, constructing the relevant narratives around the axial concepts of race and racism would perhaps make more sense in view of realizing the sheer magnitude of social inequality that Roma face on a daily basis and of grasping the scale and ubiquity of their systemic exclusion. The insights of CRT scholars may be of great help in this venture. Both their way of thinking and their methods of research work may facilitate the identification of social mechanisms and constructs that work to sustain and even worsen the marginalization of the Romani minority.

[13] I discuss Romaphobia in more detail in the following chapter.

Chapter Three

The Romanian Roma in Wrocław from the 1990s on

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the socio-political situation of Roma with a special focus on the Romanian Roma community that has lived in Wrocław since the 1990s. To make sense of the empirical findings from my research study carried out between January and July 2021, one needs some insight into the very complicated history of this community. Over several centuries, powerfully impactful stereotypes and cultural cliches have clustered around Roma, and become anchored not only in colloquial language or popular culture, but also in the discourse of politicians, officers, and local and nationwide administration workers, as well as surfacing in some research publications. For this reason, it is crucial to scrutinize multiple myths about the homogeneity of this group, its nomadic character, and its reluctance to integrate, along with the ascription to its members of some allegedly intrinsic traits which are commonly perceived as negative (e.g., laziness, deceitfulness, propensity for crime, and/or inclination to beggary). These stereotyped perceptions are discussed in section 3.1., where I build on critical Romani studies to propose an alternative framework in which to approach the historical genesis ascribed to Roma. At the same time, I depict the distinctive cultural situation of this group, which is bound up with the specificity of the Romani language and the traditional, unwritten moral code, called *Romanipen*. I also offer a brief account of the persecution-marked history of various Roma groups. In doing this, I draw on the notion of Romaphobia, which Aiden McGarry (2017) identifies as "the last acceptable form of racism". In section 3.2., I concisely depict the history of the Roma hailing from Romania in order to illumine their dire socio-political situation, since the extreme exclusion of this group results not only from its current position, but also from its centuries-long experience of violence, including such atrocities as the Holocaust, slavery, and forced sterilization. I also examine the contemporary socio-economic situation of the Romanian Roma. Thereby, I pay special attention to education in order to highlight the reasons why they seek to migrate to other European countries, as I believe that their motivations go beyond purely economic factors. In sections 3.3. and 3.4., I directly address the situation of the Roma groups which have arrived in Wrocław since the 1990s, reporting the policies that the (local and other) authorities have launched vis-à-vis these migrants. These have included deportations and the

demolition of a settlement in Paprotna Str., which made the Roma lodge a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights. I also relate a court case linked to the eviction of the Roma from the barracks in Kamieńskiego Str., and the ultimate removal of this settlement in the wake of a dedicated socio-educational program for its Romani inhabitants, which was commissioned by the Wrocław Commune and developed by the House of Peace Foundation (Polish: Fundacja Dom Pokoju). All this data is supposed to support my argument which employs the concepts of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and Gert Biesta to critically analyse processes which are part of educational interventions implemented by NGOs for and with the Romanian Roma living in Wrocław.

3.1 Introduction: Who Are Roma?[14]

The eponymous question of this section – Who are Roma? – cannot be answered briefly or succinctly. Such a definition is precluded by the fact that, culturally and historically speaking, Roma are an extremely diversified ethnic group which is sometimes referred to as a "non-territorial nation." As such, Roma are neither monolithic nor homogeneous. Their characteristics and migration-marked history defy any rigid typological frameworks. Typically, Romani-studies works open with an outline of the genesis of Roma, wherein their genealogical roots are traced back to India. Given that, Roma have lived in Europe for several centuries, I do not believe that this ancient history would have a substantial bearing on my study, which is limited to a small, contemporary Romani community in the city of Wrocław. Particulars of this distant past do not represent a necessary starting point for depicting this community. Researchers associated with critical Romani studies point out that, in fact, the focus on the Indian lineage of Roma results in the reproduction of the cliched notions of their "strangeness" – of them being "not from here," that is, not from Europe (Czarnota, Kledzik, Witkowski 2020). Studies concerning this ethnic group as a rule emphasize that its members "wandered over" to Europe from other corners of the world, reiterating for example that "it is a well-known fact that India – perhaps northern Punjab – was the potohomeland of Gypsies, who left the area about one thousand years ago" (Milewski 2009, 10). When encountering such statements, one is tempted to ask which of the nations that currently inhabit the European continent actually did

[14] On the basis of this subsection, an article of my authorship was published in "Praxema. Journal of Visual Semiotics" (Panciuchin 2022).

not “wander over” to these parts from somewhere else. Constructing narratives about Roma in this way patently exoticizes this ethnic group, with European literary culture boasting a long tradition of representing “Gypsies” as exotic. Such exoticization however, is not the only effect, because the constant citing of otherness of Roma as their distinctive feature excludes them from the circle of “real” and “legitimate” Europeans. This is one reason behind the perpetuation of the stereotyped perception of Roma as a nomadic people, with being nomadic considered by some authors (often quite inadvertently) as their inalienable cultural characteristic or even their genetic propensity. This evident discursive practice powerfully reinforces the socio-political marginalization of this group. The language which is employed to describe Roma has affected their past and present social position, which has made them the target of an array of mechanisms that can be described as violence-based. I examine the implementation of some of such mechanisms below.

Statistics indicate that Roma are at the moment the largest ethnic minority in Europe, with their number oscillating between ten and twelve million people (Kledzik, Pawełczyk 2014, 363). These figures are estimates, because EU countries do not systematically collect data on Roma, and, additionally, the members of this minority often do not recognize their ethnic belonging, conceal it, and/or fail to officially register their stay in EU countries for fear of legal and administrative consequences (not to mention the lack of knowledge of the local language and procedures in place). All these factors make it practically impossible to accurately establish the size of the minority (Śledzińska-Simon 2011, 11-12). As already emphasized, the group is dispersed across several countries, and envisaging it as one, undiversified community is misguided. The umbrella term “Roma” encompasses numerous subgroups which differ in lifestyle, economic and social status, attitude to tradition, religious observances, etc. Additionally, the language spoken by Roma, that is, Romani, is itself far from homogeneous. The fact that it is still an unwritten language without a universally recognized literary standard has prompted the emergence and rise of its multiple varieties and dialects. They are so divergent that communities inhabiting adjacent areas or regions often have difficulty communicating with each other. All this should make researchers wary of the notion of “Romaness,” constructed as a determinant of the collective and individual identity of Roma. Emilia Kledzik and Paweł Pawełczak stress that “Romaness” conceived of as “a monolithic set of values cultivated by all those whom non-Roma consider to be Roma exemplifies a constructed identity imposed on groups which not only speak different languages, but also are often in conflict with and deny each other’s right to *Romaness*” (2014, 364). If any kind of ethnic communality is indeed cultivated among Roma, it is to be found among the still sparse Romani elites whose members

are university-educated. Nevertheless, most Roma subgroups quite strongly emphasize their autonomous status, both in relation to non-Roma and vis-à-vis other Roma communities (ibid.).

Complex and multifarious as it is, Romani culture is to a large extent based on *Romanipen* ("Romaness" or "Gyspsyhood"), that is, an unwritten and uncodified set of laws the non-observance of which brings about various consequences for an individual (or a group of people) within their community. One of the pivotal distinctions is one between Roma and non-Roma people, called gadjos (or gadje), as Romanipen does not apply to one's relations and dealings with non-Roma. According to the traditional rules, Roma should not cultivate contacts with gadjos, that is with strangers – those who do not deserve respect.[15] . Romanipen includes models of conduct,[16] rules of in-group coexistence, taboos, and sanctions. Because customary law is regarded by Roma as supreme, they give precedence to the traditional principles of life over the legislation of respective countries they inhabit. This may provoke multiple misunderstandings between Romani communities and state/local authorities, and between Roma and the social majority. For groups that observe traditional principles, the avoidance of external contacts often makes the community more hermetic. As a result, gadjos are all the more inclined to perceive "Gypsies" as inaccessible or impenetrable. As a result of the numerous myths and stereotypes that have clustered around Roma over ages, they are believed to be not only mysterious but also hostile "specimens." Importantly, however, not all members of Romani communities adhere to the Romanipen rules with equal rigidity. While Romanipen is undoubtedly part of the culture of this group as a whole, Roma are not immune to the influences of majority societies, which prompt them to update and remodel their traditional ways of life. Respective Romani groups produce their own modified versions of Romanipen, and, consequently, their customs vary quite considerably (Kledzik, Pawełczyk 2014, 366-367).

Because Romanipen has never been written down, describig it in accurate detail is a major challenge. "Manifesting that one is a Rom" is counted among its primary rules (Szewczyk 2016, 43). This principle is directly bound up with speaking Romani, as this language is one of the fundamental modes of expressing Romani identity. Despite long years of dwelling in Romania, Poland, or any other country, Roma use Romani to communicate with other members of their community. It should also be spoken to clearly mark one's difference from gadjos (ibid.). Clan-like structure and allegiances are typically cited by Romani-studies sources as another unifying aspect of Romani communities. Fidelity and loyalty to one's family, which is

[15] A Rom whose lifestyle violates the prescripts of Romanipen may also become a gadjo (Romopedia).

[16] As understood in cultural anthropology.

apparently one of the most precious values to Roma, is also inscribed in Romanipen. Blood bonds hold this group together and cement its togetherness. The eldest family members serve as the first teachers who transmit the knowledge of customs and tradition to children. Also, Roma communities are characteristically endogamous, which means that they abide by the cultural principle saying that one should marry within one's group. This consolidates the separateness of the community, and prevents the loss of its members. Belonging to a given family is bound up with social prestige or the lack thereof. One's descent is also an essential determinant of one's economic standing (Kledzik, Pawełczyk 2014, 365). *Phuripen*, another crucial rule, concerns expressions of respect for the eldest family members, where family, as understood by Roma, is emphatically not limited to parents and children, unlike in majority societies. Family stands for the entire extended line or clan, and its members do not necessarily live in the same place. The eldest community members are deferred to by the younger ones, and age is one of the central factors in the social structure of the group. Because of the fundamental orality of Romani culture, the eldest are the repositories of cultural knowledge. Sustaining the community is among the most important identity processes. It is in their community and in their families that Roma find support and help. This is indicated by two other principles which, though less axial than those listed above, are still significant and meaningful: truthfulness (*čačipen*) and hospitality (*pativalo*) (Szewczyk 2016, 44).

The system of customary law is also associated with the *mageripen* code, with "defilement" or "tainting" as its fundamental notion. A person who breaches the rules is regarded as "defiled" – guilty and ritually impure. Those defiled are in various ways (and to various degrees) excluded[17] from the daily goings of the community (Bryczkowska-Kiraga 2006, 100; Kwadrans 2015, 201). Thus, the world is split into things which are both physically (e.g., corporeally) and ritually pure and impure (Kledzik, Pawełczyk 2014, 365). In the most conservative communities, *mageripen* is upheld as an ensemble of binding moral and legal rules, while less rigorous communities tend to regard it as a set of guidelines on ethics and mores. Nevertheless, *mageripen* has a pronounced controlling function. If a rule is flouted, guilt and punishment are decided by dedicated internal institutions: Šzero Rom or Kris, depending on the community. *Mageripen* is supposed to "regulate a Rom's relations with strangers (who are impure by their being non-Roma and by their non-observance of Romanipen), with women (made impure by their reproductive physiology), with the defiled and defiling objects and

[17] The Roma hailing from Romania, who are the focus of this dissertation, are marginalized and excluded by majority societies. Interestingly, however, they themselves use mechanisms of marginalization as part of their customary law. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Four.

animals" (Szewczyk 2016, 45). In the context of femininity-related defilements, it should be borne in mind that Romani communities are essentially patriarchal. Women are responsible for domestic chores and take care of children. Men make decisions and rule family life. It is on entering marriage that girls come to be acknowledged as mature community members. Marriage is in most cases concluded exclusively in an intra-community ceremony (Kledzik, Pawełczyk 2014, 365), as a result of which Roms and Romnis often are not recognized formally as spouses.

As mentioned above, the notion of "Romaness" is frequently used in a superficial way to depict the identity of Roma. 'Nomadism' is a similarly frequent and superficial association. Nomadism, which is attributed to this group, is linked to a range of stereotyped perceptions of this ethnic minority. In the popular imaginary, nurtured among other things by cultural production (films, literature, poetry, music, etc.), Roma's heightened mobility connotes freedom, romanticism, a desire to find out about the world, and the incapacity or inability to put down roots in one place. In the context of thus-conceived nomadism, narratives about Roma abound with entrenched topoi, such as camps, trains of Gypsy caravans, singing, and also reluctance to commit to a job or to use the right to education. Emphatically, repeated resettling and being always on the move have often been caused by dire socio-economic conditions and persistent persecution, which Romani communities have confronted and are still exposed to (Szewczyk 2016, 51-54). As explained by Andrzej Mirga and Nicolae Gheorghe, "being widely dispersed throughout Europe and even beyond it, the Roma have no territory of their own. Being a minority everywhere, they share a similarly imposed identity characterized by political and social marginalization and stigmatization. Their social roles and positions are, accordingly, described as pariah, middleman, or marginal, and as such they are both the subject of rejection and the target of assimilationist policies. (…) [The Roma] remain in an underprivileged, subordinate, and inferior position in society, as is evidenced by their humiliating social, economic, and living conditions" (2001). Rather than from any distinctiveness of alleged "Romaness," this status results from the centuries-long experience of discrimination, marginalization, and, for some Romani groups, even extermination. For example, the state law in Romania made Roma slaves of wealthy landowners and the church from the 14th century until as recently as the 1850s.[18] Indeed, the history of Europe is replete with applications of violence and coercion mechanisms against this ethnic group. For instance, as early as in 1471, Switzerland (where Roma hunts were held) introduced anti-Roma laws, which propelled violence, exiles, deportations, and executions on no other grounds than one's Romani origin.

[18] I discuss this issue in more detail in the following section.

Other countries soon followed. The 16th century witnessed mass expulsions of Roma from the Holy Roman Empire, France, and England. The English legislation adopted during the reign of Elizabeth I made being Roma illegal and punishable with death, also for children conceived by Romani married couples. In Spain and Hungary, Roma were forcibly relocated and forbidden to speak Romani. In this way, they were supposed to be stripped of their cultural identity and, so to speak, to "blend in" with majority societies. In the Nordic countries, Romani males were killed, and women and children were chased away. In 1830 and 1926, respectively, Germany and Switzerland launched schemes under which Romani children were compulsorily brought up by non-Roma families. Research has shown that numerous stereotypes about Roma which are part of our contemporary narratives had become deeply entrenched across Europe by the 17th century. Such stereotyped notions include inborn criminal propensities, falsity, immorality, and aversion to stable occupations. As nation-states began to arise and consolidate in the 19th century, anti-Roma hostility only exacerbated. Roma came to be referred to as an "inferior" and "lower" race, falling outside of the idea of "pure" race (Śledzińska-Simon 2011, 11-14; Kott 2019). Meanwhile "the development of the modern capitalist market economy engendered the belief that the Romani lifestyle was backward and unproductive and that, as such, it should be banned" (Kott 2019). As the perception of Roma as people with inherent criminal leanings aggravated, the German and French police were encouraged to trace and register all activities undertaken by Roma in their respective countries before World War One. Anti-Roma policies ranked among social priorities at the time, and the public was informed that police officers took care to prevent the spread of what was derogatively referred to as "the Gypsy plague" (ibid.).

World War Two marked a critical moment in anti-Roma violence. The available data does not suffice to accurately calculate the toll that the Holocaust took on Roma. While the statistics based on the accessible archival records indicate from 100,000 to 250,000 victims, indirect sources suggest that as many as 1.5 million Roma were killed during the war. Five hundred thousand victims is the figure commonly regarded as realistic. Emphatically, the Porajmos (the Devouring), or the mass killing of Roma and Sinti (collectively labeled by the Nazis as *Zigeuner*, that is, Gypsies), took different courses for different Roma or Sinti groups. Sławomir Kapralski reports that "numerous Romani communities were almost entirely killed. At the same time, other groups did not face persecution at all, or were only mildly afflicted by it. The former category included Romani groups in Germany, Austria, Croatia, Bohemia and Moravia, the Netherlands, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and some other occupied parts of the USSR, which lost between 50 and 90% of their members. Other groups in these countries and some communities of Polish, Serbian and Hungarian Roma lost between 20 and 30% of their

members. At the same time, there were Romani communities in Romania, Italy, France, and Slovakia which lost fewer than 10% of their members, or were barely targeted by genocidal persecution, which was the case for Bulgarian Roma" (2020, 19). One would be tempted to believe that the Porajmos was a critical and last moment in the history of European violence against Roma.

However, new discrimination forms against Roma appeared in the aftermath of World War Two and, especially, of the establishment of the communist bloc. As early as in the 1950s, Central- and East-European countries began to implement drastic assimilation policies. Depicted as part of their inborn nomadism, the mobility of Roma was prohibited as a fundamental threat to the assimilation of this group. Romani groups were ordered to settle down, and Roma were placed in communal apartment blocks and forced to work under productivization campaigns. Discrimination and segregation were also practiced in education. Romani children had special curricula put in place for them which were based on race-related considerations, rather than on the particular needs of students. A disproportionately large percentage of Romani children were committed to special schools and correctional facilities. In the course of time, these policies resulted in increased numbers of low-qualified or unemployed Romani adults. As a consequence of deteriorating living conditions, so-called "Romani ghettos" (Mirga, Gheorghe 1998, 18-22) came into being in Romania and Slovakia. A range of practices strongly redolent of the Porajmos was also instituted, which is perhaps most vividly exemplified by the mandatory sterilization of Roms and Romnis in Czechoslovakia (from 1958 on). Most birth-control interventions in Romani communities were performed between 1972 and 1991. According to estimates, tens of thousands of people were forced to undergo this procedure. In 2004, the European Roma Rights Centre sounded alarm saying that Romnis in the Czech Republic were still sterilized without their knowledge, let alone consent (Zlamalova 21.10.2014).

The democratic transition and, subsequently, the development of capitalism in the countries of the former communist bloc triggered other processes that furthered the marginalization of Romani groups. The emergent free-market economy, involving competition for jobs, combined with decreasing commitment of the states to welfare to make poverty worse and more ubiquitous among Roma. The fall of regimes, the emergence of a new reality, the privatization of companies, the changing rules of the distribution of accommodation, and the budding nationalist tendencies all fueled subsequent waves of migrations of Romani groups to Western Europe (Mirga, Gheorghe 1998, 22-24). In this study, with its focus on the Roma of

Romanian descent who have lived in Wrocław since the 1990s, it is essential to grasp the socio-economic context of the post-transition era in Romania. I will address it in the following section.

Yet, before concluding this part of my argument, let me examine the attitude of modern majority societies to people of Romani descent and, in particular, the phenomenon known as Romaphobia. In March 2021, the Market and Social Research Institute (Polish: Instytut Badań Rynkowych i Społecznych) polled Poles about their attitudes to other national and ethnic groups inhabiting Poland. In the survey, 68% of the respondents declared a dislike of Roma. This was the second-worse score, with Arabs being the only less-liked ethnic group in Poland, as a mere 28% of those polled stated that they liked Arabs (naTemat.pl 2021). For many years now, Roma have been recognized as a group inviting the greatest dislike from the public. Their presence often breeds anxiety and a sense of threat among majority society, which is connected to a range of persisting stereotypes about Roma and to the fear of the other, the stranger. According to McGarry, it is this irrational fear that fundamentally underpins Romaphobia, which he calls "the last acceptable form of racism" (2017), an insight worth repeating at this point. Prejudice against Roma is also described by other monikers, such as, for example, "anti-Tsiganism" and "anti-Gypsyism" in English, and "antycyganizm" in Polish. However, these terms are derived from "Tsigan," "Gypsy," and "Cygan," names which are offensive in and of themselves, and additionally do not convey as clearly as Romaphobia does the fear that is the major engine powering negative attitudes to this community. The structure of the term mirrors that of "homophobia," "Islamophobia," and "xenophobia." McGarry stresses that this collective fear of Roma is founded on the spatial and symbolic separation of Roma and non-Roma. As the impression of strangeness and exoticism of Roma has been consistently nurtured, and along with it suspicion and distrust, conjectures have morphed into socially accepted "facts," reinforcing the belief held by non-Roma that Romani communities are distinct, secretive, and not trustworthy (ibid., 2-6). McGarry posits an intriguing thesis, namely that "Roma communities have been used by nation-builders and state-builders to furnish material power and to generate ideas of solidarity, belonging and identity that have served to exclude Roma from mainstream society" (ibid., 6). This is intimately linked to the concept of constructing nation-states in conjunction with fostering and sustaining the identity of European citizens in the context of boundedness with particular traditions and territories. Roma were never included in these processes on the basis of, among other factors, nomadism which was attributed to them along with a reluctance to put down roots and otherness caused by their Indian origin, as mentioned above. This provided a convenient starting point for the multifarious exclusion of Roma as those who "are not our folk." McGarry argues that the Romani community as a nation

without territory did not "fit into" the model of nation-states. Consequently, it was troublesome in the context of efforts to construct a European order founded on nationalism, which for its part has a lot in common with racism and intolerance of "strangers" and "others." McGarry marshals several similarities between Romaphobia and other forms of racism and xenophobia in Europe, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia (ibid., 7-8).

With McGarry's framework in mind, one must not forget that Roma have been excluded not from one particular nation, but from all European nations. This strongly suggests that Romaphobia is endemic to Europe (ibid., 250). The consequences of the processes that ousted Romani groups from national communities have persisted until today. Romaphobia is "the last acceptable form of racism" in Europe in the sense that it is still tolerated and accounted for by citing other reasons than racially-driven prejudice: "Policy interventions that exclude and persecute Roma, such as ethnic profiling, are justified by the state and society due to the discourses of abjection which reify Roma populations" (ibid., 247). Romaphobia surfaces not only in the attacks of right-wing extremists on Romani households, in the segregation of Romani children at schools, in mass evictions of Romani communities, or in forced sterilization. It is also emphatically heard in daily conversations of non-Roma and in statements delivered by officials and politicians; it is patently seen in newspaper headlines. It lurks in the lack of proper legal frameworks and integration schemes as well (ibid.). Nevertheless, Romaphobia still tends to be glaringly evident and grounded in the law. For example, during his 2007 presidential campaign, Nicolas Sarkozy repeatedly stressed that there were too many foreigners in France, which put the national identity of the French at risk. He primarily meant people, including Roma, of Romanian and Bulgarian extraction who used welfare support offered by the state. Importantly, both Romania and Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007. In the wake of Sarkozy's victory in the election, deportations of members of Romani communities became more frequent and came to feature as a part of an anti-immigrant political game. With media as one of the actors involved, stereotypes about Roma's laziness, criminal inclinations and reluctance to integrate were sustained and bolstered. Their settlements would be dispersed, and they would put on planes to Romania and Bulgaria. Between 2007 and 2009, France sent an estimated 10,000-12,000 Roma back to their countries of origin. However, most of those deported have come back to France, which implies that the "migration-deportation-return" cycle is firmly in place (Pomieciński, Chwiediuk 2017, 7-8). In Italy in the same period, a surge of anti-Roma media coverages regarding crimes committed by Romani people coalesced with

pressures from right-wing parties to make then-PM Romano Prodi[19] back a regulation "which allowed prefects of police exercise their own discretion in decisions to deport EU nationals who posed threat to the public order" (ibid., 12). In this case, people of Romani origin were the main targeted group, and the regulation came into force a few days after an Italian woman had been killed by "a Romanian Gypsy," as reported by the press and Internet news outlets in the atmosphere of anti-immigrant hysteria. The deportation lists drafted by the power of this decree included first and foremost Roma of Romanian descent (ibid.).

Romaphobia lends itself to being interpreted in the light of critical race theory, which I discussed in the preceding chapter. The social marginalization of Roma, which surfaces on the discursive level and in the modes in which legal and administrative mechanisms are constructed, directly indicates implicit and explicit forms of racism exercised against this group. The domination of white individuals is replicated in relations with Romani populations. While the pursuits of NGOs, support schemes, and educational programs help overcome this entrenched domination pattern, centuries-long mechanisms of violence and exclusion are not easily eradicated. At the same time, anti-Roma racism is rather seldom straightforwardly addressed. It would be much easier to overcome if its existence were commonly acknowledged.

3.2 Why Did Roma Leave Romania?

"As long as until the mid-19th century, *Gypsies* were slaves in Romanian duchies, and many of them belonged to a given household like a stove, a scythe, or backyard poultry. The memory of the five centuries of bondage has not disappeared over one hundred and fifty years since its abolition, even though it has not been pointedly cultivated" (Mappes-Niediek 2014, 117). In these two sentences, the journalist Norbert Mappes-Niediek accomplishes a remarkable feat of capturing utterly essential issues without which no exploration of the contemporary situation of the Romanian Roma migrating to Poland and other European countries would be complete. That people of Romani origin were slaves was sanctioned by the law in the eastern part of present-day Romania, in the west of what is now Moldova, in the region between the Carpathian Mountains and the Don River, including in Bucharest, that is, in the former Duchies of Moldavia and Wallachia. Actually, Roma slavery also practically existed in other areas, though it was not officially authorized by the law. Importantly, it was not serfdom. In present-day

[19] During his tenure spanning 2006 and 2008.

Romania, Roma were slaves much the way African-Americans historically were in the U.S. (ibid., 117-118). Mappes-Niediek relates that “there was a regular slave traffic: they could be sold, inherited, gifted away, or put up as a collateral on a loan. The master was authorized to take slaves’ children away, to whip, punish, and rape slaves, and keep them on a leash like a dog” (ibid.). Roma, who did not have any legal status and were positioned at the very bottom, or basically outside, of the social ladder[20] (Achim 2013), could be owned by members of three social groups: dukes and *hospodars*, the clergy, and boyars. Any Romani person who found him/herself in the area where slavery laws were in force, automatically became enslaved. To set a slave free was an extremely rare act. Non-Roma could also become enslaved, for example, if they married a slave of Romani descent. Children born to such couples inherited the status of slaves. However, such practices were drastically curbed by legislators by making mixed marriages subject to immediate dissolution and imposing fines on the individuals involved. The liberation process of Romani slaves in Romania began in 1855-1856, and 1881 is recognized as the final date of the abolition of slavery. While Roma acquired a legal status, their actual social position did not change much, since they mostly continued to work as hired agrarian workers, which prevented them from integrating with local farming communities. Some of Roma also became involved in trade and crafts, chiefly blacksmithing (Asséo, Petcuţ, Piasere 2018, 29-31).

The second half of the 19th century was marked by one of the largest Roma migrations to other European countries and to the U.S. Hardships of life in the wake of emancipation (with authorities failing to implement mechanisms facilitating the transition of former slaves to the estate of free people) and the fear of re-enslavement compelled numerous Romani people to leave the territory of present-day Romania (Gerlich 2011, 165). Those that remained frequently continued to work for their former masters (European Roma Rights Center 2011, 13). The liberation of Romani slaves did not mean that they immediately shook off the trauma of slavery (Mappes-Niediek 2014, 119). While this is a still under-researched and unworked-through part of the history of Roma, it is one of the cornerstones of their current position in Romania.

In the aftermath of World War One, so-called Great Romania, to which Transylvania Bukovina, and Banat had been incorporated, launched robust assimilation policies targeting populations of Romani origin. The group is estimated to have included about 250,000 people at that time (Gerlich 2011, 165-166). The major aim of the government in executing this

[20] This brings to mind the notion of *homo sacer*, which has been extensively used by Giorgio Agamben (1998) in book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

campaign was to “make Romani culture, which was considered valueless and backward, disappear” (Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2014, 32). Romanian scholars were noticeably becoming more and more preoccupied with “race purity,” biopolitics, and the “inferiority” of some ethnic groups. The so-called Roma problem was approached from this perspective. World War Two saw another upsurge in the persecution of Romanian Roma, which was condoned, encouraged, and perpetrated by the pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic, and anti-Roma government of Marshall Ion Antonescu, who believed that Roma were “no better than ‘mice, rats, and crows’” (European Roma Rights Center 2011, 14). Following the alliance with the Third Reich, the Kingdom of Romania obtained Transnistria as a new province.[21] This area came to serve as “a dumping ground for Romania’s undesirables during the racist projects of World War II,” and about 90,000 Roma were deported there between 1941 and 1944. More than 30% of them died from exhaustion, malnutrition, and various ailments (ibid.; Gerlich 2011, 166). Romania’s government meticulously concealed the scale of these practices, which were initiated by Antonescu himself. Efforts were made to obscure the fact that the deportations were actually part of an ethnic cleansing project. Reasons cited for the deportations included the “hazard” that Roma allegedly posed through their nomadic lifestyle and high crime rate. Lists of individuals with Romani background who were regarded as “dangerous” were drafted, and then the deportation process was set in motion. At the end of the campaign, it transpired that more people than originally planned had been brought to Transnistria, and that, additionally, many of them were not the individuals from the previously compiled lists. The deported Roma were not allowed to take any personal belongings with them; nor were they given time to secure their property, which was subsequently taken over by the National Centre for Romanianisation as “abandoned goods.” Having arrived in Transnistria, the Roma were distributed across or on the outskirts of villages on the Bug river. Some of them were given dug-out dwellings to live in, while others were lodged in houses previously owned by Ukrainians. For their part, the Ukrainians were either evacuated to other towns and villages or ordered to share homes with other village dwellers. The resultant living conditions in the Romani colonies were extremely harsh. The local authorities neither supplied the residents with sufficient food, clothes, or cleaning supplies nor provided enough jobs. Health care was basically non-existent. The available archival records do not provide exact data on how many people died of starvation, cold, or disease in Transnistria. In May 1944, the population was evacuated from the area. Some

[21] These are coastal areas of present-day Ukraine, located between the Dniester River and the city of Odessa.

of the Roma returned to Romania, others remained in what is present-day Ukraine, and yet others dispersed across the entire Soviet territory (Achim 2013).

As reported by Miłosz Gerlich, "when warfare ceased, Romani culture came to epitomize poverty and backwardness in communist Romania" (Gerlich 2011, 166). The new regime resumed assimilation practices aimed at ultimately erasing all expressions of "Romani culture" and, in this way, instilling uniformity among citizens. Several campaigns were initiated, including compulsory settlement[22] and employment in, for example, iron and steel works. Roma had to abandon their previous occupations, and fed the ranks of labor force in state-owned plants. Their children could discontinue education as early as in primary school, which resulted (and still does result) in high illiteracy rates among Romanian Roma. In the 1970s, a massive project of disbanding villages and relocating the rural population to towns was commenced in Romania. This entailed immense changes for Roma, as for them "the displacement meant not only a thorough transformation of lifestyle, but also a considerable impoverishment, since their skills proved useless in the new settings" (Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2014, 33). The Nicolae Ceauşescu regime accused Roma of thwarting the modernization of the country, and increasing nationalist tendencies concomitantly enhanced hostility against people of Romani descent. As the economic situation in Romania deteriorated towards the end of Ceauşescu's rule, social benefits were cut down, which exacerbated poverty among Roma and further marginalized them in society (ibid., 33-34; European Roma Rights Center 2011, 16). Relocations, efforts to remodel traditional culture, attempts at reducing the role of Romani, and enforced changes of lifestyle failed to bring about the effects envisioned by the government. Policies implemented to productivize Roma, that is, to make them citizens that contributed to the development of the country, also aggravated the social exclusion of Roma and fueled anti-Roma sentiments.

At the turn of the 1980s, the Ceauşescu regime was overthrown in Romania. On 25th December 1989, the dictator was shot by the firing squad in the town of Târgoviște. Upon his execution, a wave of collective enthusiasm swept across the country, and hopes for a better future were kindled in the population. However, it became clear soon enough that the breakthrough did not entail any improvement in the living conditions, social position, or cultural situation of Roma. People of Romani origin were not included in the new Romanian society as full-fledged and equal citizens. The stereotypes formed centuries before still persisted in the

[22] Horses and carts owned by Roma were confiscated to curb Romani mobility (European Roma Rights Center 2011, 15).

social perception of Roma. The dissolution of state-owned factories and altered arrangements in the housing system caused a dramatic decline in the living conditions of Romani communities. The new, post-transition realities pervaded by fledgling wild capitalism, multiplied challenges that Roma had to face. To make things worse, the early 1990s were marked by outbreaks of violence against the Romani population. A number of anti-Roma pogroms took place between 1990 and 1993. Non-Roma set Romani houses on fire, destroyed Roma-owned property, and drove Roma away from the towns they inhabited. It is estimated that at least eight Romani individuals were killed during mob violence over these three years (European Roma Rights Center 2011, 17).

For scores of Romanian citizens, including Roma, the transition entailed the loss of jobs and homes. As most members of the Romani community had merely primary-school education, if any, they were not "attractive" workers on the capitalist labor market. Exacerbating unemployment had a series of consequences for the living conditions and the worsening social marginalization of the group (Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2014, 33). According to the European Commission statistics, the number of Roma living in Romania currently stands at 1,850,000, which accounts for 8.32% of the country's entire population. However, to determine the accurate number of residents of Romani origin is a steep challenge as Roma frequently fail to report the birth of their children to the registrar's office. As a result, their children do not become "legal" citizens of Romania upon birth. They have no citizen rights and remain invisible to the system, which detrimentally affects their access to education, social welfare, and healthcare services (Grzybowski 2011, 124-125).

The Roma living in Romania experience race-related discrimination in several respects. For example, as far as housing is concerned, they are regular targets of illegal evictions and dislike from landlords. When apartment owners find out that their potential tenants are of Romani descent, they tend to refuse to sing contracts with or even to show places to them. Romani settlements, especially those in rural areas, have no basic amenities, such as water or electricity. This often forces their dwellers to use well water, which is often unpotable and causes disease. Discrimination is also encountered by Roma in healthcare provision. For example, at the end of the 20th century, a municipal hospital attempted to ban Roma from entering it, because some of them did not pay health insurance premiums, which allegedly made them "ineligible" for medical attention. Rural Romani communities have seriously constrained access to healthcare facilities due to deficient public transport services. The exclusion of Roma from the labor market is patent even in job adverts, many of which often state that "Roma are not accepted." Even if a non-Roma employer takes on workers of Romani origin, they are likely

to be exposed to mistreatment from co-workers, relegated to the worst positions, and/or forced to accept lower pay than non-Roma employees. Members of Romani communities not infrequently are denied service at stores, restaurants, discos, etc. (European Roma Rights Center 2011, 86-103).

In the context of this study, it is essential to note that members of Romani communities are discriminated against because of their background and social position in education as well. Admittedly, the Romanian Ministry of Education has put in place a range of anti-discrimination measures, such as appointment of regional officers to monitor the situation of Romani children in public education, training of Romani language teachers, a Romani curriculum for schools, courses improving literacy skills, and summer camps for Romani children. However, all these solutions have failed to foster an inclusive schooling system sensitive and fully responsive to the specific needs of children and adolescents of Romani descent in Romania. Research conducted by the European Roma Rights Center has revealed that "the majority of Romani children in Romania remain significantly hindered in their ability to claim the right to a substantive and meaningful education" (ibid., 104). In practice, a considerable proportion of Romani children have no access to education, and many of those who are able to use their right to education end up in schools that practice racial segregation. One reason for this is that non-Roma parents who are driven by ethnic prejudice refuse to have their children share classrooms with Romani children. Romani public schools are allowed to establish classrooms for students with learning difficulties. A study conducted by the European Roma Rights Center has found that such classrooms mainly comprise Romani children, even if they exhibit no symptoms of mental disability. This indicates that students of Romani descent are consigned to such classrooms, because their conduct differs from that of their Romanian peers. Romani children tend to grapple with behavioral problems resulting from the conditions in which they are growing up, and teachers often lack competencies necessary to effectively work with them. Romani children are also frequently exposed to expressions of dislike and violence from non-Roma. This engenders the atmosphere of fear and instils a negative attitude to school in young Roma. They feel at risk, inferior, and unwanted, which is not conducive to their commitment to education. Similar processes also unfold in pre-school education settings.

Because Romani children begin formal education relatively late and lag behind children of Romanian descent in terms of core-curriculum achievement, some of them are placed at schools for students with mental disabilities. While no official statistics are available on the exact proportion of Romani children in special schools, the general scale of this phenomenon can be estimated on the basis of particular cases; for example, in September 2000 a special

school in Cluj-Napoka had two hundred students, about 70% of whom were of Romani origin. While Romani youngsters are consigned to such facilities as they are found to have fallen far behind in their studies, the parents of children that study at special schools are eligible for additional social benefits, which may make Roma less inclined to resist these practices. Such schools usually offer meals, textbooks, and school materials to their students, which often represents very substantial help for the parents, who daily wrestle with privations of utter poverty.

Because some parents fail to officially register their children's birth, some Romani children remain invisible to the public schooling system and, as such, are refused enrolment at education facilities. Adults who want to re-engage in education and make up for incomplete schooling in their childhood also stumble upon various obstacles. The heads of educational facilities often harbor a dislike of Roma, who continue to be perceived as "inferior"; hence, people of Romani descent rarely have their right to education fully enacted. According to a report of the European Roma Rights Center, schools in Romani neighborhoods are situated in lower-standard buildings and have worse equipment than schools in non-Roma communities. In the former, teachers rely on outdated teaching aids and exhibit limited work motivation. Even though primary and lower-secondary education (a total of eight years) is compulsory in Romania, a majority of Romani children (about 65%) drop out of school in the third or fourth grade of primary school. Only about 20% of Romani students continue education in upper-secondary schools, having completed the compulsory schooling stages. This very strongly affects the future lives and possibilities of social promotion of individuals of Romani descent (European Roma Rights Center 2011, 104-120).

In an interview for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska relates that "[a]bout 80% of European Roma live in extreme poverty, and out of those living in Romania, 70% have no running water, 80% have no shower and toilet, and have no access to electricity" (2020). This situation is a result of persistent, centuries-long discrimination, persecution, and marginalization of this ethnic group in all other societies with which Roma have co-existed. Emphatically, many of the assimilation campaigns targeting Roma have been pervaded by racial and ethnic discrimination. The repeated failures of actors possessing more agency and more power to address and respond to the dramatic situation of this group indicate that there is a blind eye is deliberately being turned to the problems of the Romanian Roma community in Europe. In 2007, Romania joined the European Union. Besides facilitated border passages, this act should have entailed enhanced attention to the rights of ethnic minorities and concerted effort for improving their living conditions, social position, and cultural situation. As Talewicz-

Kwiatkowska says, "when they [Romanian Roma] got passports, they set out to run away from hell, as anybody would. It appears that a cardboard tent in a park in Paris or Milan is a better place to live than a village or a town in Romania. (…) It has turned out that despite increasing racism, refugees feel more comfortable on French or Italian streets than at home in their country. I had the displeasure to visit such camps, and I know Europe's response: they must be deported, or at best kept behind barbed wire, in defiance of the EU principles and human rights" (ibid.). In exploring the situation of contemporary Romani communities in Poland or any other European country, the focus should not be on so-called labor or economic migration. Of course, when Roma travel to and settle down in another country, they look for a better place to live in dignity, which involves seeking better income. However, poverty exacerbated by very high unemployment rates caused by the economic crisis was not the only challenge Roma had to confront in Romania. They also had to cope with systemic exclusion, discrimination, hindered access to education, dismal living conditions, and Romaphobia, that is, phenomena directly ensuing from the centuries-long persecution of Roma. When arriving in West-European countries, they must often face up to similar challenges, but the fact that despite all odds they remain in Poland, Germany, and France speaks to the hardships they have left behind. The developments and processes discussed in this chapter suggest that the notion of meritocracy I evoke in Chapter Two deserves a great deal of criticism. Inequalities, particularly those afflicting groups as radically excluded as Roma are, stem from systemic defects in education, social policy, and the economy. The reproduction of inequality is patently visible in the case of Romani communities, which means that their emancipation and the improvement of their position in the social hierarchy are only possible if comprehensive solutions are implemented.

3.3. The Early Period in Wrocław and the Court Case over the Removal of the Paprotna Barracks

Resulting from centuries of discrimination and subjection, the dire situation experienced by Romanian Roma has prompted them to migrate to various European countries, including Poland. People of Romani origin currently make up one of the poorest groups in the European Union and, at the same time, one of Europe's largest ethnic minorities (Kwadrans 2013, 178). The? Romanian Roma have settled in several cities and towns of Poland, including Poznań, Gdańsk, Ciechocinek, Warszawa, Bydgoszcz, and Wrocławiu. This study specifically focuses on their presence in Wrocław.

A Romanian Roma community has lived in Wrocław for three decades now. It mostly consists of migrants hailing from the surroundings of Făgăraș, a town in the Transylvanian Brasov district. Their decision to leave their home country was triggered by their difficult social and economic situation. The first settlement of the Romanian Roma in Wrocław came into being in so-called Wilczy Kąt (literally: Wolf's Corner), a small estate on the left riverbank of the Oława River in the eastern part of Wrocław, in 1994. The barracks[23] were not really big, and hardly any information about them has been preserved. In all likelihood, they were demolished in conformity with the decision of the Municipal Office, as was the case later with the barracks in Irysowa Str. In 1998, controversies arose around the events involved in the removal of the barracks from the Wrocław residential district of Tarnogaj. The settlement initially had about two hundred dwellers, who were living in cabins they had themselves constructed from recycled materials. At the beginning, the regular residents of the area displayed interest in their new neighbors and helped the newcomers, for example, by sharing water with them, as the place they occupied had neither sewers nor potable water supply (Marcinowski, Rusakiewicz 2015, 13). However, the period of peaceable co-existence was soon followed by exacerbating tensions. The barracks expanded, and as no waste collection service was available, the place was mutating into a dumping site as time went by. The local population was becoming increasingly ill-disposed towards the Roma, and the frequency of attacks and fights picked up. This period finished one night with an unannounced intervention of the police and the border guard, who came in armed, with balaclavas over their faces and rubber gloves on their hands. The medical service workers who accompanied them tested the community for tuberculosis, with some of the Roma returning positive results. This was the trigger of a deportation action. Encouraged by promises of help from the local authorities, the Roma boarded the coaches waiting nearby, which took the migrants to the headquarters of the Border Guard in Kłodzko. They were subsequently deported to Bucharest, and the houses they had erected were torn down. The action bore the codename of "Obcy" (literally: "Alien") (Witkowski 2020, 300–304). Such events have a profoundly negative influence on the attitudes of the members of Romani communities to any official institutions.

[23] In this study, I do not use the term "koczowisko" ("makeshift camp" or "cardboard city") which is the most frequently used moniker of the Romanian Roma's settlements. "Koczowisko" is a pejoratively colored word, which connotes something temporary, makeshift, unclean, and unpleasant. Instead, I have opted for "baraka" ("barracks"), a term which is popular with the Romanian Roma themselves, when they talk about the houses they build for themselves in Wrocław. In this way, I seek to mark the impact of the Romanian Roma on and their presence in my dissertation, including its linguistic layer.

Similar ploys were used in Warsaw as well. The metropolitan authorities started to inform the public – with overtones of alarm and crisis – that the Romanian Roma who were living in camps on both sides of the General Grot Rowecki bridge posed an epidemic hazard to all the residents of the capital. Urban legends about dead bodies buried in the neighborhood of the Roma settlements were spread by word of the mouth. In June, the police and the city guard staged a night-time operation (between 2 and 4 a.m.) of dismantling the two encampments located on either side of the bridge. About one hundred people who were dwelling there at the time were forced to pack their belongings and leave the place. The mud huts they had built were burned down and bulldozed. In March 1999, about eighty people were deported from Poznań to Romania. Romani camps were also demolished in the Tri-City, Elbląg, Płock, and Cracow (Pomieciński, Chwiediuk 2017, 13).

In 2008, barracks were built in Paprotna Str. in Wrocław. The four buildings housed a family of nine adults and seven children. In July 2015, the barracks were surrounded by the city guard, and then bulldozed, as their lodgers were absent. The order was issued by the District Construction Supervision Inspector (Polish: Powiatowy Inspektor Nadzoru Budowlanego) due to the alleged fire safety concerns. The Roma lost their home along with all their possessions, including medicines, documents, generators, money, and family heirlooms. All the material remains that evidenced the Roma's existence were dumped at a landfill. The barracks were removed, even though meetings of an inter-sector team established during the 4th Forum on Local Migration Policies in Wrocław were in progress in 2015. Talks about the living conditions of the Roma were also held among the departments of the Lower Silesian Governor's Office (Polish: Dolnośląski Urząd Wojewódzki). The demolition of the four homes stirred up considerable turmoil among the entire Romanian Roma community, including the Roma living in the barracks in Kamieńskiego Str. They were afraid that their settlement was soon going to be wiped out. It was in the Kamieńskiego camp that the families who had just lost their accommodation found shelter. The "Nomada" Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society (Polish: Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Integracji Społeczeństwa Wielokulturowego Nomada) immediately intervened.[24] Its members accompanied the Roma to a police station, where they reported their possessions missing. In response to the complaints filed in by the Roma, the Wrocław Municipal Office insisted that the officers in charge of the demolition of

[24] The "Nomada" Association is dedicated to the protection of huma rights. The organization works with migrants, excluded groups, and ethnic and religious minorities. I discuss the Association's engagement in the issues concerning the Wrocław-based community of Romanian Roma in the following chapter of this study.

the barracks had meticulously made sure that no objects belonging to the members of the Romani minority remained at the site (Waszkiewicz 2015).

Regarding the demolition of the barracks in Paprotna Str., sixteen members of the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community used the help of the Helsinki Human Rights Foundation to lodge a complaint against the authorities of Wrocław[25] with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg on 22nd January 2016. Their suit stated that as the dwellers of the settlement had not been notified of the demolition plans in advance, they had been unable to prepare for the eviction. Additionally, the final decision on the demolition had only been made by the second-instance body. The Roma believed that the measures employed had been inadequate to the situation as it had been at the time. In their view, the Wrocław authorities had failed to take into account their extremely difficult economic situation and the risk of homelessness caused by the pulling down of their barracks. In their view, the destruction of the settlement and the deprivation of property were forms of persecution, especially that the Paprotna dwellers included people with disability and children. In the wake of the demolition, the Wrocław Commune (Polish: Gmina Wrocław) had failed to extend any assistance to the Roma or to secure accommodation for them. The Roma considered this to represent inhuman and degrading treatment that breached Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. They also claimed that they had been denied the right to private and family life and respect for their home (European Court of Human Rights 2017). The Roma's decision to bring a lawsuit against the authorities of Wrocław to the European Court of Human Rights attracted considerable interest from both local and nationwide media. This translated into the increased visibility of this group in discursive space. The plaintiffs directly communicated that they were human and that their fundamental rights should be respected by the authorities.

In the second half of 2017, the Court notified the government of Poland of the complaint filed in by the Roma and issued questions to be answered by the Polish authorities. The questions concerned, among other things, the possibility to appeal the Municipal Office's decision about the demolition of the barracks. The document stated that the Court would examine the case regarding the violation of Article 3 of the Convention (prohibition of torture and inhuman and degrading treatment), of Article 8 of the Convention (right to private and family life and respect for one's home), Article 14 as related to Article 8 (prohibition of discrimination), Article 13 as related to Article 8 (right to effective appeal measures), and

[25] Although the suit was lodged against the local authorities, the Court looks into it as a complaint against the action of the state authorities.

Article 1 of Additional Protocol 1 of the ECHR (right to property) (Sobczak 2017). The Roma applied to the Court to rule that law had been violated and that the wrongs they had suffered as a result of the activities of the Wrocław Commune must be compensated for. According to Dorota Pudzianowska, one of the lawyers representing the plaintiffs, the European Court of Human Rights could choose either to try and make the two parties accept a deal or to proceed to trial: "In the former case, the Court does not issue a verdict, but requests the government party to take a position on the possibility of settling the issue amicably, which commences conciliatory negotiations. If they fail, there is still a possibility for the government to issue a unilateral statement, and the Court then decides whether there are grounds for further investigation into the complaint. In the latter case, the Court pronounces a judgment, and a trial may take place, but it does not happen in all cases" (Harłukowicz 2017). The proceedings are still pending. Whatever verdict the judges of the European Court of Human Rights reach, the very fact of the Roma filing in a complaint against the authorities is an extraordinarily important event in the struggle for their self-determination and recognition as full-fledged citizens of Europe.

3.4. The Barracks in Kamieńskiego Str. and Their Demolition

As already mentioned, on arriving in Wrocław, Romanian Roma settled in once-peripheral, undeveloped, and degraded areas of the city. This community has never been homogenous or uniform. As early as in the 1860s (that is, when the abolition of Roma slavery began in Romania), Roma of the Kalderash tribe began to migrate to what is now Poland[26] from present-day Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine. Today, they are dispersed all over the globe, with their largest clusters outside Romania to be found in the U.K. and the U.S. The name Kalderash literally means "Coppersmiths" or "Cauldron-makers" and is derived from the Romanian word *căldare*, that is, a boiler or a cauldron. The making, tinning, and soldering of cauldrons and pots has traditionally been the chief occupation of the Kalderash. Their native language is Romani, and more specifically, one of its northern – Vlax – dialects which contains numerous loanwords from Romanian and Hungarian. The Kalderash make up a small part of the total Romani population in Poland. As most of the so-called Roma kings come from the Kalderash, the group

[26] These territories, though often populated by Poles, were formally not Poland at the time, as in the late 18th century Poland was partitions by its neighbors (Prussia, Russia, and Austria) and only regained independent statehood in 1918.

had once a considerable influence on other Romani communities living in Poland (Bryczkowska-Kiraga 2006, 100; Romopedia).

The largest barracks inhabited by the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community, hailing among others from the Kalderash, were situated in the area of deserted allotments/community gardens in Kamieńskiego Str., a land owned by the Wrocław Commune. They were put up in the winter of 2009/2010 (Mandelt, Ferenc 2013, 11). The Roma inhabited houses constructed from second-hand materials (e.g. sheeting, old doors and windows, fiberboards, etc.) and heated by DIY heating systems (chiefly made from metal barrels). The buildings had neither electricity nor potable water supply. They did not meet any legal norms of fire safety and sanitary standards. Power was provided by a generator that ran on petrol, for which the entire community pooled. It produced only little power, so electricity was usually available between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. Water was brought two times a week by a cistern provided by a municipal company. The barracks settlement had merely three movable toilets and one garbage dumpster. Importantly, the area was inhabited by about two hundred people. Despite the Romani men's outstanding building skills, the materials collected from dumps were not enough to ensure the sanitary and habitation standards to which contemporary European urban dwellers are accustomed. For example, the barracks had dirt floors covered with a few layers of rugs. They were small and consisted of one room, which precluded respective family members having separate spaces of their own, as one home was occupied by a few to over a dozen people. Children had neither a place to play nor a dedicated setting in which to study and do their homework. Stoves fed with garbage, old furniture, and the like emitted profuse smoke, which filled the rooms and stuck to the dwellers and things they stored inside. The smoke was basically irremovable, because the buildings had no ventilation and were difficult to air. As the interiors were very hot even when it was freezing outside, the lodgers often fell ill, mainly developing upper respiratory tract conditions. As a result of poor sanitary conditions and thwarted access to healthcare, the Roma also suffered from skin diseases, cancers (with their incidence more frequent than in majority society), and bad teeth. Their dire economic situation made them rely on low-nutrition diet, mainly consisting of thick soups, potatoes, and hominy grits, with meat – as a rule low-quality chicken – only rarely eaten. In the gender-based division of duties, the women would get up early in the morning to fire up the stoves, make coffee, dispatch the children to school, and go out to the city center or churches to beg. Meanwhile, the men would carry out maintenance chores in the settlement and individual buildings, fetch petrol for the generator, and collect scrap and other things of potential value from dumps. The barracks area was in general disarray, with various objects scattered around. The ground of the former

allotments was unpaved and unhardened, so autumn and winter precipitation transformed it into a bod covered in a thick layer of mud.

Similarly to the barracks in Paprotna Str., the Roma's relations with the locals were initially correct. The neighbors extended various kinds of help to the Romani community, including food provisions. However, as the settlement expanded, and its population grew, unfriendliness came to prevail. Support was no longer offered, and requests for money or water elicited irritated responses. The incidence of aggression against the newcomers picked up. Some of the Roma were beaten up, and the shrubs surrounding the barracks were repeatedly set on fire. The recurrent media coverage that warned against possible epidemic hazards additionally stigmatized the members of the Romani community (Witkowski 2020, 304-308).

Complaints of the Polish residents of Wrocław prompted interventions of the city guard, whose officers started to come to the settlement every day from February 2012, whereby they often threatened its dwellers with deportation and demolition of their abodes. Besides the city guard, the Roma were also visited by the municipality's social workers, the police, the border guard, and officers of the public-health authority. Importantly, as Przemysław Witkowski observes, the complaints lodged by the neighbors of the camp concerned not only the state of the area inhabited by the Romani community, but also the fears that their own estates will lose value because of the vicinity of the settlement of the migrants from Romania (ibid., 309). This represented racism and xenophobia, which were justified by economic anxieties.

In view of these developments, the municipal authorities scheduled an eviction of the Roma for March 2021. While the eviction warrant cited the negative assessment of the living condition in the barracks issued by the Provincial Public Health and Epidemiological Authority (Polish: Wojewódzka Stacja Sanitarno-Epidemiologiczna), legal consultation indicated that the displacement of Romanian citizens was illegal. Information about the plans the city authorities had for the settlement leaked to the media and stirred up considerable controversy. Over the following months, a series of meetings was held to discuss the issue with local and governmental officials, uniformed services, and experts on migrants. An agreement on the competence and responsibilities of respective agencies vis-à-vis the "unwanted/" labor migrants who were at the same time citizens of an allied EU state was notoriously difficult to reach. Ultimately, in 2013, the Wrocław Commune filed a Roma eviction suit to court. On 26th March 2013, the Roma received a written order to leave the area and hand the commune land they were occupying over to the commune. The order stated that failure to comply with its stipulations within fourteen days would result in penalty payments or eviction. Importantly, most members of the Romani community were illiterate, so they could not read the order by

themselves. These developments prompted the "Nomada" Association to launch a letter-writing marathon. On 4th April 2013, Amnesty International launched an *urgent action* (the first one since 1989) and appealed to the then-Mayor of Wrocław Rafał Dutkiewicz to start a dialogue with the multifariously excluded group. An appeal to the Mayor was also issued by the Roma, who had gained the support of several notable personages, such as Zygmunt Bauman and Olga Tokarczuk. At the same time, the conflict was constantly being fueled by nationalist and Fascist circles, which called for an ultimate solution to the Roma problem and for tearing the barracks down (which was supposed to mark an anniversary of Adolf Hitler's birth). The debate unfolding in the local press also indicated that the population of Wrocław was becoming increasingly ill-disposed towards the Romani migrants. At the same time, the Municipal Office was unable to explain what would happen to the Roma after the eviction. To place them at a homeless night shelter was one option suggested, but at the same time ruled out, because the shelter could not possibly house about two hundred needy people.

The first hearing in the case against forty-seven[27] members of the Kamieńskiego Romani community took place on 22nd November 2013. The trial proved highly controversial, abounding with instances of negligence and patent discrimination. First of all, the judge did not grant the request made by Aleksander Sikorski,[28] the lawyer representing the Roma, who asked for appointing a Romani interpreter. The hearings were only attended by a Romanian interpreter, while the Roma, who had left Romania quite a long time before, did not really use Romanian. Their first language, that is, the language they spoke in daily life, was Romani. The judge dismissed the request despite multiple appeals from several organizations which had become engaged in the case (Witkowski 2020, 311-317; Mandelt, Ferenc 2013, 11–18). Witkowski explains that, in this way, "it was made impossible for the Roma to defend themselves in a language they speak at home and think in" (Witkowski 2020, 317). The judge also refused to recognize the "Nomad" Association as a party to the case and to allow the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children to attend. The non-appointment of a Romani interpreter resulted in a number of inaccuracies: as the Roma did not understand the questions they were asked, their replies were imprecise or did not directly refer to what the questions were about. In many senses, the trial defied a number of rules, and the defendants, so to speak, by default found themselves in a non-win position.

[27] Only as many barrack dwellers were identified by the agencies involved in staging the Roma eviction trial.

[28] Aleksander Sikorski became a lawyer for the Roma during the trial at the request of the "Nomada" Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society.

As a result of the efforts undertaken by the "Nomada" Association and despite the initial reluctance of the Municipal Office, a work group was established on 18th June 2014 to try and reach an understanding over the situation of the Romanian Roma. The work group included representatives of the Wrocław City Office, the Governor's Office, municipal social services, the embassy of Romania, the University of Wrocław, law enforcement agencies, and the Catholic Church[29] (ibid., 318). Talks in the work group and the trial itself went on very slowly. In the meantime, the local daily papers, in particular *Gazeta Wrocławska*, whose write-ups are often denounced as racist and xenophobic by activists and academics, went on to fan the atmosphere of hatred. NGOs and private individuals advocating for the Roma sent a barrage of open letters to Rafał Dudkiewicz. Nevertheless, the Municipal Office did not alter its ways. In 2015, the barracks in Paprotna Str. were demolished, which I described above in section 3.3. The incisive actions of the "Nomada" Association and the lawsuit against Poland brought to the European Court of Human Rights put the trial against the Roma from Kamieńskiego Str. on temporary hold (for about three years no hearing took place). On 28th November 2017, the court convened in the case against the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma for the last time. The trial was suspended pursuant to the request of the representatives of the Municipal Office, which was supported by the lawyer for the Roma. If either of the parties had filed for the resumption of the proceedings within nine months, the trial would have gone on again. This, however, did not happen, so the case was permanently dropped. Witkowski aptly emphasizes that people involved in the trial, including not only activists but also the members of the Romani community themselves, observed that it was precisely the trial that eventually enabled them to speak out publicly in their own case (ibid., 335-336). In this way, they were no longer merely a theme to be discussed by the authorities and an object of media slur. Although the situation was oppressive (with no Romani interpreter made available to them), they symbolically regained their subjectivity. Their voice became audible, and they stopped being treated as a nameless group of strangers.

Although the suit brought by the Wrocław Municipal Office against the minority community of Romanian Roma was dropped, the barracks in Kamieńskiego Str., like those in Paprotna Str., were removed as well, albeit on other conditions. Between 2017 and 2018, their inhabitants were distributed across various accommodations all over Wrocław (from Biskupin almost to Leśnica[30]). Under a dedicated socio-educational program, the Romani families moved

[29] Importantly, the Wrocław-based community of the Romanian Roma is more affiliated with the orthodox church.
[30] The tram route that connects these two far-removed neighborhoods is almost twenty kilometers long.

in to a dozen or so training accommodations rented by the NGO House of Peace Foundation (Polish: Fundacja Dom Pokoju) to the order and from the budget of the Wrocław Commune. This scheme was supposed to improve the Roma's living conditions, enable their children to follow compulsory schooling, and eventually result in their engagement with the labor market and eventual self-reliance. Social assistants were appointed to accompany the families. Therefore, the change in the mode of dwelling also entailed changes in intra-group relationships. Because the community became dispersed, the benefits of the improved material quality of life are likely to go hand in hand with the weakening of previous bonds among the community members.

The users of the program are supposed to develop competencies and skills promoting their self-reliant living. The point is that the Roma should acquire experience helping them not only become economically independent but also learn and use their rights along with performing their duties as members of the Wrocław community. Essential factors in their envisaged integration include, for example, working in stable jobs, taking care of their accommodation, and having their children enact their right to education, thereby increasing their emancipation chances. This type of support aims at bridging the gap between the Romani community's previous way of life and the cultural and socio-economic model currently in place in Poland. Moving in to training accommodations has certainly improved the sanitary and hygienic living standards of the community of the Romanian Roma. The regular availability of running water, electricity, and gas has facilitated their everyday lives, as they no longer have to collect fire wood, buy fuel for the generator, etc. The Roma are obligated to regularly pay the rent for the apartments they inhabit, which makes their cost of living higher than that they incurred when dwelling in the barracks. The adult members of the community encounter various obstacles in securing stable jobs; the gravest ones include, from within, poor language competence and, from without, stereotypes of and prejudice against the Roma (and, earlier, their undocumented status). Moving to training accommodations also triggered changes in the diurnal rhythms of the Roma's life, as the members of the group have since gained more "leisure time," because, for one, they no longer have to busy themselves with the maintenance of run-down barracks. In their previous dwellings, mobile phones and social media often had to replace daily face-to-face meetings.

The Wrocław Roma-dedicated program comprises an educational dimension. Education happens on two levels. Firstly, children and adolescents attend public schools. Secondly, all age groups (including youngsters) learn to live in a democratic system and the capitalist, free-market economy. They are, so to speak, being modernized. For example, the Roma have their

traditional and distinctive conceptualization of time, which can be seen in how dates, periods, days, months, and years are conveyed in their narratives about the passage of time. Specifically, to render the passage of time, they do not refer to events involved in successive stages of education or work career. Instead, they think of time in terms of a "stream of life." Of course, the rhythm of life, as they perceive it, includes rites of passage which mark the adoption of new social roles, but they do not seem to be centrally essential to the Roma's individual temporal axes, at least not in their narratives. When depicting the present, they very rarely refer to concrete plans for the future. Under their program, however, they have acquired an opportunity to develop habits of punctuality, abandon their day-by-day mode of life, and learn to respect other people's time, divide the day into working time and leisure, and think about the future.

Despite all these development-promoting factors, the scheme is not free from risks. The point is that the dispersal of the community across the city and the demolition of the barracks seem to reduce the "visibility" of the Roma. In the light of arguments advanced by Laclau and Mouffe (2001), the conflict between the Municipal Office and the Roma, dating back to more or less 2012, has been blurred. When the barracks were still in place, the Romani community was a "visible" party to the conflict. This visibility was both physically manifest in the city space and discursively pronounced, for example, through (not only local) media coverages and abundant discussions among the representatives of the City Office, the Marshal Office (Polish: Urząd Marszałkowski), NGOs, and other actors. The last write-ups about the Romanian Roma from the barracks in Kamieńskiego Str. were posted on the Internet portals about mid-2018, as if the demolition of the barracks, the clearance of the area, and thus the removal of the material traces of the community evinced its complete disappearance. If this intriguing phenomenon is depicted in the language of Mouffe and Laclau, it takes us to the concept of hegemony. The dominant discourse, conceived as a linguistic and non-linguistic space in which identities are produced (see Howarth 2008), is delimited by hegemonic practices. There is a risk that the discourse and the Roma identity may become scattered and vanish (from the field of vision) amidst the various buildings, apartments, and people. Therefore, from the perspective of agonistic democracy, the Roma are losing the battle at the moment.

In the following chapter, I examine in more detail the socio-educational program implemented by the House of Peace Foundation and the advocacy of the "Nomada" Association for the Romani community.

CHAPTER FOUR

Socio-Educational Interventions for the Wrocław-Based Romanian Roma Community

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze and interpret the data generated in my empirical research. To achieve the aims of my project, I conducted a total of ten semi-structured interviews with members of the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community and with current or former workers of two NGOs involved in the implementation of socio-educational programs for this community: the House of Peace Foundation (Polish: Fundacja Dom Pokoju) and the Nomada Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society (Polish: Stowarzyszenie Na Rzecz Integracji Społeczeństwa Wielokulturowego Nomada). In exploring my data, I will rely on the theoretical concepts discussed in preceding chapters in order to offer a critical analysis of issues related to the designing and carrying out of these interventions. The empirical research I conducted took form of a case study (Creswell 2007, 73-75) of socio-educational programs for the Wrocław-Based Romanian Roma community, created by the two above-mentioned non-governmental organizations. I conducted the interviews in order to collect data enabling the analysis of the presence of hegemonic relations in these interventions, as well as the manner of their creation and implementation.

Subchapter 4.1 provides particulars of the empirical research method I adopted in my study. The research techniques I applied are depicted, including, for example, the manner in which the interviews were conducted, the scope of questions I asked my respondents, and the analytical procedure I used to make sense of their narratives. Subchapter 4.2 depicts the mission and pursuits of the Nomada Association, detailing the goals of this organization, the groups it targets, its publications, and the ways in which it implements its projects. Subchapter 4.3 contains the corresponding information about the activity of the House of Peace Foundation. The following subchapters report my findings based on the data generated in the course of my empirical research and gleaned from the publications of the two NGOs. Subchapter 4.4 focuses on the objectives and goals of interventions for the Romanian Roma community undertaken by the Nomada Association and the House of Peace Foundation. It looks into the methods used by

the members of these organizations in their work with the Roma, the so-called housing-first approach being one such method. This subchapter also retraces the genesis of the "Program for Romanian Roms and Romnis, the Residents of Wrocław" (Polish: "Program na rzecz Romów i Romni rumuńskich – mieszkańców i mieszkanek Wrocławia"), which was launched by the House of Peace Foundation.

Subchapter 4.5 investigates a surging phenomenon that has come to be called projectosis. This term is more and more widely used, among other actors, by people who work for NGOs, cultural institutions, and/or research hubs and are involved in the execution of social, educational, and cultural projects. Projectosis denotes the process of making the market logic and market mechanisms a fundamental part of project work, which is manifest, for example, in how the terms and conditions of grant competitions are formulated, in reporting on the progress of the projects, and in the grant-givers' focus on the targeted "effect" or "outcome," which should preferably be easily quantifiable and expressed in numbers. Consequently, in this subchapter I address the passages of my respondents' narratives that imply the persistence and significance of projectosis-informed approaches in the programs for the Romanian Roma community.

Subchapter 4.6 investigates family assistance as a method of working with the Roma community. Both the Nomada Association and the House of Peace Foundation have made family assistance the cornerstone of their cooperation with this minority group. Given the centrality of this method, I explain how the profession of family assistant is defined in the Polish legislation and what is specifically involved in the practice of assistants of Romani families. I also describe how relations between the assistants and the Roma are established and developed. Importantly, I relate an exceptional case of a Romni who works for the Nomada Association as an assistant of Romani families.

Subchapter 4.7 recounts the efforts involved in the process of making it possible for the youngest Roma to exercise their right to education. I depict, for example, the educational classes the Nomada Association organized for the Romanian children before their enrolment at public educational facilities and the formal and Romaphobia-related issues the NGO had to solve for the Romani youngsters to be registered as students of public schools. I also highlight how ill-adjusted the public schools were to meet the needs of the Romani community and how fraught the parent-teacher and peer relations were. I illumine the particular challenges that the students of Romani origin faced during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

As already mentioned, the subchapters based on my empirical data include references to the theoretical concepts discussed in the preceding parts of this study. By looking at my data

through this theoretical lens, I seek to understand the power relations at work in society, the current hegemonic configurations and their impact, the systemic inequality and exclusions, and the models of the "correct" functioning of individuals in the contemporary – democratic and capitalist – social world.

4.1 Empirical Research Methods

Before describing the empirical method of data generation, analysis and interpretation I used in my study, an important explanation is in order. Specifically, my investigations are premised on the idea that the social world is produced in and through language. There is basically nothing is social reality that cannot be expressed in words. It is only that which is comprised in language that can be comprehended and, consequently, analyzed, whereby actions and their products are also verbally mediated. Similarly, the fabric of research processes is woven of terms, concepts, and categories that make it possible to construct, depict, and interpret the world. The social world consists of varied and often competing discourses in and through which it is conceptualized and co-constructed. Thus, "language is by no means easily reducible to the role of a medium. Its relevance is far broader. In the discursive framework, the significance of language increases, even to the rank of a social formation, because it thoroughly determines the shape of socio-political reality" (Ozimek 2015, 163). In this context, discourse is an instrument for analyzing the totality of the social world and not only its communicative and linguistic layer. Essentially, social relations are inextricable from discourse, as discourse "is the source from which social relations ensue" (ibid., 165). This does not entail neglecting non-discursive phenomena since, as explicated in subchapter 1.1, a clear line between discursive and non-discursive practices is notoriously difficult to draw. In my deconstructive scrutiny of power relations, configurations of forces, and the operations of inequality, I will build on the discursively and critically oriented theoretical and methodological models depicted in detail in Chapters One and Two. I will also employ the concepts of hegemony and emancipation, along with the notions of agonistic democracy theory.

Chapter Four of this study is underpinned by the data generated in my empirical research which was carried out between January and June 2021. The study was originally planned on March-August 2020, but the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, made it necessary to re-schedule it. Though derailing the initial timetable of my project, this delay was on the whole auspicious for the volume of the materials I was able compile. I had an opportunity to look into

the progress of the projects I depict below and to explore publications that addressed them. The pandemic-triggered changes in social reality evidently affected some of the spheres of life addressed by my respondents.

In order to achieve the major scholarly goal of my project, I chose the empirical qualitative research design. I conducted a total of ten semi-structured interviews with members of the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community and with former and current members of the House of Peace Foundation and the Nomada Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society, two NGOs which have implemented and are still implementing socio-educational interventions for this community. The Roma[31] who agreed to talk with me have been or are beneficiaries of the programs offered by these NGOs. All the interviews were anonymous and used a prior script. They took from about an hour to four hours each.

When interviewing members of the NGOs, I particularly asked about the goals, scope, and components of the programs or projects they had launched for the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community. I also sought to see whether these interventions had mutated over time and, if so, to re-trace their changes. I wanted to elicit my respondents' individual experiences of and in working with the Roma community, as a considerable majority of them had worked or were working as assistants to Romani families. As a result, assistance as a method of work proved a salient issue, and I will address it further in this chapter. My questions also concerned attitudes to education embraced by the adults and children in the Romani Roma community and by the school staff and parents from majority society. I asked my respondents to identify the causes and consequences of dismantling the Romani settlement in Kamieńskiego Str. and of some of the Roma moving to training accommodations. My other queries explored how the community members were getting by in their apartments scattered across Wrocław and into their rapport and cooperation with the assistants. The themes of centuries-old stereotypes of Roma, hate speech and physical violence associated with racism and Romaphobia surfaced in all these interviews.

My interviews with members of the Romanian Roma community primarily focused on their life experiences over recent years, but this preoccupation did not preclude talking about their more distant ("Romanian") past. Given that Polish was for them a largely foreign language the command of which differed from individual to individual, the easiest approach was to refer to particular stages in their lives one by one. Such landmarks included, for example, their first arrival in Poland, living in the barracks, the eviction court case, resettling to training

[31] My respondents were married adults with preschool- and/or school-age children.

accommodations, and enrolling children at schools. Hence, I asked my respondents about their living conditions in the country of origin, that is, Romania, and in the Kamieńskiego Str. settlement, and about their daily lives in their training accommodations. I was also interested in how they perceived collaboration with the assistants and in their experiences of participation in the projects caried out by the two NGOs. I requested my respondents to comment on the issues implicated in earning their livelihoods, their children's education and their relations with majority society. They also told me about their family histories and the experience of poverty and discrimination.

In individual interviews scripts, the wording of questions was adjusted to respective respondents. The interviews were voice-recorded and subsequently transcribed. In the first stage of processing the material collected in interviews, I read the transcripts a few times in order to select the most relevant passages. Concomitantly, I kept notes registering my impressions from and reflection on the interviews. In this way, I was able to identify the issues central to my perspective which I then interpreted by means of the theoretical and methodological toolkit depicted in Chapters One and Two. For the sake of anonymity, the interviews have been coded as W1, W2, W3, etc.

Thus generated data were then combined with those obtained from the documents available on the websites of the Nomada Association and the House of Peace Foundation as well as those directly provided by members of these organizations. As a result of pandemic-enforced restrictions and social-distance rules, I was not able to conduct participant observation of educational interventions designed for the Roma community.

This arrangement of empirical research afforded me access to narratives of both the designers and the recipients of the socio-educational programs and projects. On the basis of these data, I will offer an account of the relevant power relations and hegemonic configurations. I will also use them as a lens through which to examine classroom-based and extramural education-specific issues along with the influence of the meritocratic narrative on individuals, social inequality and various ways of developing projects for this excluded group. Before depicting the problems that emerged from my data set, I will briefly depict the pursuits and activity fields of the Nomada Association and the House of Peace Foundation[32] in order to sketch the background of the interventions they launched for the Romanian Roma.

[32] The sequence is chronological here as the Nomada Association was the first NGO to start collaboration with the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community.

4.2 The Nomada Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society

The Nomada Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society was founded towards the end of 2009. The NGO is dedicated to human-rights advocacy and primarily works for migrants, refugees, excluded groups, and ethnic and religious minorities. While, in topographic terms, the NGO's activities are mainly centered in Wrocław, its members, if need be, support individuals in other urban settings as well. Currently, the Nomada staff consists of political scientists, lawyers, cultural-studies scholas and ethnologists with rich experience in intercultural and anti-discriminatory education, handling legalization procedures for migrants in Poland and assistance to members of the Romanian Roma community in Wrocław. Importantly, the team includes a person of Roma descent who is an assistant to Roma families; she is the only Romanian Romni in Wrocław to work in this role. The major forms of activity undertaken by the Nomada members are defined on the NGO's website as "development and educational projects, monitoring and advocacy, interventional assistance and legal support. We also release publications, hold trainings, conferences and debates." (*About us* n.d.)

As one of its chief pursuits, the Nomada Association provides free-of-charge legal counseling to migrants coming to Poland. This includes support in navigating the procedures for obtaining documents that legalize their status in Poland, assistance in family issues, and help when faced with prejudice-fueled violence. Such help is offered by the Nomada members and associates in stationary consultancy at the NGO's office and in the field by accompanying individuals at offices, medical facilities, courts, and police stations. These services are used, among other recipients, by the Romanian Roma who live in Wrocław and also by the individuals who stay at the Guarded Center for Foreigners (Polish: Strzeżony Ośrodek dla Cudzoziemców) in Krosno Odrzańskie (*Poradnictwo* n.d.). The Association facilitates the establishment of consortia assembling various NGOs dedicated to augmenting support methods for migrants and refugees in Poland. Since the Polish state itself has put in place neither sufficient help-provision mechanisms nor any consistent migration policies yet, these consortia aim to redress this gap by developing support tools and framework for migrants who stay in Poland (*One for all, all for one* n. d.).

The Nomada members organize and run training courses for people who work with children and young adults. The courses focus on a range of issues related to peer discrimination due to race, ethnic background, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and the like factors and aim to furnish the participants with knowledge on intercultural communication and with skills requisite for responding effectively to acts of micro-aggression spawned by prejudice. The

Association holds open meetings, debates and screenings at various urban venues and locations with a view to sensitizing the public to discrimination, to educating them on cultural stereotypes at hand and to promoting tolerance (*Projekty* n. d.).

To spread the knowledge produced in its multiple ventures, the Nomada publishes robustly, releasing multiple guides and handbooks. The offer insights into and advice on issues connected to collaboration with refugees in education, social welfare, and healthcare, to support for victims of prejudice-driven violence, and to work with the Romanian Roma community. Besides, the Nomada members author monitoring papers and reports which examine the operations of governmental agencies, such as the Border Guard, the police, and the Office for Foreigners in Wrocław (as part of the Lower Silesian Governor's Office [Polish: Dolnośląski Urząd Wojewódzki]) (*Publikacje* n. d.) Such publications are a strategic tool for disseminating the tested manners of working with groups that require special attentiveness. As a result, the knowledge produced and, crucially, tried-and-tested in action becomes more widely available.

Apart from these undertakings, the Association has carried out projects dedicated to the Romanian Roma community since 2011. These comprise, as already mentioned, legal counselling, assistance and publishing on the intervention methods for this group. Besides, the Nomada members support and monitor education processes of Romani children. As a result of their concerted efforts, young Wrocław-based Roma enrolled in formal education in 2014. Prior to that, the Association had helped them prepare for studying at school in a series of activities and classes (*Education* n. d.). I will discuss the educational pursuits of the Nomada Association in the following subchapters.

4.3 The House of Peace Foundation

The House of Peace Foundation was established by Edward Skubisz, a Dutch theologian of Polish descent, in 2005. In its mission statement the NGO proclaims that its goal is to "create a space in which what matters is humanity and not the labels of nationality or of any other belonging." (*O nas – misja* n. d.). The Foundation is committed to building and strengthening civil society through fostering a space for discussion. It also promotes non-violent communication, empathy, openness, and tolerance. The Foundation's staff comprises social scientists, mediators, lawyers, psychologists, and educators with ample experience in setting up networks and consortia, anti-discriminatory and participatory education, dialogue facilitation,

transformation of urban spaces, and cooperation with socially excluded people (*O nas – ludzie fundacji* n. d.).

The three major sectors of activities launched by the House of Peace Foundation are conflict transformation, local development, and education. Conflict transformation is the major object of, for example, the Mediation Emergency group (Polish: Pogotowie Mediacyjne), that is, the project of support-provision in solving problems through mediation. This form of help is available free of charge to all the residents of Wrocław. The Foundation is also involved in dialogue facilitation and undertakes actions for promoting mutual understanding and peaceable communication among parties locked in a conflict situation. As another form of operation in this sector, the NGO coordinates social consultations and evaluation processes. The House of Peace has contributed to the establishment of the Lower Silesian Dialogue Center (Polish: Dolnośląski Ośrodek Dialogu), a network of NGOs devoted to the development of social dialogue. The conflict transformation sector also encompasses the "Program for Romanian Roms and Romnis, the Residents of Wrocław," (*Tranformacja konfliktu* n. d.) mentioned in Chapter Three, which the Foundation has been implementing since 2016. The particulars of interventions launched as part of this project will be discussed in depth in the following subchapters.

The local development-focused sector of the pursuits of the House of Peace Foundation is intimately embedded in the revitalization processes of Nadodrze, one of Wrocław's downtown neighborhoods. Since 2009, the Foundation has been running Infopunkt Łokietka 5,[33] which is a meeting venue for the local residents and a support hub for the local entrepreneurs. Since 2019, the House of Peace has also been developing the Other Center (Polish: Inne Centrum), an agency devoted to stimulating the development of communities inhabiting downtown areas of Wrocław by such low-profile campaigns as refurbishing display windows of small local crafts or trading businesses. The locality-centered undertakings of the NGO are supposed to promote social activism and the sense of co-responsibility for the closest surroundings among the population of Wroclaw (*Rozwój lokalny* n. d.).

The education-focused sector of the Foundation's activity involves conflict management at schools and peer mediations. These interventions are offered to educational facilities and their fundamental aim is to change communication modes at schools and to prevent and counteract verbal aggression. As part of this involvement, the House of Peace also holds workshops, classes, and activities on anti-discriminatory education, citizenship education,

[33] Łokietka 5 is the address of the "Infopoint."

and human rights protection (*Mediacje rówieśnicze* n. d.). The Foundation also develops educational publications and resources. These include, for example, reports from research and social consultations carried out by the House of Peace, along with handbooks and good practice collections. Their thematic concerns include alternative manners of conflict-solving, methods of including city dwellers in participatory processes, and the model of working with "an ethnically different community" (specifically, the program implemented for the Romanian Roma) (*Publikacje Domu Pokoju* n. d.).

4.4 The Goals of Projects for the Wrocław-Based Romanian Roma Community

In this subchapter, I examine the goals that both NGOs – the House of Peace Foundation and the Nomada Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society – seek to achieve through their programs and projects for the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community. I also briefly address the methods of work employed by the two organizations in these ventures, the most fundamental of which will be depicted in more detail in the following parts.

As indicated in subchapter 3.2, the pursuits of the Nomada Association are centered around the issues of human rights protection and are primarily addressed to migrants, refugees, ethnic communities, and excluded groups. The NGO commenced its cooperation with Wrocław's Romanian Roma community in autumn 2010. At the time, the Association's activities chiefly consisted of immediate material help. In the course of time, the team of the Association began to engage in closer relations with the group members, which gave the former a better insight into the latter's situation and needs. As one of my respondents recalls:

> When we were starting to work with the Roma, the group could certainly be described as utterly excluded, marginalized, and poor. Nobody had a job, and there were no social benefits. Their livelihoods came from begging and collecting scrap metal. In the morning, they had nothing to eat and would go out to beg and to collect scrap metal to buy some food for their children in the afternoon. At the time, they had no water either; it was only later that the commune organized water supplies for them in water carts. (W07).

The realization how much the Roma were excluded and invisible to the Polish legal-administrative system was a starting point for the Nomada to develop interventions for this group (W01). One of my respondents believes that the marginalization of the Romani community should be explored through the lens of the history of the slavery of Roma in what

is now Romania.[34] She observers that this issue has not been adequately studied by researchers, and that Roma themselves do not know much about it either, with their vague knowledge of it primarily derived from vestigial family tales. In the light of critical race theory, this historical slavery experience of Romanian Roma must not be considered irrelevant, as it is among the phenomena that lie at the root of the rise of inequality in the social world. The fact that majority society is largely unaware of Roma's enslavement does not entail that slavery has no impact on the present condition and position of this community. Exclusions take centuries to take shape, and they represent an accumulation of various forms of discrimination. What these forms are exactly like depends on the historical conjuncture with its distinctive model of social relations.

The set of priority goals defined by the Nomada Association first and foremost included supporting the Roma in completing formalities for the registration of their residence in Poland and having the children and adolescents included in the public education system. In the former matter, the point was above all to make the community eligible for public healthcare services, the right to education, and social welfare support. With a view to achieving these aims, a family assistance project was launched,[35] under which family assistants were supposed, among their other responsibilities, to help the Roma overcome various administrative difficulties and legalize their status in the Republic of Poland. As far as the public schooling objective is concerned, the Association had to implement a range of non-formal educational activities in order to help the Romani children, who had no prior school experiences whatsoever, adapt to participation in the traditional education system.[36] As court cases concerning the removal of the barracks in Paprotna Str. and Kamieńskiego Str. were underway at the time, the Association also became involved in advocacy for the Romani community by raising funds for the fee of the defendants' lawyer, supporting the Roma during court hearings, and promoting an increased visibility of the group in the media. The latter was highly relevant given that stories disseminating racist anti-Roma cliches were plentifully published in the press at the time. In this context, one of my respondents stresses that:

> The team wondered whether we weren't perhaps doing the Roma a serious disservice, whether we were right to stir a media buzz about them. Anyway, this is still something we give a serious thought to in Roma-related projects. We exposed them *outside*, and they had to face up to a number of new things, but they also told us that we were making them feel more secure. (W09)

[34] Roma's slavery is discussed in Chapter Three.
[35] For more information on assistants of Romani families, see subchapter 4.6.
[36] Romani children's education is discussed in more detail in subchapter 4.7.

As a result, coverage started to appear in local media which unsettled at the dominant, stereotype-underpinned narrative about the Roma. This revealed the existing stereotypes, which Laclau and Mouffe believe to testify to the presence of the "Other." The "Other" precludes the constitution of subjects' permanent identities, which makes it possible for social conflicts to occur. The media tended to depict the Roma as thieves, sloths, and people not only refusing to conform to the lifestyle of majority society, but even detrimental to it and posing a risk to its regular operations. While the coverage inspired by the advocacy of the Nomada Association was inherently defensive, it was also explanatory as it elucidated the Roma's extremely difficult and complex situation. This could frustrate the collective production of the "enemy" image. As a result, the entrenched hegemonic structure was undercut, for example on the level of media discussions.

Talking about the goals pursued by the Nomada Association in its actions launched in cooperation with the Romani Roma community, one of my respondents concludes:

> Our aim is for the group not to need us at a certain moment. It's all about reinforcement for the members of the community to be self-sufficient, capable of self-determination, to decide for themselves, and to be their own advocates. We don't want to speak on their behalf, because that's what's been the case for years. We want the community's members to speak for the community. It's about becoming subjects, about reinforcing self-determination, self-sufficiency, and autonomy – then, they'll no longer need any support from the outside. For this to happen, you must also work with majority society. It's about anti-discrimination and multicultural education. (W07)

Thus, the inclusion of the Roma in the Polish legal-administrative system and their adaptation to majority society's way of life are not the only point of the Association's program. The interventions of the Nomada team are also supposed to bolster the community and strengthen its identity. This ties in with Mouffe's reflection on agonistic democracy. Ideally, the political arena should make it possible to articulate as many views and demands as possible, regardless of the social actors' skin color, gender, age, etc. It is only such a pluralism that affords an opportunity of shifting the field of hegemony in place. For its part, this is the foundation of sustaining and developing democracy. At the same time, Mouffe insists that conflicts lie at the core of pluralism and, as such, they should not be solved through the Habermasian committed pursuit of consensus. The achievement of the goals indicated by my respondent – both relative to the Roma themselves and pertaining to majority society – could redirect thinking in terms of an enemy to be "destroyed" toward thinking in terms of "opponents." This framework of

reasoning helps discard the model in which only one way of life is regarded as right and, instead, accept that there are various disparate attitudes and positions.

The House of Peace Foundation has implemented one program targeting the Romani community as part of the organization's general pursuits primarily focused on reinforcing civil society and on fostering space for dialogue and peaceable conflict-solving. As specified in subchapter 3.4, the "Program for Roms and Romnis, the Residents of Wrocław" was launched by the House of Peace Foundation at the request of the Wrocław Commune as a grant-giver at the turn of 2016. The program was initiated as a response to the crisis precipitated the court case concerning the eviction of the dwellers from the barracks in Kamieńskiego Str. In the official documents, the aims of the first stage of the program[37] are defined as "the dispersal of the settlement and attempts to include the Roma in the socio-institutional structures of Wrocław" (Pylypenko, Rudziński, Wajda, Whitten 2021, 22-23). In order to achieve this aim, the NGO founded an Intersector Team for the Romanian Roms and Romnis (Polish: Zespół międzysektorowy do spraw Romów i Romni rumuńskich), comprising public institutions, NGOs, and schools. The Foundation acts as the leader of the program, coordinates the collaboration of these actors, and manages training accommodations. As an additional body, the Intersector Team, which coordinates actions of various actors, consists of the Head of the Social Affairs Department (Polish: Departament Spraw Społecznych), other representatives of this agency of the Wrocław Commune, the Head of the Municipal Social Welfare Center, the Head of the Wrocław Integration Center (Polish: Wrocławskie Centrum Integracji), and a team managing the program on behalf of the House of Peace Foundations. As part of the operations of the Intersector Team, workgroups have been established to handle legal matters, take care of education and integration (in the neighborhoods where the Roma moved after leaving the barracks), and deal with begging as an undesirable form of earning livelihoods. The first stage of the program was divided into a series of phases, including "the settlement, relocation, the development of trust and inclusion into the system, work based on relations" (ibid., 24). This implies that the program encompassed the Foundation's running of training accommodations, a project of assistance for Romani families, actions promoting the Roma's integration with the population of Wrocław, and the accumulation and dissemination of good practices.

[37] The first stage of the program was implemented between 2017 and. 2020. The second stage was commenced in 2021. It is scheduled to last for two years.

The program of the House of Peace Foundation has been implemented in reliance on the housing-first method.[38] The members of the Foundation explain that it is predicated on the idea that:

> Without meeting the basic physiological needs, changes in attitudes and habits, rehabilitation, self-reliance, emancipation, and even preliminary employment-related efforts are not to be expected. Regarding this, in the case of people affected by the homelessness crisis (including those dwelling in the camp, in conditions that grievously fail to meet the standard we accept), these are the need of warmth, security, shelter, access to water and lavatories. (Rudziński 2020, 9)

Crucially, as reported by my respondents, the Roma themselves did not perceive themselves as homeless when dwelling in the barracks: "they simply thought of them as their homes. It was the system that saw them as homeless" (W09). As a result of the view that the system had of the community, the Wroclaw Commune decided during the court case over the eviction of the Roma from the Kamieńskiego settlement to install tin containers in one of Wrocław's housing estates and have the Roma move to them from the barracks. The containers were supposed to serve as substitute accommodation, which the commune was legally obligated to make available to the evicted residents. The idea was not consulted with other stakeholders, such as the Nomada. The Association found out about those plans from the local media:

> People from the estate started to panic right away and spread hate speech. The Romani family were to be split, because they were thought of as homeless people, so women with children were to live separately from men. These containers were put there, but as a result of the media feeding frenzy, Polish homeless people ended up living there. This is an example of the worst thinkable practices used vis-à-vis Roma in Europe. (ibid.)

In conjunction with the housing-first method, each of the families from the Kamieńskiego barracks was offered training accommodation to move to. The Foundation rented these apartments from private owners based on the housing-market prices, because "it was not possible to use the municipal resources, while it was urgent to disperse the settlement quickly, though gradually" (Rudziński 2020, 10). In the NGO's view, this solution was supposed to facilitate the integration of the Roma coming to settle in the apartments and members of majority society in the area. As pointedly underscored by Tomasz Rudziński in his contribution to *Mieszkanie jako dobro* (English: *An Apartment as a Good*), another textbook

[38] For more details on the housing-first approach, see, for example, D. Padgett, B. Henwood, and S. Tsemberis (2015) *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives*. Oxford University Press.

released by the House of Peace Foundation (2020), "the training apartments and houses did not differ from those inhabited by *the average Joneses* in any respect. Nor were they marked by any external sign revealing that those were special dwellings with special tenants; simply, a new family moved into the neighborhood" (Rudziński 2020, 10.). The publication does not explain why the accommodations to which the Roma moved should have had and "external signs" in the first place. Thus it is impossible to infer what function such signs should have had or what they should have informed about – background, skin color, or anything else. This indirectly implies that that people of Romani descent were by default treated as "others" or "strangers." Rudziński's assertions, though apparently well-meaning, in fact exhibit an impact of the hegemonic structure in which the Romani community is consigned to the margin of majority society both in the lived reality and in the representations of Roma.

Mieszkanie jako dobro mentions a Foundation-organized debate on the perception of access to housing as an indelible human right which was held at a Wrocław-based cultural institution on 19 November 2020. The debate was recorded by cameras (no public was allowed to participate due to the pandemic restrictions in place at the time), but the recording has never been made public. Nor have the report and a documentary produced as part a research project which aimed to identify the cultural and educational needs of the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma. As mentioned in the Introduction, I was on the team responsible for drawing up the report. Neither this document nor the video material has been released yet. Generally, the local media coverage concerning the situation of the Romani community in the aftermath of the demolition of the barracks has been very scarce. This precludes the dissemination of knowledge about this group and the augmentation of the good practice collection accumulated in cooperation with the Romanian Roma. Consequently, plurality is not promoted, not even on the level of media coverage.

About 150 people decided to use the offer of moving to training accommodations. Not all of them have remained in the House of Peace Foundation's program until this day. Some of the Roma migrated to other West-European countries or moved to other Polish cities, such as Gdańsk and Poznań (where their family members live as well). However, some people appear to have dropped out of the program as a result of the fraught Roma-assistants-Foundation relations. One of my respondents observes:

> All the Roma will tell you that they couldn't come to terms with the Foundation, so they left the program. It was also about debts, control, the seizure of the 500+ money,[39] and

[39] At a certain point in the program, the 500+ benefit was automatically used to cover some of the rent that the Roma were to pay. They did not obtain the money, as the Municipal Social Welfare Center (Polish: Miejski

> the fact that they didn't feel at home in the apartments. The Foundation will tell you that the partings were exemplary, and the families *chose homelessness*. Most of the families that have left the program still live in Wrocław, but they haven't become self-reliant; they've moved to social housing where their relatives live or settled in empty buildings. None of those that have left the program get by on the housing and labor market the way the project aimed for them to do. (W07)

Some of my respondents claim that mostly the families that enjoyed a relatively significant position in the barracks have given up on the program. They had a comfortable footing in the settlement community, and their family bonds were very strong. When the Roma moved to training accommodations, the group was dispersed across the urban space and could no longer meet in a large company (there was a ban on having guests at the training accommodations), as a result of which contacts among the community members were weakened. The Roma that were not fully accepted by the barracks dwellers, including their own closest relatives, are reportedly most in favor of the program. For them, relocation to the apartments made available by the Foundation was an opportunity for disentangling from difficult relations.

The long-term goal is for the Romani families that inhabit training accommodations to move to social housing granted by the Wrocław commune. One of my respondents reports: "I've been waiting for social housing for two years now. There is no electricity or water in the place they've given me. I'm waiting for it to be repaired. I'd like to repair it myself, to speed things up, but they don't let me. When we get it, we'll be paying much less than now. I have nothing to go back to in Romania; I have no land, no house. (W04)

Importantly, applications for social housing were not filed in by the families at the very onset of the program despite the common knowledge of how very long it actually took to obtain it. One of my respondents suggests that one reason for this delay has been that submitting such an application has been framed as "a reward for sticking it out and not returning to the camp" (W02). The drop-out rate from the program might be lower, if the prospect of obtaining social housing were more immediate and perceived by the Roma themselves as more realistic. This might also help alleviate the Roma's sense of being controlled by the Foundation's staff. Social housing might make them feel more independent and free.

At the moment, the second stage of the program is underway. It was commenced at the beginning of 2021, encompasses far fewer people than at its start, and is scheduled to run for two years (ibid.). I have been unable to find any information about it on the Foundation's

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Ośrodek Pomocy Społecznej, MOPS) paid it directly to the Foundation's account (W07), even though the benefit is by definition meant to be spent on children's educational needs.

website or anywhere else on the Internet. In one of my interviews, I learned that the plans included, among other things, the starting of “an information point” for the members of the Romani community, including those who no longer participate in the program. However, the name does not denote any physical venue, rather referring to a possibility to contact a Foundation employee to ask for support. The second stage is also envisaged as centered around submitting applications for social housing for all the families in the program. The scope of the assistants’ work is supposed to be minimized, and the focus is to shift on the emancipation of women and employment support. At the same time, my respondent emphasized that “these families simply had to have a place to live” (ibid.) before moving to social housing.

To put together the possibly most complete image of the program, I will outline its genesis, into which I had an opportunity to look during one of the interviews. My respondent, a woman who had earlier been affiliated with the Nomada Association for years and, consequently, had ample experience in collaborating with the Romani community, contacted the Wrocław Commune and offered to support the peaceable solution of the conflict which was then beginning to soar around the barracks in Kamieńskiego Str. (in the wake of the suspension of the court case over the eviction of their dwellers). In the solution she proposed, the Roma were to have been invited to move from the settlement to big houses, suitable for the whole clans to live in. Additionally, a center was to have been set up for the entire community to meet up at, build their own space, and also prepare for living on their own in social housing in the future. Initially, the officials exhibited very favorable attitudes to the idea. Funds from the municipal budget were allocated for the construction of the center, the design of which was inspired by South-American favelas. The building was to have been erected jointly with the Romani men in Obornicka Str., a venue not far from the Kamieńskiego Str. When a scale model was ready and my respondent and her colleagues began to go about arranging the building permit, the Commune changed its mind about the location. Obornicka Str. was dropped, and a far-removed site at the periphery of the city was proposed instead, though there was no school in the area and no public transport route either. This vividly exemplifies the drive to isolate the Roma spatially and remove them from public view. When my respondent objected to this change, the entire venture was abandoned by the municipal administration (W01). As she concludes, “I don’t know who exactly made the decision” (ibid.). All in all, the center was not erected, and, additionally, difficulties cropped up in finding enough houses suitable for the Roma’s needs, partly as a result of the increasing migration of Ukrainians to Poland. Specifically, employers tended to rent houses and other spacious accommodations for lodgings for their workers arriving from Ukraine. As a result, basically only smaller apartments were

available, which at the same time meant that monthly rent to be paid by the Roma went up. My respondent was included into the team of the House of Peace Foundation, which was selected as the executor of the project. However, the difference of ideas over the way the program was being run prompted her to quit. She could not endorse what she believed were the Foundation's excessive control of the Roma, too steep demands placed on them regarding the achievement of the planned effects, and insufficiently individualized approach to the needs of the community's members (ibid.).

I asked most of my respondents how they would depict the goals of the program implemented by the House of Peace Foundation. Their answers frequently featured the notion that the Wrocław Commune had to cope with image-related issues. As one of my respondents explains: "the basic aim of the program was to dismantle the camp and to remove the Roma from public view. The camp was awkward for the image of Wrocław. Image is a paramount thing these days, and the program itself enjoys a good image outside; it is presented as a success in other cities, at conferences" (W07). Another respondent adds:

> The project is supposed to, colloquially speaking, make the Roma not cause problems anymore. So that they neither occupy the land owned by the municipality nor are homeless. So that they live in a place for which they pay, and not at a squat. So that their children go to school, and no guardianship agency or courts are involved. So that men have jobs and provide for their families. At the beginning, the idea was to produce a Romani Pole, then it shifted to "let's prevent the Roma from breaking the law when trying to get by in life." It was about giving them a set of competencies for getting by in the city not as beneficiaries of the MOPS and 500+, without being a burden to the municipal budget, for them to become members of the community of Wrocław (W06)

Crucially,: "Wrocław: the Meeting Place" (Polish: "Wrocław – miasto spotkań") is a slogan adopted and trumpeted by the city as part of its marketing campaign. The phrase is supposed to resound with references to multiculturality. However, this multiculturality it envisions in fact primarily concerns the composition of the population inhabiting Lower Silesia and its capital in the direct aftermath of the Second World War. What my respondents say implies that the Romani community is regarded as an undesirable dimension of Wrocław's current multiculturality. The urge to remove this group from public view and scatter it across the urban space may speak to the wish not to expose the type of diversity that triggers dislike in majority society. These attitudes and practices are closely linked to numerous biases and prejudice against Roma at work in the social world. The municipal administration's attempts to avoid the exacerbation of the conflict that soared in Wrocław's media and the local community, for

example, during the court case over the eviction of the Roma from the Kamieńskiego barracks forestall the development of pluralism, which is one of the pillars of democracy.

4.5 "Projectosis"

"Projectosis" is a term that has recently gained currency among workers of various organizations who implement projects funded from the public budget. "Projectosis" captures the way that NGOs, as well as cultural and research institutions, must organize their activity and pursuits as based on grants obtained for separate (specific-targeted) educational, social, cultural, and other projects. This funding framework is unstable, as each time the acquisition of grants depends on the decision of competition boards, with the rules for the allocation of points and the priorities set by grant-givers differing from competition to competition. The funding is granted for a defined period of time, often for one year or two-three years. This model tends to preclude long-term visions and forces organizations to operate on a "from-project-to-project" basis and thus to adjust to the requirements outlined in the terms and conditions of grant competitions. These as a rule stipulate that a project should deliver a set of pre-established effects, which are usually expected to be translatable into specific numerical indicators, such as the number of direct and indirect users, the number of workshop hours, the number of project-related press write-ups, the amount of the printed promotional materials, etc. The principles of projectosis do not leave much room for processual operations, testing, experimentation, or mistakes. Each departure from the prescribed mode of implementing a project or from its budget (as declared in the grant proposal) must be reported to the grant-giver, citing relevant grounds for the modification. Most of such corrections necessitate drawing up amendments to the grant agreement, which entails additional extensive paperwork and formalities. These arrangements make the implementation of grants similar to the execution of service contracts. For example, a grant-giver seeks to have social change happen in a Wrocław neighborhood, and an NGO proposes a way in which to achieve this goal within a year-long project. Whether the NGO has effectively executed this "contract" is established by reference to an ensemble of indexes, where the occurrence of social change is supposed to be evidenced by, for example, the attendance rate in cultural events held in this neighborhood. What ultimately matters is the final outcome, which must comply with the priorities specified in the grant competition. As a result, projects tend to dismantle the deliberately built structures geared to the longstanding, sustained pursuit of the mission of organizations and institutions, because these are made to take up issues

sometimes only tangentially related to their major line of work. NGOs tend to engage in projects beyond their main field of activity for a variety of reasons, one of them being to ensure livelihoods to the members of what has come to be called projectariat, that is, a group of social actors whose income is primarily earned through project-based work.

Some of my respondents addressed projectosis, stressing that it poses a serious threat, especially when projects involving excluded groups are at stake. As one of my interviewees observes, "a project is only a frame, I mean, only an ideal vision. In the proposal, you can let you imagination run wild and try to attain your dreams. In practice, it'll never pan out the way the proposal envisages, because we work with living people. Reality simply does not look like that" (W01). My respondents also noted that one of the fundamental mistakes in developing programs for the Romanian Roma (and not only for them) was that the members of this community were not included in designing the interventions. As the group was not consulted, some misguided assumptions were inevitably made and affected the expected outcomes of the programs. The failure to take the Romani voices into account early on contributed to, for example, conflicts between NGO workers and the Roma included in the projects, as well as to triggering distrustful and violence-underpinned relations among the actors engaged in the execution of the grants.

As opposed to that, one of my respondents insists that such projects should be founded on "radical empathy, unconditional solidarity, listening to the Roma, and trusting what they say" (W09). When interventions are planned on the basis of one's own preconceptions alone, multiple adverse upshots are likely to ensue. Programs designed, so to speak, "at the desk" are incapable of responding adequately to the real needs of the target group: "Roma need to be asked about their dreams. Experiences developed *in the field* indicate what is really needed, and not the other way round" (ibid.). Another crucial issue lies in adopting a long-term perspective when conceptualizing such interventions. Incidental, short-term actions "cannot possibly reverse the centuries-old marginalization of Roma within barely three years" (ibid.). However, long-term thinking is hindered if the interventions are devised under projects whose funding must be obtained in grant competitions from year to year. As my respondent insists:

> You mustn't presuppose implementing non-long-term projects. Sensitivity is also necessary; we shouldn't developed projects only benefiting or for a community but also with a community. Actions must have their consequences. Short interventions first of all result from the annual-cycle mode in which NGOs work. Such work will bring no good. Continuity is what is vital. Another vital thing is to educate host society. It's not about declarations that there's no discrimination here, because we treat everybody in the

same way. Equality does not come down to such simplistically understood treatment *in the same way*. One can't expect the same of Poles and of an illiterate, excluded, poor community that doesn't speak Polish. (W07).

The illusory vision of equality pointedly referenced by this respondent can be related to the meritocratic beliefs and their critique. The idea that social inequality does not exist because all individuals have the same opportunity of development afforded, for example, by the free public education system is actually off the mark. Treating all citizens "in the same way" is not a method for improving the lived experience of excluded groups. Without noticing and acknowledging that systemic inequality is indeed in place and without accordingly adjusting socio-educational and other programs for marginalized communities, empathetic and not-hurting cooperation with such groups is impossible. This also ties in with what critical race theorists call color-blind racism. Since no Polish legislation has provisions sanctioning racist practices, it may seem that racism does not exist in Poland, at least not in formal settings. However, long-entrenched stereotypes and xenophobic cliches concerning Roma and various forms of anti-Roma discrimination cannot be erased quickly and easily. They are still very much alive and powerful in social relations and political practices.

One of my respondents who once worked for the House of Peace Foundation reports that whenever it came to obtaining the funding for the consecutive stages of the "Program for Romanian Roms and Romnis, the residents of Wrocław," uncertainty about what the Wrocłąw Commune would decide always ruled the day, because "should the municipality be satisfied, it would prolong the project" (W10). Crucially, the grant-giver's "satisfaction" not necessarily overlaps with the "satisfaction" of the target community. This proved to be the case in the program for the Roma as well. As related in the previous subchapter, some of my respondents posited that the Wrocław Commune's aim for the program was to remove the Kamieńskiego barracks from public view, because the conflict soaring around the settlement negatively affected the image of the city. This reasoning centered on obliterating the spatial and visual presence of the Romanian Roma community in Wrocław. Consequently, at the beginning of 2018, when the Romani families were still moving to training accommodations, representatives of the grant-giver reportedly asked the members of the House of Peace Foundations rather unpleasant-sounding questions: "The Commune's communication was quite explicit: *Why are they still in the settlement? What are we paying you for?*" (ibid.). The expressions cited by my respondent imply that the institution funding the program was preoccupied with solving what it perceived as a "problem," that is, the unfavorably perceived presence of the Roma community

in the area that was part of the Wrocław Commune's property.[40] This standpoint made no allowances for a balanced process of the families leaving the old households and commencing lives in entirely new conditions, for doubts, unpredictable circumstances, and individual responses of the members of the Roma community to this challenging and complicated situation. The grant-giver thus comes across as an exceptionally important figure casting a long shadow on the implementation of the entire "Program for Romanian Roms and Romnis, the Residents of Wrocław." The Commune was not just a funding institution that did not "meddle" in the execution of the project. Rather, it was an active actor in this undertaking, closely entangled in the court case concerning the barracks in Kamieńskiego Str. Before the trial, the Commune had been deeply implicated in the illegal dismantling of the settlement in Paprotna Str., a complicity against which the Roma community filed a lawsuit with the European Court of Human Rights. Officers of the Commune exerted pressure on the Foundation's team to make haste in achieving the informally set goal of removing the Roma from public view, both spatially (the "dispersal" of the barracks) and discursively (putting to an end the discussion around this group in the media). My respondent observes:

> When was the project expected to accelerate? Whenever people who managed it came back from meetings with the Commune officials. These weren't evaluation meetings. The Commune used them to specify priority targets and verify the budget – what would be funded, and what wouldn't. You had to explain yourself, why so much had been spent on housing, and so much on education. We were supposed to carry out the project, but the grant-giver would time and again say what was expected. For all those running the program, the Department of Social Affairs of the Wrocław Municipal Office was the greatest symbolic oppressor. We didn't realize that for quite a while, but it was really the agency that managed what we were doing in many ways. This resulted in a lot of frustration and bitterness among the members of the Foundation's team. The steward gives, the steward demands. This pressure came down on the people running the organization, then descended on the program coordinator, then on the assistants, and finally on the Roma themselves. It's not the grant-giver that should call the shots. (ibid.)

What is conspicuous in this account is a "ladder" along which the pressure directly caused by the approach of the program's funding body spread. The respondent adds that she does not blame the people on the team of the House of Peace Foundation, because these

[40] The size of the land inhabited by the Roma was about 55,000 square meters. It was situated in a neighborhood (structurally speaking, a neighborhood is an administrative unit smaller than a borough) which was and still is a site of quite robust housing development ventures.

pressures were so strong that they precluded adopting any other mode of practice (ibid.). In her view, the Wrocław Commune gives NGOs tasks the execution of which exceeds the competencies possessed by its own officers. In this way, the municipal authorities shift responsibility for the successful conclusion of the process onto NGOs, but at the same, instead of being observers, assume the position of an active actor that determines conditions in which projects are to be executed. In the language of Laclau and Mouffe (2001), this situation is a lens that focalizes the mechanisms of the hegemonic game. The privileged social actors make use of power they have come to possess and consolidate their position through exerting pressure on individuals dependent on them (primarily in financial terms) – in this case, on the grant-holder that, so to speak, is in charge of the Roma community. What is at stake is not only funding but also, crucially, a vision of what reality is like and how the social world should function, with the grant-giver imposing its own version of it. In this version, the Roma are not active subjects, but people stripped of autonomy and subjected to power mechanisms. Paradoxically, they are marginalized again.

Another respondent adds:

> I hate the phrase “it must deliver.” Funding is granted for a given period, and “it must deliver.” A process, long development is not part of it. The project may perhaps deliver, but not before the generation of today’s children has children of their own. It will take a dozen years at least, so you mustn’t expect any immediate effects. Limited access to funding from EU programs[41] means that we have money for the period from 2013 to 2020, and that’s it. You never know whether the grant will be prolonged. (W06)

As already mentioned, the project outcomes should as a rule be quantifiable. However, when working with a group excluded in so many ways as the Romanian Roma, it is barely possible to expect with any certainty that, for example, within the first six months of the program ten people will find legal jobs, and all children will be enrolled at schools and go to the next grade. It is also challenging to put one’s finger on the factors promoting thus-conceived effects. As market-specific relations are transplanted onto the implementation of public projects, which can be seen in the striving to achieve the profit targeted by grant-givers, individual responses of people engaged in the execution of a given undertaking are not taken into account:

> I’m not comfortable with the fact that somebody’s culture is meddled with. Things are done that change things. I wish that the House of Peace had invited the Roma to directly

[41] As I was writing this dissertation, the political situation in Poland regarding the rule of law, the observance of which is one of the fundamental values of the European Union, developed in ways that made the acquisition of EU funding for various projects even more difficult.

> collaborate with them. They are stressed out. They say that there was no dancing during the festival season. Some develop depression. When living as a community in the barracks, they were very authentic. Vulnerable people were given support, and now they may lack it. Th theme of uselessness, of having nothing to do, surfaces. In the barracks, there were always plenty of things to do in order to cook something, or to wash. In the apartment, these things take far less effort, but it doesn't always mean that the Roma are happier. They don't know what to do with themselves in these new conditions. How can this be explained to a lady from the MOPS or to the grant-giver? We're only inclined to think in our terms, and in our terms they surely must be better off now. (W01)

Overlooking the needs of the Roma community in this way and unexamined reliance on one's own preconceptions about the "correct" manner of getting by in the social world may produce several adverse outcomes. In this context, one of my Romani respondents relates what happened to her father when the family moved from the Kamieńskiego barracks as the first family to settle in the lodgings situated in one of the divisions of the Municipal Social Welfare Center:

> My father died two years ago in Reymont Str. Before we moved to these lodgings, he had no health complaints. The moment we moved from the barracks, he started to develop various conditions. He became depressed, and it was only getting worse. My father couldn't read and write, nor could mum, but he worked all his life. I grew up in a Romanian village. He had chickens, horses, he worked in the fields. When we came to live in these lodgings, prohibitions began. You mustn't go to town to earn, you mustn't go scrap-collecting. You can only lie down. Dad didn't speak the language. He felt worse and worse. He took all these drugs for depression, and he became addicted to them. His heart started to fail. He had a surgery, and it went well. He died when he was 48. It's difficult for me to think of that. I'll regret it till the end of my life that I was so taken in. I'm not glad at all that I have children in the 6th, 4th, and 2nd grades, that I live in a social accommodation. I'm not satisfied with this. We lived all together once. There was always somebody around with whom to leave the kids. To share food with. To borrow money from. We always stuck together. When a problem appeared, we solved it together. Moving put an end to this. We couldn't have guests, drink alcohol, dance or sing, only ready ourselves for the grave. I blame them[42] for my father's death. I know that I shouldn't say this, but I can't help it. (W08)

[42] The respondent means the workers of the Municipal Social Welfare Center.

This account makes one realize that the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community founded their life on togetherness. As a closely-knit community, they coped with everyday problems and personal issues together. The communal togetherness was the source of support for vulnerable individuals and made the routine daily transactions, such as childcare, easier. When the lifestyle of the community members changed, because they no longer lived close to each other but inhabited separate, remote apartments, the social relations among them were acutely affected and individuals' mental wellbeing suffered. The idea was that moving to another accommodation would improve the living conditions of the Roma, since they would have access to running water, electricity, and heating. However, as the Romani Roma's experience shows, living in better conditions does not always come with favorable effects alone. The preconception that the way of life endorsed by majority society is not only right but also superior to the lifestyle embraced by the Roma is an important factor at play in this case. The change of accommodation, which was in fact the cornerstone of the program, has profoundly affected the identity of people of Romani origin and has not necessarily made their overall situation better in a holistic sense.

According to Edwin Bendyk, the mechanisms typical of so-called projectosis:

> replicate the model that is becoming ever more widespread as the neoliberalization of the state and the public sector progresses, a model in which the provision of public services is delegated to the market and the third sector in search of greater effectiveness (meaning, in an attempt to reduce cost). However, it is not only about cost-cutting and exploiting the precariatized labor of social organizations; the point is that the latter put in not only work but also competencies that public-sector workers often do not have. (Bendyk 2016)

As states neoliberalize, the market relations are transposed onto the designing and implementation of social, educational, and cultural projects. The insistence on and preoccupation with achieving very particularly defined targets, including profits for grant-givers, does not promote the recognition and meeting of the individual needs of project recipients. Reliance on the logic typically informing free-market operations may also result in obscuring systemic inequality and overlooking its powerful influence on the situation and position of the groups involved in particular programs.

4.6 Family Assistance as an Intervention Method

Family assistants have been pivotal to programs involving the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma launched both by the Nomada Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society and by the House of Peace Foundation. The assistance they provide represents one of the fundamental forms of working with this community. Before going into the details of these programs, a short overview of the operations of the Polish assistance system is in order. While its beginning cannot be dated with any accuracy, family assistance in Poland by common consensus go backs to the period between 1990 and 2005. Initially, the instances of such help-provision were isolated and locally circumscribed (offered, for example, in Warsaw, Sopot, and Ruda Śląska). The method was gradually becoming more and more popular, with an increasing number of social welfare service centers and NGOs employing it on a more regular basis. Family assistance projects were as a rule implemented with funding from the EU budget. Researchers note that the development of this form of support-provision was bound up with the soaring social demand fueled by the effects of the political and economic transition of 1989 and was prompted by the ineffectiveness of social welfare agencies, which did hardly anything beyond applying for and distributing financial benefits (Walc 2018, 22-23).

The Law on Support for Families and the System of Foster Care (Polish: Ustawa o wspieraniu rodzin i systemie pieczy zastępczej) adopted in 2011 instituted a new professional role called the family assistant. The Law defined assistance as “accompanying a family and advising it in search of adequate solutions” (Chrząszcz 2014, 50) and specified that this concerned families that found themselves facing extremely difficult situations, which were insurmountable without support from third parties. A family assistant’s responsibilities involve helping a family structure its daily life, supporting parents in their child-raising role, and providing help in handling official and administrative procedures. Family assistance also tends to be linked to job-seeking in case of adult family members and to educational support in case of children. Assistants are expected to adjust their interventions to the individual needs and profiles of particular families, and they should work “in,” “with,” and/or “for” families. At the same time, a family, as a basic social unit, is not to be treated as a passive beneficiary of assistance, as one of the chief goals of assistants’ support is to instill pro-active attitudes in families and motivate them to make constructive changes in their modes of daily life.

Family assistants are primarily perceived as social workers. The support they offer is multidimensional, because problems with which families grapple are as a rule related to more than one area (e.g., relationships, health, law, finances, education, etc.). Successful family

assistance is premised on establishing a good and mutually trusting rapport with families (Walc 2018, 23-24). The repertory of techniques family assistants most frequently employ in their work includes the distribution of tasks, explanation, the reinforcement of self-worth, negotiation, guidance, and the enhancement of decision-making and problem-solving competencies. As can be seen, such interventions are predominantly individual, but they can be expanded by adding elements of group work (Chrząszcz 2014, 52). The Law of 2011 listed a range of responsibilities to be handled by family assistants, such as developing and consistently executing a work plan with a family (this stage should comprise consultations with family members and other social workers), providing support in, for example, ameliorating the family's living conditions and solving subsistence, child-raising, and psychological problems, motivating family members to improve their occupational skills, keeping records of interventions, drawing up periodical assessment of a family's functional outcomes, and monitoring its situation in the follow-up of the intervention. These responsibilities are very extensive and require varied competencies, not least a set of personal traits. Interestingly, to be eligible for the position of a family assistant, a person must have secondary-school credentials, a certificate of the completion of a training course in interventions for children and families, and at least a three-year record of working with children and families. Given the wide scope and variety of family assistants' responsibilities, these criteria raise serious doubts.

The specific work of family assistants differs from the classic way that social workers go about their duties. Family assistance entails mixing with a family and stepping into its private sphere. As a consequence, relationships that develop between support-providers and support-recipients are different from those encountered in local social welfare agencies, where relations of the client-worker type prevail. As family assistants become involved in the private life of families, they are likely to stumble upon various difficulties and to need considerable mental resilience, primarily in the context of retaining the requisite work-private life balance. As another problem often plaguing their job, family assistants tend to have too many families appointed to them at the same time, while they are anyway overburdened with excessive bureaucratic loads. To make the matters worse, family assistants often have no access to information on tools and resources usefully facilitating their pursuits, while assessment and supervision models helpful in augmenting the set of good assistance practices are scarcely used either. This makes the working style largely dependent on assistants' individual approaches and competencies (Walc 2018, 25-28).

The Nomada Association, which was one of the first local actors in Wrocław to begin collaboration with the Romanian Roma community, was quick to introduce family assistance

into its toolkit employed in interventions for this migrant group. Since 2012, at least four people have supported the Romani community members in dealing with administrative procedures and obtaining basic healthcare, vaccinations, and specialized medical help. Family assistants have also been helping the Roma in a series of crisis situation. They explained the rights and obligations pertaining to Poles and residents of Wrocław to them, and educated them on the principles of social coexistence upheld in Poland. They also explained to the Roma how administration bodies were structured and how social and public institutions worked. All these areas of assistance were closely connected to the problems the Roma faced, and the strategies of interventions launched by the assistants were supposed to be instrumental in solving these problems. This meant that the assistants went with members of the Romani community to offices, for example when legalizing their status in Poland, in order to facilitate first contact with the staff, explain the formalities involved, and clarify the meanings of formal expressions. They helped the Roma in similar ways at job centers and healthcare facilities. At the same time, the assistants considerably expanded their competencies and accumulated experience in handling various administrative procedures, obtaining various forms of social help, and getting health insurance.[43] One of my respondents recalls that:

> At the time, most of the community had no papers whatsoever. They were invisible to the system – no documents, no work, living without running water, without electricity, outside of the system. To start with, they needed help in having documents issued for them. Most of these people are illiterate, so they needed to be accompanied in the process, to have things translated linguistically and culturally, have forms completed for them. (W07)

She also admits that the Association workers who were to be family assistants for the Rom first had to educate themselves in these matters and learn the ropes of the trade. She adds:

> Many of us had had experience in working with migrants, refugees, the homeless. We knew what it was like to work with the excluded, but assistance and transactions at offices were things we had to learn. All these procedures, documents… For us, Poles, it was difficult to face officials, let alone for the Roma, whose Polish is worse than ours, who are not familiar with formalities, and differ in appearance. (ibid.)

Emphatically, support in administrative procedures was needed not only by the Roma themselves but also by the officials who worked their cases. They were unable to communicate

[43] This information comes from the application for an EOG Fund grant under the “Obywatele dla Demokracji” (English: Citizens for Democracy) program. The application was made available to me by the Nomada Association.

with their Romani clients and often were not versed enough in relevant legal procedures. This is a rather ironic finding, especially in the context of the modes of thinking often espoused by majority society and manifest in attitudes to the Romanian Roma community. Specifically, colloquial, official, and media discourses tend to underscore that "arrivals" need to adapt to the Polish realities. Adaptation is thus foregrounded instead of promoting integration, which is predicated on pro-active approaches of both the hosts and the comers.

While the assistance system implemented by the Nomada Association is in many ways aligned with the dominant and legally anchored notions of the role of family assistants (as outlined at the beginning of this subchapter), the Association's members working as assistants are certainly not social workers. Family assistance was adopted as one of the methods of collaborating with the Romanian Roma community, and I believe that it has a lot in common not only with social welfare services, but also with broadly conceived education. One of my respondents, and at the same time a co-founder of the family assistance system under the Nomada Association program, talks of "cultural interpreters," rather than of "assistants" in this context. Interestingly, he has not coined the term himself:

> Once, I was there to help when a woman who wanted to have a child very much was being diagnosed for cancer. The doctor didn't know what my role was and spontaneously asked me whether I was a cultural interpreter. We introduced this expression into our vocabulary and started to use the term. We developed the definition of family assistance around this catchphrase. (W09)

The way the Nomada team understands the term, the role of a cultural interpreter is to help overcome not only the language barrier but also the cultural divide between the Romani community members and officials, the staff of public institutions, physicians, etc. As part of this venture the process of fostering mutual trust must be launched, sustained, and bolstered, not only on the communicative level (Szczepaniak 2015, 122). My respondent also emphasizes that:

> It is of utmost relevance to balance out communication between the person *behind the desk* who represents the system and people who are entering the system. Assistants know how to navigate this orderly system and can at the same time explain the principles or the course of a given situation both to majority society and to Roma. All information needs to be communicated in a simple way, even though it often concerns very complicated matters. First of all, the point is to treat Roma as serious people and not only as passive beneficiaries of help or as people with disability. (W09)

This again brings to the fore the multidimensional quality of assistants' work. Their job is not a simple Romani-Polish and Polish-Romani translation of documents and/or conversations; they must also translate two social worlds – one of the Romanian Roma community and the other of majority society, which stands for all things systemic. Interestingly, all my respondents refer to the "system" in their interviews with extraordinary frequency. As a rule, they use the term when talking about administrative, legal, and educational matters and associate it with oppressiveness and control exercised by the authorities as part of the system's operations.

My respondent lists the necessity of developing an individual approach to one's responsibilities as a fundamental component of the job performed by assistants of Romani families. If general areas covered by assistance are defined, every family assistant must decide on his/her own which methods to employ and what working style to choose. To establish good relationships with families is crucial to any actions family assistants undertake:

> It all depends on how deeply one wants to engage in these relations. You're there when babies are born, you're there when people die, but you can't turn a blind eye to some things. Sometimes, you have to respond and make your point. For example, children were sometimes abused, and you needed to respond then. At the same time, we were a shield, we fought for the families we worked with. (ibid.)

Assistants not only took part in or witnessed situations that were difficult for the Roma. Because their collaboration was founded on close relationships and mutual trust, they often acutely experienced such moments together with the community members and occasionally became actors in these evets. Bringing information about a relative's death, being there at childbirths, transmitting health diagnoses, overcoming administrative obstacles, and many other taxing situations marked the daily work of the assistants on the Nomada Association's team. Such experiences were inevitably linked to professional burnout. When participating in stressful situations alongside the Roma, the assistants invested considerable effort and emotional resources in their work. This precluded any easy separation between private time and work time, as crisis situations would happen at various times of the day. In this context, my respondent observes that:

> When designing such interventions, one should give it a good thought whether it's possible and indeed expedient to set apart activism, work, and friendship with people one cooperates with as an assistant. All these things are closely interrelated. (ibid,)

This working style represents one method developed by the Nomada staff. It involves a range of risks (such as, first and foremost, professional burnout) to assistants themselves, but at the same time exemplifies a good practice, especially in working with the Romani community,

characterized, as it is, by a substantial distrust to all individuals from outside the group, as a result of a long history of mistreatment (being cheated, assaulted, ignored, called names, exploited, etc.). This sense of distrust is coupled with the group's exclusivist culture.

How unpredictable and varied the problems the assistants had to confront when the Romanian Roma community still inhabited the barracks were is perhaps most vividly illustrated by an episode related by one of my Nomada-affiliated respondents. As its protagonists, the story features a juvenile pregnant girl and her boyfriend, both of whom dwelled in the informal settlement in Kamieńskiego Str. The girl only spoke Romani, and the man spoke Romanian, English, and mid-level Romani. He had grown up at an orphanage in Romania, completed a trade school, and taken part in international exchanges during winter and summer holidays, visiting a Dutch host family, where he had had an opportunity to learn some English. Communicating with him in this language, the assistant found out that the girl had no documents and that, moreover, hers was not the usual case of having no papers "on her." The point was that she had already been born in Poland, but no birth certificate had been issued for her. As a result, she had formally speaking no legal identity, and she simply "did not exist" for any legal-administrative system. With her being pregnant and the delivery date approaching, it was vital to make sure that she should have access to healthcare. For this to happen, her status in the Republic of Poland had to be legalized. My respondent took a series of steps to make the girl visible to the Polish system:

> I started quizzing the Roma about where that girl could have been born. It was not really obvious whether it was in Bielsko-Biała, or Białystok, or perhaps Biała Podlaska. I kept phoning various bureaus of vital statistics and hospitals. Even though she was born in Poland in 1993, before my intervention, she had been entirely invisible to the system. Finally, I found a hospital in Bielsko-Biała, where an employee by some miracle came across a note about the birth of a child that fit in perfectly with what I had learned about that woman. From that moment on, I was a liaison between the bureaus of vital statistics in Wrocław and Bielsko-Biała. In this way, she eventually had a birth certificate issued for her and then the remaining documents, so she was granted an identity in legal terms. Additionally, it turned out that when giving birth the girl would still be a minor, for some two weeks longer at least. This meant that she wouldn't automatically be given custody of her newborn baby. This was a serious problem. A judge from Wrocław's family court, who had handled many cases of Romani children before, helped me solve it. The best solution was for me to become a legal guardian of the woman and to apply for the guardianship of her child. All this came down to personal connections. We used

> all possible systemic tools, but to succeed, we anyway needed a huge amount of people's good will. Later on, her boyfriend obtained the custody of the child, and she reached the age of majority. For her to have a legal identity was my personal goal. In this context, one of the advantages of her becoming part of the system was that she was protected, for example, against human trafficking. (ibid.)

This story vividly demonstrates how unconventional and unpredictable a family assistant's work can be and the degree to which its success hinges on the individual commitment of people who work with families. Acting on behalf of the pregnant girl, my respondent not only devoted his working time and energy resources to her, but also bound his legal status to her and her child. By assuming the legal guardianship of the girl and applying for the custody of her child, he went beyond the standard responsibilities of a family assistant, whose job description primarily comprises accompanying families. This case makes one realize how much depends on assistants' individual approaches and the methods of work they select. The story is also one of multiple examples of Roma being overlooked by the Polish administration system. Even with as considerable a physical visibility of the Romani community in the space of Wrocław as that indisputably boasted by the Kamieńskiego settlement, neither the municipality's nor the province's agencies attempted to persuade the Roma to have their status legalized in Poland. Such efforts were only undertaken by the Nomada staff. As long as the Roma lived "outside the system," they were not a problem that system had to confront. Officials were not forced to face up no novel and non-standard situations. The members of the Romani community themselves developed and applied various strategies and tactics for avoiding contact with the authorities and lingered in a kind of "buffer security zone." For example, when queried by the staff of the MOPS, the inhabitants of the barracks would profess that they were "tourists only" (W01). The MOPS workers knew perfectly well that the Roma were no tourists, but they accepted such explanations, perhaps in order to avoid any inconvenience to themselves.

One of the highlights of the assistance program implemented by the Nomada Association has been that, as a unique case in Wrocław, a woman from the Romanian Roma community has been one of its family assistants. She is the only member of this group to work in this role. Her collaboration with the Nomada began in 2010, and she has been employed as a member of its team since 2019. She is in constant touch with about thirty people from Wrocław's Romani diaspora, and she occasionally provides support to Roma living in other Polish cities and towns.[44] She first arrived in Wrocław as a child in the 1990s and was then

[44] https://nomada.info.pl/o-nas (Access 20 February 2022).

deported together with her parents back to Romania. She returned to Wrocław as a married woman in 2006. Her family was the first one to move out from the barracks a few years before the launching of the House of Peace Foundation's training accommodation program. She recalls:

> I completed three grades at a primary school in Romania and got married at thirteen. I myself chose my husband, not my family. I don't blame anybody. I threatened to run away, to kill myself if my parents didn't allow me to marry him. So, what were they supposed to do? I was and still am stubborn, so I married him. I didn't know back then whether to remain a child or to become a woman. When I came here with my husband, I didn't speak Polish; I couldn't even buy a tent, and I slept in the open air. People would often spit at us, call us names, beat us up. I learned Polish all by myself. I had no book. I learned at shops, by listening. I wanted to leave the settlement, not only for myself, but for my children. (W08)

The stubbornness and determination of which she herself talks helped her start living in a different way, have her children included in the public schooling system, and find a paid job.

The woman's responsibilities are the same as those of the other – Polish – family assistants working for the Nomada Association. Her huge advantage over them lies in that she is part of the Romani community, so the Roma trust her far more than they do the other assistants. She is closely acquainted with the members of the group, and, as she speaks Romani, her rapport with them is not marred by a language barrier. Having herself gone through the process of registering her residence and experienced negotiations with the healthcare personnel, school staffs, officials, and social workers, she is richly versed in a range of legal and administrative formalities. In depicting herself, she admits:

> As long as I can remember, I've been a translator, a helper to my children, my family, strangers, other Roma. It's a hard role, but without me, [what they go through] at offices is carnage. Not a chance that these ladies behind the desk come to terms with Roma. At the beginning, I always try to settle these issues quietly, but when officials don't want to cooperate with me, I'm ready to scratch their eyes out to get what I need. Life's taught me that. (ibid.)

Given the position of women in Roma communities, my interlocutor has been extremely courageous in transgressing the role of a wife, mother, and homemaker, which is traditionally appointed to Romnis. This has tended to stir up controversy in the community. On the one hand, its members trust her because the help she offers is essential, but on the other they sometimes resent her unconventional ways. The respondent emphasizes that, as a woman, she must always

try harder in order to gain respect. She was the first woman in the community to obtain a Polish driving license:

> Once, I had no time to dream. My dream was for my children to be healthy and not to go hungry. A moment came that I said *enough*. I decided to get a driving license. I had a great instructor. I bought books, a laptop, and I started to study. I passed the theoretical part at the first attempt, and the driving part at the second. (ibid,)

This is another example of her crossing the traditional limits of a woman's role. Being able to drive made her more independent both symbolically (a driving woman continues to be a butt of jokes not only in Romani communities) and practically. She can take her children to school without her husband's help, do shopping, and more effectively navigate the city when working as a family assistant. This has sometimes provoked criticism leveled at her husband: "The Roma would tell him: 'she'll soon dump you, you'll see,' or 'you don't deserve her, she's too clever for you'" (ibid.). At some point, she give up on the driving course for a while because of her partner's jealousy, but she did not relinquish her aspirations. She resumed the course and successfully completed it.

One of my respondents who collaborates with her on a daily basis believes that she is the flagship example of the emancipation of Romani women. She was not only the first one to move out from the barracks, to enroll her children at school, and to learn to drive, but also the first (and, for now, the last) one to appear as an expert on Roma-related matters in majority society. She is a leader of and an advocate for her community. Many of my interviewees insist that women are the most powerful vehicles of transformation:

> Integration with majority society makes them change their ways. Many of them have taken up jobs, so they have money of their own. They're becoming more independent of their husbands, so more and more marriage crises happen. Men lose then their position of family headship. They [women] often earn more, speak better Polish, and do better in life. (W07)

In this way, the traditional, rather paternalistic, family hierarchy is beginning to crumble.

The case of the Romani family assistant can be associated with the process of emancipation as conceived of by the Dutch educator Gert Biesta (see subchapter 1.3). Biesta calls for abandoning the traditional notion of emancipation as involving two characters: the emancipator and the one being emancipated. If this asymmetrical arrangement is to be discarded, the principle of quality must first be endorsed. Biesta believes that each and every social actor can initiate change without waiting for the emancipator – an omniscient educator – to intervene and show the right direction in which to move. The Romni who works as a family

assistant is equal to the other family assistants (all of them of Polish descent) affiliated with the Nomada Association. Her strong personality and utmost determination have helped the woman to time and again shift the boundaries of her exclusion. Having met the staff of the Nomada Association, she obtained an opportunity to put her qualities and skills to good use, but the path of her development was not determined by the NGO. The Association thus did not act as a classic emancipator, and the Romni's position was not that of a classic person to be emancipated as a result of somebody else's actions. In line with Biesta's model of emancipation, the transformation has not been effected upon the woman; rather, she has herself been effecting it. Emphatically, emancipation in this context is not an idealized escape from power. In fact, although the Romani family assistant lives in what is a traditionally understood apartment, speaks perfect Polish, and her children go to school, she is still exposed to Romaphobia because of her skin color and ethnic roots.

Besides the program implemented by the Nomada Association, a project of assistance for Romani families has also been launched by the House of Peace Foundation as part of its "Program for Romanian Roms and Romnis, the Residents of Wrocław." Before discussing the data generated in my interviews with the current and former family assistants working for the Foundation, I will address the relevant passages of a handbook on the model of work with the Romani community developed under this program, published by the Foundation. The cooperation of assistants with Romani families mostly took place after the Roma had left the barracks and moved to training accommodations. In April 2018,[45] the program included thirty-one "family units."[46] As specified in the handbook, the aim of family assistance was to:

> foster the families' independence so that they could get by in the wider community of Wrocław in conformity with social norms and rules as full-fledged citizens in their own right (having their needs secured by the system). What this entails is the situation in which the community members meet their needs by living in compliance with the system and not on its edges, passive and isolated. (Pylypenko, Rudziński, Wajda, Whitten 2021, 26-27).

The assistants carried out observations in order to establish the needs and possibilities of individual families. In doing this, they registered character traits, individual capacities and predispositions, as well as any discernible deficits. Based on these observations, family

[45] At that time the last Romani family left the barracks in Kamieńskiego Str.
[46] "A family unit" (Polish: komórka rodzinna) is the term that the Foundation uses under its program to denote a family understood as parents and their children (sometimes also including grandparents) who share a household. This notion distinctly differs from what the Roma themselves regard as a "family" (Polish: rodzina), that is, an extended group (of up to several tens of people) belonging to one clan.

assistance was designed to rest on eight pillars, with each of them comprising a defined set of skills that family members should acquire in order to become self-reliant. The following areas were identified:

1) documents (skills: signing papers in full name and surname, reading and writing in Polish, legalizing one's status in Poland, knowing one's rights and obligations, knowing what papers one needs to be able to get by in Poland, knowing for what social support one/a family is eligible, completing application forms, and cooperation with institutions such as job centers, the Municipal Office and MOPS);
2) health (skills: using basic healthcare services provided by outpatient clinics, knowing how the Polish healthcare system works, using emergency phone numbers and emergency medical help at hospital ERs, communicating with the personnel of healthcare facilities);
3) education (skills: enrolling children at pre-schools and primary schools, knowing how Polish schools work, maintaining high school attendance rates for children and adolescents, knowing how psychological and educational counseling centers work);
4) employment (skills: self-reliant job seeking, drawing up CVs, retaining jobs, being aware of one's skills and the commensurability between the payment received and the work done);
5) apartment (skills: communicating with the proprietor of the apartment, keeping the apartment tidy, using domestic appliances, removing minor malfunctions, and responding adequately to major accidents);
6) Municipal Social Welfare Center (skills: applying for social benefits);
7) social integration (skills: establishing correct relations with neighbors, navigating the city, using public transport);
8) household budget (skills: paying back debts, managing the household budget, getting by without social benefits) (ibid., 28-29).

These areas of assistance together with the skills defined for them were supposed to help Romani families become self-sufficient, that is, capable of managing without support from the welfare system, finding and keeping paid employment (and, consequently, abandoning begging, which was particularly important at the time of pandemic lockdowns that practically precluded generating any income in this way), using the healthcare system, and exercising the right to education. In brief, all this added up to altering their lifestyle to adjust them to the standard commonly endorsed by Polish majority society and regarded as "regular" or "correct" by the general public.

The handbook did not specify what methods the assistants used in working with the Romani families to achieve these aims. The Roma covered by the program were not included in defining and developing these key areas of assistance; they were not asked what their needs, skills, and aspirations were. Similarly, their competencies were not considered in terms of their wider utility (including for majority society), even though the rapid erection of barracks to serve as homes suggested that the Romani men possessed advanced construction skills. The team that managed the program implemented by the House of Peace Foundation deemed that it would be best to persuade the Romani community to adopt the lifestyle dominant in majority society. This epitomized the operations of hegemonic forces in the social world. As explained by Gramsci and further theorized by Mouffe and Laclau, the dominant collective seeks to impose a particular way of understanding reality on minorities. This is closely bound up with antagonisms that arise and work in the social world as a result of the presence of multiple, mutually conflicting discursive positions, that is, identities. Social actors from the dominant group engage in hegemonic practices in order to exclude discourses other than those they espouse from the social space. In this way, they demarcate the dominant discourse.

In my research, I interviewed former and current family assistants working under the House of the Peace Foundation's program and some of its Romani participants. One of the themes that time and again surfaced in the interviews concerned the fact that the assistants' role had been imprecisely defined and that they had not been sufficiently prepared for their work:

> My role as an assistant was completely unspecified. My contract only lists formal aspects. As far as preparation for work is concerned, I didn't do anything over the first week. I had the computer switched on for me and was told to read everything there, hundreds of gigabytes of data. Then one of the project coordinators took me along to a family to introduce me. (W05)

Importantly, among the group hired as assistants for Romani families, only one person had any prior experience in this respect.[47] As an effect, it was hardly possible to build on people's previously developed or tested methods of work. Each of the assistants had to go about designing collaboration with the families on his/her own.

In the first phase, the assistants cooperated with the families before moving from the barracks, but the planning of this relocation was already on the cards. The assistants were supposed to establish a rapport with the Roma, which was a serious challenge, because they had never had any contact with this community before, and the atmosphere around the program

[47] The person quit after a few months.

was far from propitious, since many people were anxious about the new situation. As one of their fundamental priorities, the assistants were to have the Romani adults officially registered as unemployed, which would make them eligible for public healthcare services. Whenever the assistants found themselves in situations in which they did not know what to do, they were supposed to "look for creative solutions" (W10). Besides working directly with the Roma, they were also expected to complete daily work charts in which they recorded what they had done on a given day:

> It was difficult to complete them if I'd spent three hours in the settlement to practically no effect, and the project is assessed on the basis of its effects. First, we only wrote internal reports needed for the payment of remuneration from contracts of mandate. But then we shifted to contracts of employment, so the internal control system was put in place. (ibid.)

Some of the assistants also note that insufficient measures were applied to protect them against mental burnout. Additionally, the decision-making competences of the team members were not clearly defined. Some of them believe that there were too few externally conducted supervisions that would make it possible to look into both the assistants' practice and the way the entire program was being managed. At the cyclical internal assessment sessions of the team's work, the assistants could share their observations and draw the management's attention to a range of programs: "a lot of bitterness cropped up then, and many people quit over value conflicts" (ibid.). The staff turnover was one of the major issues that beset the program, given that it was to a large extent founded on family assistance. New workers had not only to go through the process of being initiated into a new situation but above all to establish relations with the Romani family from scratch. Some assistants quit because they did not accept the way the program was being managed:

> We started to criticize some issues and think over the way the program was running. Some people quit without giving reasons, because they were critical. It was only behind the scenes that they admitted that they found fault with many things. (W06)

Other assistants quit as a result of the taxing working conditions, which required a lot of mental and physical stamina. For example, the working hours were difficult to regulate, as the assistants not only visited the families at their homes, but also had to draw up work reports, plan schedules for each family, take part in team meetings, etc. This irregular timetable was made all the more unpredictable by unexpected situations, such as things breaking down in the training accommodations or the Romani family members suddenly falling ill. One of my respondents recalls that:

> The working hours were crazy. The families phoned about various issues at any time of the day and night. I worked with a woman with a mild intellectual disability. She attended integration sessions, but she couldn't tell the time. In order not to be late, she called me every hour in the night and asked what time it was. It wasn't one call, but dozens of them if I didn't pick up. She cared about the sessions a lot, so she panicked when I didn't answer. (ibid.)

Importantly, the assistants did not have work phones for some time, so they were using their private phones to keep in touch with the families and call outpatient clinics, schools, and the MOPS. Consequently, they had no idea whether incoming calls from unknown numbers in the evening or at night were about an accident involving their loved one, neighbors' complaints about the Roma's noisiness, or perhaps a real threat to the life or health of a Romani family member. The excessive workload experienced by the assistants particularly in the first months after the removal of the Kamieńskiego barracks was also caused by the scarcity of their number as compared to the size and considerable needs of the Romani families. In such circumstances, it was hardly possible to arrange the working conditions promoting reflection on the methods applied or a thorough scrutiny of the effects of interventions launched and their impact on the families.

In their interviews, the assistants also frequently address the prevalent attitude to the families, primarily focusing on the building of relationships between the assistants and the Roma, where language appeared to be a key issue. One of my respondents recollects that:

> In this project, the Roma were for a long time not treated as subjects. I arrived at the *site* – you didn't say, even in the narrative, that you were going to somebody's home – which was rented by the foundation. I checked up on what condition the apartment was in, drew up a list of assignments with the family, and checked whether the assignments had been completed. It was hard social work, without taking into account their expectations and various things that were going on. Even the time of mourning after the death of a relative, when Roma only perform the most basic chores, was not respected. (ibid.)

Developing any deeper relations with the families was not regarded as a priority. As such, the assistants' role was in a sense reduced down to monitoring the tidiness of the apartments and the execution of activities included in the week's or the month's plan (e.g., making an appointment at a clinic, job-seeking, paying back debts, etc.). In the view of my respondents, this was caused by the pressure that the Foundation's management purportedly felt from the Wrocław Commune as the organizer of the program. In conjunction with this pressure, one of my respondents comments:

> I didn't know whether I should be a police officer, an official, a psychologist, or an assistant, whether to demand or to cooperate. All these roles were mixed up (…), as assistants, we were the *final executors* of the authorities' pressures. Whenever a meeting at the commune office was held, the program was pushed to accelerate; it was all about verifying the budget and defining the current aims. (W10)

This observation brings into relief the consequences of the pressure exerted by the grant-giver. This is closely interwoven with what has been called "projectosis," which I describe in the previous section of this chapter. If the concrete, tangible outcomes are regarded as the supreme goal of a program, negligence and abuses vis-à-vis the individuals involved in it are likely to proliferate. As part of this process, a kind of unification is prompted as the targets defined become superior to the needs that families may experience at a given moment, ones not necessarily overlapping with the seven pillars of assistance as designed by the House of Peace Foundation. There is no room for individual needs of people or unexpected incidents, such as grieving after the death of a family member. Rather, the assistants are tasked with activities that my respondents explicitly defined as "control," such as checking whether apartments were tidy and whether no damage had been done. The accommodations were rented by the Foundation from private owners, so on moving to them, the Roma were told that the apartments were not theirs. This made it all the more difficult for the new dwellers to feel at home there, thwarted developing their responsibility for the state of repair of their homes, and exacerbated their sense of "out of place." Crucially, before moving out from the barracks, many of the Romani community members had never lived in the traditionally conceived housing architecture. They did not know how to use some of the domestic appliances either, because they had had no access to a permanent electricity source or running water in the settlement in Kamieńskiego Str. or other clusters of informal architecture they had inhabited before. They had cooked on open fire, hand-washed their clothes, and taken care of personal hygiene in very provisional conditions. With such experiences, they did not use the infrastructure of their training accommodations properly. This resulted in frequent defects and malfunctions, the repairing or removal of which incurred further costs from the program's budget. As such expenditures were often considerable,[48] the assistants found themselves under an increasing pressure to monitor how the Romani tenants were using their lodgings. The assistants were expected to "inspect cupboards,

[48] One of my respondents said that at one point during the implementation of the program, the House of Peace Foundation's management tried to make the assistants financially accountable for any damage the Romani families did to their apartments. The assistants' team firmly objected, and the idea was finally dropped (W06).

fridges, and take pictures" (W07). One of the Romnis I interviewed recounted a story of another woman from the community:

> When she went to visit her mum, an assistant from the Foundation entered her apartment, with her absent, and looked into the fridge and the cupboard. The apartment was dirty, because there are five or six young kids and three adults there. The kids make a lot of mess. They phoned her to rebuke her for the apartment being dirty. I told her to go and see the program manager about it, because they shouldn't have entered the apartment when she wasn't there. And she said that it would do no good, because they always said that she was lying and didn't believe her. Once I also tried to complain, but it was the same thing – they don't believe. (W08)

The episode related by my respondent directly exemplifies breaching basic principles that protect family privacy. Entering apartments when their dwellers are absent speaks to them not being treated as equal partners in this complex process, but as people in an "inferior" position, unable to manage by themselves, and in need of being supervised. As a mechanism reinforcing the Roma's feeling of being controlled by and dependent on the Foundation, "the families were threatened that their children would be taken away from them" (ibid.). Children are in fact one of the community's most treasured and protected values. For the Roma, the children's home and supervision by the guardianship agency are the most chilling prospects. Envisioning this was an argument to which the Foundation's staff resorted to make members of the Romani community obey their decisions and remain in the program.[49] The assistants were obligated to report to the police the incidents involving Romani mothers from the program begging together with their children. My respondent explains:

> I am absolutely against children begging, because it's violence against them, but calling the police is no solution. Either you work with the family and win its trust, or you turn into a person the family will run away from the way it runs away from the police. This won't make them give up begging, but run away from the assistant and lie to him or her. (W07)

The episodes recounted by my respondents illustrate a split that rifts the family assistance project implemented by the House of Peace. On the one hand, the assistants are supposed to be guides that help families grasp how the system and its solutions that majority society considers common and understandable work. On the other hand, they are made to act as supervisors, controllers, and people who place demands on the Roma, while having a range

[49] Some participants of the program could not bear the sense of dependence and control, so they wanted to quit the program and live in the informal built environment again.

of disciplining mechanisms at their disposal. In this context, it is not really feasible or imaginable to treat the Roma as equal partners that contribute to the implementation of the Foundation's program. Rather, they are cast as "clients" (a moniker often employed to refer to people using social welfare benefits) or simply as passive recipients, having neither the will nor preferences of their own. Emphatically, the assistants themselves are under strict control of the Foundation's management. This is very clear in the fact that unofficial contacts between the Foundations' assistant team and a Nomada Association member working with the Romani community "was seriously frowned upon by the Foundation's management" (ibid.). For this reason, the assistants employed by the House of Peace keep this relationship secret. This finding may raise some eyebrows, because the Association has been working with the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma far longer than the Foundation and thus has more relevant experience in this respect. Knowledge sharing and implementing mutually complementary interventions would in all likelihood best promote the wellbeing of the Romani community.

Some of the assistants working for the House of Peace Foundation have anyway tried to found their collaboration with the families on good relations, rather than exclusively on control mechanisms. One of my respondents emphasizes that key to her working path was treating each family member as an individual subject with his/her own unique experiences and needs, which entailed "not imposing anything on them, not using *our norms* vis-à-vis the Roma, but appreciating, looking at things unconventionally" (W05). When talking with the families, the woman sought to discern similarities, for example, parallels between her own life and the situation of Romani women. She foregrounded the shared elements, which facilitated establishing a relationship. These common points included, for instance, the experience of living with the mother-in-law under the same roof, parents' death, living in a foreign country, etc. This mode of thinking helped temper the dichotomic division into "local" and "foreign" and rechanneled the relations between the assistant and the Roma. This respondent told me that she spent a lot of time with the families, as it were, "illicitly" (ibid.), that is, without monitoring or enforcing the execution of the planned targets:

> In team meetings I would say that I'd sent an application, but I wouldn't say that I'd spent four hours painting with the boys so that their mother could wash her hair and have some rest. This was forbidden, because this meant relations. Relations were supposed to be bad because they caused crossing the boundaries. It was all about rigorous enforcement, about being an employee and a controller. If I have a bond with somebody, I'll not yell at them to pay for the oven they've damaged, but I'll sit down

with them and talk about it. Talking doesn’t produce immediate effects. It won’t make overdue money for heating materialize on the Foundation’s account. (ibid.)

Many of the situations related above indicate that the ways in which the assistants of Romani families employed by the House of Peace Foundation have worked have been affected not only by their individual decisions on how to go about collaborating with the Roma, but primarily by the expectations that the grant-giver, that is, the Wrocław Commune, has had regarding the effects of the program. The assistants have been the only people affiliated with the House of Peace Foundation to have direct contact with the Romani families. Given this, the position of the Foundation’s management has been that influencing the Roma to meet the targets defined in the program is solely up to the assistants. This reveals the systemic oppression in which the Romani community has found itself.

As already mentioned, the work of the assistants of Romani families affiliated with the Nomada Association and the House of Peace Foundation is interpretable not only as an element of social welfare support, btu also as an educational method primarily intended for adults. Such a learning process is aligned both with non-formal education and with the ideas of public pedagogy and, more generally, critical pedagogy as such. Both movements underscore that education is closely interwoven with the political and has two fundamental dimensions. For one, it brings learners round to accepting the operative principles of the social world as determined by the dominant discourses and thus contributes to their persistence. At the same time, however, it has an emancipatory potential to it and may prompt learners to make change happen. The ways in which the family assistants have cooperated with the Romanian Roma community illustrate the instantiation of both these dimensions in practice. On the one hand, some of the assistants’ practices promote the dissemination of the dominant lifestyle among the minority. On the other, other developments, such as the Nomada Association having a Romni work as an assistant of Romani families, indicate that the emancipatory potential of non-formal education can indeed be actualized.

4.7 Children's Education

When the team of the Nomada Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society was commencing its collaboration with the Wrocław-based community of Romanian Roma, most dwellers of the barracks in Kamieńskiego Str. were children and adolescents. None of them went to school at the time, and none of them were involved in any non-formal education, either. Children learned skills needed in daily life from their family members. Importantly, many of the adults in this community have never had any schooling experience, as a result of which a considerable part of them is illiterate. Those of the adults who completed a few grades at primary schools still back in Romania and can read and write, better cope with learning Polish (W07).

As pointed out by one of my respondents, these circumstances made the Association staff define education-related interventions as one of the fundamental priorities in the work with the Romanian Roma community, besides providing immediate humanitarian help. As the first challenge encountered in implementing this target, the NGO members had to win the trust of the parents of children that Nomada wanted to invite to take part in its first educational project. The initial fearful responses from the parents were natural: "Some Polish women came to the barracks; the community couldn't communicate with them, and these Poles want to *take away children*, that is, the most precious and protected part of the community" (ibid.). Such fears were alleviated when relations between the Association workers and the community members were established and developed. No special methods or intervention models were applied; simply, as a respondent recounts, "we stayed in the barracks for hours on end, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, and talking. Just being together. We were becoming acquainted with each other" (ibid.). Trust was more readily inspired by the team in the Romani women, which mattered a lot because it is women that for the most part make decisions about children and their issues.

Educational classes for the youngest Roma were initiated by the Nomada at the end of 2011. Meetings were held twice a week, and their participants (about twenty children) were aged from five to fifteen years old. Considerable age differences within the group posed a challenge to the educators running these sessions, as they had to adjust the themes and methods of work to the children's widely varying needs.[50] Essentially, the classes were not held in the barracks, because the Association made a point of helping the children become familiar with school interiors they had never had an opportunity to enter before. Classrooms were first made

[50] For the project, the children were divided into two age groups.

available by the 10th High School, situated in the vicinity of the Kamieńskiego barracks. Subsequently, the group used rooms of the 74th Primary School in Kleczkowska Str. Because that facility was located further away from where the children lived, they had to be accompanied by educators on their way thence and whence. As a result, comprehensive organizational endeavors had to be undertaken: "bringing the children there and back home, meals (the kids were often hungry), classes" (ibid.). My respondent observes that when travelling with a group of Romani children on public transport from the barracks to the school and back, she witnessed notorious acts of violence related to Romaphobia, recalling:

> For these three years, not a single week went by without somebody calling us names or spitting on us. I would walk along, leading young children by the hand, and they were being called stinkpots. This is everyday life. Physical attacks took place as well; a car drove along, pulled over, a man leaned out from the window and sprayed pepper gas into the kids' eyes. (ibid.)

As can be seen, the participants of the program had to cope not only with new challenges related to studying but also with displays of racist prejudice (the attackers primarily judged the children's descent based on their skin color and the sound of their language), to which they were not exposed when living in the barracks amidst their community without direct contact with majority society. Importantly, such experiences could significantly contribute to making the children afraid of leaving the secure space of the Roma community, discourage them from participation in educational projects, and increase their parents' fear of sending them to any classes or courses.

The Nomada Association defined instilling literacy skills as the fundamental objective of the project, and, in terms of long-term goals, pursued the inclusion of children in education provided by the state-run public schooling system. To emphatically restate, the participants of the classes organized by the Association had no prior formal or non-formal educational experiences. The team members quickly realized that "to teach children who had never sat at a school desk to read and write was a somewhat exaggerated aim" (ibid.). Before doing this, they had to start from exercises improving the children's manual skills and focus and, first and foremost, to explain to them what school was, what rules had to observed at school, and why one actually went to school.

Communication with the children was another problem to solve. When the project commenced, most of the children did not speak Polish. There were only three boys who had a basic command of Polish, and they acted as Polish-Romani interpreters for the rest of the group. Given this, learning Polish had to be added to the fundamental objectives of the program. All

this was complicated by the fact that the children were initially unable to keep their focus for longer than five minutes. Thus, study had to alternate with movement and play. As my respondent explains:

> We adjusted our methods to the needs and capacities of the children. At the beginning, they were simply not able to remain seated at the desk, because they had never had to keep such a posture before. Their little hands hurt even when doing things as easy as coloring pictures. We had to introduce everything incrementally, slowly, systematically. (ibid.)

All these complications exemplify the consequences of Romanian Roma children's long-standing "invisibility" to Poland's socio-legal system. For a very long time, members of the Romanian Roma community remained entirely unnoticed by the Polish state. Because they did not legally register their arrival and residence, they did not use either social welfare or healthcare, or the right to education. Even though they could be seen in the city's space, the competent state agencies did not go about their legalization process and, consequently, did not offer them any opportunity to effectively exercise their rights. Importantly, the meritocratic vision of the social world holds that as all citizens have equal access to education, they all enjoy equal opportunity in terms of self-development and securing their social position. This assertion, however, did not hold true for the Romanian Roma children. Stemming from the defective operations of the system in place, the inequality they experienced regarding the right to education relegated the young Roma to an "inferior" position from the very beginning.

The Nomada Association implemented also another project, called "Przyjazne przestrzenie miasta" (English: "Friendly urban spaces"). The method developed within this project has been applied by the Nomada team to complement formal education ever since. Specifically, this method involved "going out into the urban space, visiting places which are inaccessible to Roma children in regular life; it's a kind of education through cultural participation" (ibid.). When dwelling in the barracks in Kamieńskiego Str., the young Roma often spent their time in the city center, but their presence in the Market Square and its surroundings was mainly connected to begging. Boys and girls would hand out red roses to passers-by in expectation of getting some cash handouts in return. While they were users of these representative parts of Wrocław, they did not appear in them in the way the other residents or tourists did. Asking for money automatically put them in the position of somebody "worse" or "unwelcome." As a result, they often fell victim to racially and xenophobically driven verbal abuse and physical assaults. The Nomada project sought to enable them to "abandon the position of a person that begs and assume the position of a welcome person, a visitor, or a

customer" (ibid.). With a view to this, the educators accompanied the children to art galleries, theaters, cinemas, museums, and other cultural institutions. The children also had an opportunity to eat out and dine on restaurant summer terraces, where they had previously begged for alms. Thus, the young Roma visited venues which had earlier been "out of bounds" for them and where they could also meet their Polish peers. The project can therefore be said to have aimed not only to educate its beneficiaries in cultural participation, but also to attempt to overcome the power relations that structured the ways in which the city's space was used. In the idiom of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, the Nomada activities caused a reversal of subject positions. The Roma children, who were beggars in everyday life, could for a while at least participate in practices mainly accessible to (white, more affluent and powerful, etc.) people in the dominant position, such as dining in restaurants and frequenting cultural institutions. As the Roma children, accompanied by the educators, crossed the thresholds of these venues, the regular balance of power was ruptured, so to speak, and the identities of the young Roma were "unsealed": they temporarily moved from the position of unwanted and passive beggars to the position of invited and active guests. As my respondent concludes, "this strengthened the Romani children and the educational process we were conducting very much" (ibid.). Importantly, the Romani children and their older relatives currently spend a lot of time around Wrocław's Market Square as well. Their presence there is linked to the same practice of handing red roses to passers-by and asking for money in return. Another reason for their visits to the city center is that the clan members no longer have a meeting place of their own. Clan encounters had earlier been held in the settlement, but when the families moved to training accommodations under the program implemented by the House of Peace Foundation, the community lost their agora.[51]

In order to promote the integration of the young Roma with Polish children, the Nomada Association invited the former to take part in Oleśnica's Festival of Circus and Art and the Brave Kids festival. These events "do not require any academic knowledge or advanced language competence and offer an opportunity of engaging with peer groups" (ibid.).

Because the members of the Roma community were not really versed in Polish, the Nomada Association launched a project under which Polish could be learned via the computer. Though initially designed for young adults, the intervention in fact stirred the greatest interest

[51] Agora, as used here, refers to the space between individual barracks. The homes themselves were small and thus not fit for meetings of big groups. Thus, the community would spend a lot of time outdoors, in front of their homes. It was outdoors that the Roma enjoyed themselves, celebrated together, cooked, and discussed matters of importance to the entire group. Sessions of *kris*, a traditional court, were also held in front of the barracks (W01).

among Romani teenagers. While adults took part in two meetings on average, the younger participants attended them regularly. This attendance pattern was caused by the community's living conditions at the time. As the women were tasked with multiple chores, such as keeping their households clean, cooking, and child-rearing, they had not time for additional engagements, such as participation in the course. For their part, the men were preoccupied with collecting scrap metal or other gigs to provide for their families. As a result, the project chiefly benefitted illiterate adolescents. The computer greatly facilitated the learning of Polish to the young, who had no handwriting skills. They were particularly attracted to the course by the opportunity to open their own Facebook accounts and to master other Internet-mediated communication forms. Today, a considerable majority of children, adolescents, and adults use smartphones, and communicators such as WhatsApp and Messenger are pivotal in sustaining relationships among the community members. When the entire group had dwelled in the barracks in Kamieńskiego Str., all its members had shared the same space, yet the relocation to training accommodations under the program of the House of Peace Foundation altered their ways of being together. The accommodations are scattered across the city, so daily togetherness has been replaced by remote communication on social media.

The educational activities described above were carried out by the Nomada Association for about three years and helped the Romani children become accustomed to the forms of conduct required in traditional school classrooms (e.g. sitting at the desk, doing what the teacher says, retaining focus, etc.). The young Roma also acquired basic literacy skills and learned some Polish. In the next stage of enabling them to use their right to education, they needed to be included in the public schooling system. This process involved a series of obstacles related both to formal procedures and to ethnic prejudice. My respondent concludes that:

> It was a glaring example of the systemic exclusion suffered by this community. The school situated a few hundred meters away from the barracks told us many times that children from the Romanian Roma community could not enroll there, because they had no Polish documents. This is against the law, because every child has the right to education. Then, it came down to them not having personal ID numbers [Polish: PESEL]. It is easier for the system if one has such a number, but it isn't mandatory for foreigners in Poland to have one. There was a very strong resistance from the school. (ibid.)

Critical race theorists would associate this situation with the phenomenon called color-blind racism, which is discussed in subchapter 2.2. Basically, enrolling Romani children at a public school should not have been a problem at all because they were Romanian citizens, and

Romania was a member state of the European Union. Thus, the consistent refusals of the school to accept the children could thus ensue from racist and/or xenophobic prejudice, even though racial divisions were not in the least inscribed in Polish law. Other reasons for the school's unwillingness to cooperate could include reluctance to brave administrative difficulties and challenges believed to be bound up with teaching migrant children as such. Polish public schooling still appears to be largely incapable of efficiently responding to specific educational needs of foreigners' children. The young Roma's living conditions (inhabiting informal architecture in the vicinity of the school, with no running water, no electricity and no sanitary amenities) accounted for another factor behind the school's persistent refusals. Whatever the reason for the school management's noncompliance, its firm position very tangibly exacerbated the exclusion of the Romani children.

Eventually, the pressure and efforts of the Nomada Association resulted in the school's consent to register the young Roma as its students; they were to start formal education in 2014. As my respondent's narrative recounts:

> Another stage of exclusion began then, as specialist opinions saying that the Romani children had to use special education were directly extorted. The children were enrolled at the school in the proximity of the barracks, but in a meeting of representatives of the school, the Nomada, the municipality of Wrocław and the psychological and pedagogical counseling center, we were directly told that without those opinions, the children would not be enrolled anyway. (ibid.)

The respondent also adds that, for these prospective students, there were no legitimate reasons to issue assessments on special educational needs, which are in principle based on a child's ineligibility for the regular schooling pathway due to a physical or intellectual disability. Despite that, such assessments were issued for the Romani children, and the very process of issuing them was objectionable, because the tests that the youngsters had to take were not adapted to their language and cultural background. Additionally, there was not Polish-Romani interpreter to assist them, despite this being a legal requirement (W01): "in this case, mums acted as interpreters though their Polish was worse than that of their children" (W07). To make things worse, not all the mothers had courage enough to admit that they did not understand some of the instructions concerning test items; consequently, it is difficult to establish exactly what questions the children were in fact answering. As a result of all these circumstances, the tests scores were low, and the children had to start their school education in the individual instruction mode. In this way, the school isolated the Romani students and prevented them from joining the school community. A special Romani classroom was set up, which the management

of the school initially called a “Romani section” and which comprised solely the children of Roma descent who lived in the barracks. My respondent emphasizes that it was “an example of segregation. Integration was not even mentioned. We insisted that at least physical education classes should be held together, but the school didn’t agree” (ibid.).

The separation of the Romani children from the other students was more than pointed. The former began their lessons in the afternoon, when most Polish kids had already finished for the day, so the two groups neither attended any classes together nor even met in the school corridors. It took barely one week for Polish parents to lodge a formal complained with the management about the presence of their neighbors from the Kamieńskiego barracks at school. What precisely caused the complaint is described by my respondent:

> The children got new school-starting kits, and we settled it with the teacher that their backpacks would be stored in the classroom. If they’d taken them back to the barracks, their younger siblings would quickly have snatched these things. The kids themselves wanted to keep their things at school so as not to damage them. Besides the school things, they got from us a sandwich, juice and fruit for breakfast every day. In their complaint, the Polish parents requested that Romani children should not use the same classroom as Polish children, because Roma spread vermin and had dirty things. It took us a while to figure out what it was all about. We found out that on Friday a piece of breakfast fruit (an apple or a peach) had been left in a backpack, and fruit flies had begun to fly around it over Saturday and Sunday. Ant that was it. (ibid.)

In response to the complaint, the school management moved the classroom for the Romani children up to the attic to what had been a carpenter’s workshop, a room that was not even intended for teaching. In this way, the spatial isolation of this group from the rest of the student population was additionally reinforced. No other lessons or activities were held in the attic; nor was there any other reason for Polish children to go up there. To sum up, the young Roma came to school later than the other students and climbed up to the last story of the building, which was not adjusted to instruction purposes. In this context, my respondent once again emphasizes: “it was very obvious segregation,” and adds: “a wise educator would have handled the parent issue. Of course, it was a new situation for this school; they’d never faced one like that before. It was a challenge, but it was not really well handled” (ibid.).

These developments are helpfully illumined by the insights of critical race theorists. The mechanisms at work are directly reminiscent of the educational arrangements for Romani children that are described in subchapter 2.3. While not exactly a ghettoized school, the educational facility established a classroom for the Roma only, spatially separated Romani and

Polish children, and regarded the young Roma as intellectually disabled, all of which indicate racial discrimination. Promoting equal educational opportunity for Romani children should be one of the pillars in removing systemic inequality experienced by the Roma community. The policies applied in this case clearly reflected the marginalization of Roma in the social world.

The Nomada team time and again objected against the segregation of the Romani children. As a result of the Association's efforts, the young Roma that began their education in the following years attended classes together with Polish children and were not forced by the school's staff to take competence tests. Nevertheless, the "Romani section" was still there, and while it was not enlarged, it was not disbanded either. Already in September, Polish parents lodged a complaint with the school head, claiming that the teaching standards had dropped because of Romani students. Facing such complaints,

> the management didn't want to publicize the issue, preferring to sweep everything under the rug. The school head insisted that publicizing involved even the idea to have a Nomada representative come to a parents' meeting and answer their questions to dispel their fears and stereotypes of Roma. (ibid.)

This approach only served to maintain a decent rapport with Polish parents, but in no way improved the situation of the Romani children or helped foster an integration-conducive environment. Importantly, Polish students and their parents were well aware of the living conditions of the Romani Roma community. The primary school at which the Romani children were enrolled was a zone school situated in the proximity of the barracks. The informal settlement and its inhabitants were frequently discussed in the neighborhood. This not only fueled its management's reluctance and prejudice revealed in Polish parents' actions, but also affected peer relations at school. My respondent reports that:

> the dislike of school among the young Roma is triggered, among other factors, by conflicts with their peers. Polish children often exclude Romani children and mock them. At the very start, Romani children feel that they educationally lag behind their Polish schoolmates. They compare themselves with them, and this may also breed their dislike, but it is the school's responsibility to create a setting in which a child does not feel inferior. (ibid,)

It was anxiety about their children and fear of bad experiences they might have with their Polish peers that made several Romani parents afraid to send their offspring to school. This reluctance was also related to the fear of becoming visible to the system, in this case, specifically, of being controlled by social workers. The Romani parents were afraid that their child-raising decisions would be judged as wrong and that, as a result, they would be put under the supervision of the

guardianship agency. One of my respondents notes that the parents, who have never gone to school themselves, do not know what the educational process exactly looks like: “They don’t know how classrooms look, that there are desks and blackboards in them. They don’t know what a recess is. They don’t know what happens to their children when they’re at school” (W05). At the same time, the custom of schools holding special welcome meetings for Romani parents is not there, even though it would be a perfect opportunity for allaying all anxieties and doubts. One of the Romani mothers I have interviewed recalls her early thoughts on sending her child to school:

> For me, it was a shock; I was afraid to send my child to school because I was afraid that he would be beaten and feel lonely, and that I’d miss him. Even going to the bathroom, I always had my children with me. Whatever I did, the kids were always around. It was a difficult thing for me to send my child to school. (W08).

This woman’s child was among the first children from the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community to start school education. Her family was also the first one to move from the barracks a few years before the onset of the House of Peace Foundation’s training accommodation program. The respondent is gifted with considerable practical resourcefulness and is deeply dedicated to the pursuit of her goals. These traits may have helped her negotiate an agreement with the head of the school which her child was to attend. She herself admits that “I told the headmistress what my point was. I wasn’t ashamed, and she made things easier for me. This was the first Romani child at this school. Only Poles around, and his skin is dark, and there you are” (ibid.). The two women agreed that my respondent’s child would spend an hour or two at school at first. As he was becoming accustomed to the new environment, that time was extended. Additionally, his mother accompanied him during the adaptation period, first staying with him in the classroom and later waiting in the hall. In this way, the process of engaging with education was easier both for the child and for the mother. That method for becoming familiar with the new situation was not a standard procedure, but it exemplified a good practice which was implemented as a response to the student’s specific needs.

Moving from the barracks to training accommodations under the program implemented by the House of Peace Foundation marked another significant stage in the school education of children from the Romanian Roma community. As far as schooling is concerned, this relocation meant that the children no longer attended the school in the vicinity of their previous place of residence, one where they learned together. Instead, they continued their studies at new schools. Importantly, the training accommodations were situated in various parts of Wrocław, and the zoning principles prevented the children from being moved to another school together as a

group. This also concerned the children who were part of the "Romani section" described above as a classroom comprising exclusively the young Roma. It turned out that as a result of too quick a progression form one grade to the next, these children had failed to develop a sufficient command of Polish in reading and writing, so there was a gap between their actual competencies and the requirements for students in the corresponding grades at their new schools. My respondent stresses that:

> As the children landed in the fourth grade without having mastered these basic skills, they were completely unable to handle studying in the new format.[52] Catching up was impossible at that stage. There even was a girl from the Roma-only classroom, who reached the sixth grade in another school, though she couldn't read or write. How should she have wanted to go to school if she didn't understand anything that was going on during lessons, and was additionally laughed at by her peers? (W07)

This situation was the fallout of letting children pass from one grade to another, even though they had not mastered requisite skills. One can guess that this was caused by pressure not to extend the period of children's education and to have them leave school as soon as possible, but teachers' wrong notion that letting children progress to the next grade would encourage them to study may have been another factor at play. Yet another reason for this situation is cited by my respondent: "A group of children was enrolled way into the school year,[53] and a mere few months later they were let go to the second grade. They hadn't learned reading or writing yet, but the school wanted to brag that the effects were already there" (ibid.). Such practices are deeply detrimental to Romani students, as they do not acquire basic competencies and consequently find studying on more advanced levels all the more difficult. This also cements prejudice against Roma and furthers their marginalization. Admittedly, the children started attending regular schools, but they continued to be perceived as diverging from their Polish peers, less clever, and inferior. This clearly shows that it is not enough to register children with the public schooling system and expect the commencement of the educational path alone to solve all problems. Without adapting instruction to the specific needs of foreigners' offspring and, primarily, without taking into account their past experiences of utter poverty and social exclusion, educational success is not to be counted on.

[52] In the Polish schooling system, the fourth grade represents an important educational transition, because it marks the end of early-school education. In the first three grades, the students spend most of their time in one classroom, follow an integrated curriculum, and learn under the guidance of one educator, who is at the same time their form teacher. Having gone to the fourth grade, students move from classroom to classroom for every lesson as instruction is split into specialized subjects, each with its own curriculum and each taught by a different teacher.

[53] This occurred back when the community still inhabited the settlement in Kamieńskiego Str.

Back to the issue of changing schools because of moving to training accommodations, which began in 2017. Because some children had taken part in school education while still living in the barracks (as a result of the Nomada Association's program), parents felt less afraid to send their children to schools (ibid.). One of my Romani respondents says:

> I didn't go to school and didn't complete a single grade. My son went to school, because when he grows up, he may achieve something in life. Maybe he'll get a driving license; maybe he'll be a doctor. And when you can't read and write, what can you achieve in life? (W04)

The parents realized that school education could benefit their children in many ways. Besides wishing that their children should have better lives than they themselves had, the parents also thought of the usefulness of their children's mastering skills such as reading and writing in Polish. One of the advantages was that the children could be – and indeed were – interpreters for their parents, making it easier for them to sort out formalities at offices, to communicate with physicians, etc. Consequently, the Romani parents did not find transferring their kids to new schools really problematic in principle. However, whereas the modus operandi in collaboration with the staff of the school situated in the vicinity of the Kamieńskiego settlement had already been developed, relations with the personnel of new schools had to be established anew. These matters were handled with the help of family assistants who worked with the Roma under the program launched by the House of Peace Foundation.

Although the Romani children had already been visible in and to Wrocław's schooling system for a few years then, the difficulties encountered by the Nomada Association team during the first attempts at enrolling them at school surfaced once again. The staff of zone schools in the neighborhood of training accommodations "concocted various ideas for making it impossible to register them there" (W02). At the time, most of the Romani children had not been officially assessed as being in need of special education, but the personnel of some schools, as my respondent relates, "suggested that the parents should have the children examined by a psychiatrist and obtain such assessments in order to get rid of the problem and apply the individual instruction mode" (ibid.). The maneuvers designed to "conceal" the fact that Romani children attended those schools were again mobilized, and the schooling system again proved poorly tolerant and "closed" in this respect.

Integration and diversity are not treated as enriching factors or a constructive challenge by the staff of these facilities. Rather, they are perceived as barely surmountable difficulties. These developments also bring into relief the extent to which systemic inequality affects the social world and make one realize how hegemonic mechanisms operate in society. The fact that

the Romani children have been noticed by the schooling system turns out not to be enough for them to be able to use this system in the same ways and to the same effect as children from Polish majority society do. The young Roma continue to be consigned to an inferior position. This is one of the forms in which Romaphobia is expressed and experienced. Even if no explicit acts of hate speech or physical violence take place, the Romani children are discriminated against because of their ethnic background. Of course, some of them may have certain disabilities, but to presuppose in advance that each and every Romani child should be tested for such disabilities is abusive. In terms proposed by critical pedagogues, educational facilities should be dedicated to ensuring equal opportunity for the members of the Roma minority, instead of sustaining – if not indeed aggravating – their marginalization. Against this notion, the Romani children are not perceived as social actors from whom one can learn a lot and whose presence can greatly contribute to educators' efforts for increasing tolerance in Polish society. As a result, the idea of the public good, which is crucial in the perspective of public pedagogy, is squandered. In the framework proposed by Gert Biesta, which I discuss in detail in subchapter 1.4, the pedagogical staff of Wrocław's schools should be nothing short of committed to fostering an educational environment conducive to the Romani children "moving" from the private sphere (individual instruction, Roma-only classrooms, etc.) to the public sphere (general classrooms, integrated activities, etc.), because such changes help promote pluralism and, consequently, a free and diverse community. Such actions can contribute to dismantling hegemonic constellations in place and to bolstering democratic values in society.

Importantly, the Romani children transferred from one school to another not only on moving from the barracks. Since apartments that serve as training accommodations are rented by the House of Peace Foundation under its program from private owners, the Romani families have rather frequently had to move because of the proprietors' decisions. The reasons have included improper modes of using the apartments and conflicts with neighbors. As a consequence, some of the children have been forced to change schools a few times over the school year, which has generated multiple difficulties in the students' adaptation to their new educational environments.

One of my respondents who has worked for the House of Peace Foundation as an assistant of Romani families points out that Wrocław does not have a unified policy for the educational path of Romani students. She also observes that it is pointless to compare these children's needs with the needs of other foreigners who continue their education in Poland. While both groups need to learn Polish, many of the Roma have only had their first opportunity to enter a school classroom in Wrocław, unlike, for example, Ukrainians, who were regular

students in their country of origin before coming to Poland (W05). The success of channeling the young Roma into the schooling system as part of public education depends, in her view, on individual teachers' good will:

> It all rests on an individual's shoulders; for example, there is one great form teacher; her approach is very good. She doesn't alienate parents, and children work really well under her guidance. In another school there is a Romani assistant (though she's not of Romanian descent; she belongs to the Polish Roma community), and a girl who is in her charge loves school. She is happy to go to school. (ibid.)

However, not all educators display an equally profound dedication to adjusting school instruction to the needs of Romani children. According to my respondent, "some teachers expect that these children surpass themselves" (ibid.). In order to explain to the teachers with whom she has collaborated as a family assistant what the young Roma experience at school, she has availed herself of the following example: "I would ask them: How would you feel if you woke up in China tomorrow, sitting in a quantum physics classroom taught in Chinese and having to pass an exam in a month's time?" (ibid.). In her view, Romani children, who have not mastered the skill of reading and writing in Polish and academically lag behind in other ways, often find themselves in such a metaphorical situation. This is vividly illustrated by her story of a 14-year-old boy whose Polish was very limited. The teaching staff assessed that though age-wise he should be enrolled in the seventh grade, his competencies corresponded to the level of the fourth grade. Initially, he would sit at the front desk in the natural-science classroom, but in the course of time he moved to the back of the room. Then he often missed lessons and ultimately dropped out. When the assistant asked him why this had happened, he answered: "I feel like a moron, because I don't understand anything and I can't go there anymore" (ibid.). My respondent tried to intervene with the school counselor. She requested the school to organize additional Polish lessons with easily assimilable elements of math for the Romani students of this school in order to enhance their self-esteem. Her request was rejected: "The counselor told me that the boy had to attend the lessons or he wouldn't go to the next grade. End of discussion. The fact that the kid was sitting there without understanding anything and that he had never gone to school before didn't matter" (ibid.).

This represents another instance of the maladjustment of the schooling system, which does not respond to the situation of Romani children and, in this way, exacerbates their low self-esteem and exclusion. The unwarranted and thus detrimental practice of letting children pass to the next grade without requisite skills and knowledge only increased when online learning was instituted as one of the measures against the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Because

most Romani families do not own computers, the young Roma have not been able to take part in classes taught on Internet platforms, such as MS Teams. One of my Romani respondents reports that her children were the only ones to attend online lessons via their smartphones (W08). The crucial factor here is that this Romani woman works for the Nomada Association as an assistant of Romani families. She speaks perfect Polish and is versed in a range of legal and educational procedures. The other children in the Roma community could only use worksheets printed out and left by teachers at schools' front booths (but not all teachers used this method). Another respondent, who conducted educational activities for the young Roma at the Nomada Association's initiative during the pandemic, recounts:

> From March to June 2020, schools did not contact the Romani children at all. Sometimes, teachers left some teaching materials for them at school, but those were never returned after being filled in, which however didn't elicit any response from the teaching staff. Those were stacks of worksheets, which the children were unable to complete on their own. So there were no grounds for letting them go to the next grade, but that happened anyway. (W07)

Emphatically, as is widely recognized, even students for whom Polish is the native language found it challenging to adapt to remote learning. What made the situation even worse for the Romani children was the fact that their apartments were as a rule overcrowded and, consequently, noisy, largely precluding quiet and focus needed to study. By leaving worksheets for the children to complete, teachers were only going through the motions in order to prove that they performed their duties. Nevertheless, such perfunctory actions did not give the young Roma any real chance to continue their education. In my respondent's view, "the schools did not undertake any contact in this regard; nor did they monitor this kind of work in any way" (ibid.). It was only when teachers were directly approached that any interest in this matter was elicited, which however did not entail developing another, more effective method of remote teaching.

Relationships between the school staff and the Romani parents are another important factor in the school education of the young Roma. The interviews with my respondents indicate that both parties are afraid of mutual contact and that communication between them is insufficient. Additionally, the Romani parents, whose command of Polish is often limited and who do not know how exactly school settings operate, tend to be ashamed to admit that they do not fully understand some of the things that teachers communicate to them (W01, W05, W06, W07). When the families have an assistant appointed to them, which is the case in the House of Peace program, the teaching staff bypasses the parents and directly communicates with the

Foundation's worker; as a result, "the parents cease to exist for the school then" (W06). If this communication pathway is used, the establishment of relations between teachers and parents is entirely precluded. One of my respondents notes that even if a face-to-face encounter takes place, for example, during a teacher-parent conference, "the parents first of all get to hear that what they do is all wrong and that their child is no good. And at the same time, they are well aware of the common contempt of and disgust with Roma" (ibid.). In her view, such practices considerably boost both parents' and children's reluctance to engage with school.

According to the recent estimates, about 85% of children from the Romanian Roma community currently attend schools in Wrocław (W07). This is a conspicuous change, given that when the Nomada Association began its collaboration with this minority group[54] in 2010, none of its children used their right to education. One of my respondents emphatically states that "their class attendance rates may be far from ideal, but access to school instruction as such is what matters" (ibid.). What she believes primarily changes is the children's aspirations: "When going to school and comparing themselves with their peers, they no longer want to live the way their parents have lived for years, dwelling in the barracks and begging in front of churches. They want to have a cool car and a cool job" (ibid.).

Crucially, the Romani children are still exposed to various forms of discrimination at schools, ranging from hate speech to the non-adjustment of instruction to their needs. It is misguided to claim that this results from the defective operations of the system that simply needs more time to accommodate this group. Inadequate attention to the situation of the Romani children in the process of education stems not only from individual teachers' and/or school heads' imperfect decisions. Rather, this state of affairs is explicitly linked to the position Roma as such take in society, as schooling is an exceptionally important part of the social world. As indicated by the insights of critical pedagogy, schools are also sites where various discourses clash and hegemonic forces unfold. Schools and classrooms are not immune to disputes and conflicts between dominant and subordinate groups. As public-pedagogy thinkers insist, education should not be believed to function in isolation from other components of the public scene. Nevertheless, though entangled in various power relations, teaching and learning are among the engines of social change, without which it is impossible to build radical democracy based on equality rather than on hierarchy.

[54] The group was far more numerous back then than it is today.

Conclusion

This dissertation came into being in a rather turbulent period (by the standards of Central Europe in the 21st century). Relative peace and stability were first disrupted in March 2020 by the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, which has since radically altered people's daily lives and social relations across the planet. Less than two years later, on 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, adding to the turmoil. Besides their global fallout, the two events have wrought havoc in individuals' pursuits, also affecting my PhD project, especially as the time of strict social isolation in the first months of the pandemic was not propitious for doing certain kinds of research. However, this is not my major reason for referring to these global and more local developments. I cite them because, even though not all of their facets have had a direct bearing on the Wrocław-based community of Romanian Roma, they eloquently speak to social inequality in place, to the ways in which people of Romani origin are perceived, and to the mechanisms of Romaphobia persistent in our society.

Photos and footages of forlorn streets, squares, and parks are among the iconic images of the pandemic by now deeply imprinted in collective memory, since lockdowns were imposed as one of the basic methods for combating the spread of the disease, and citizens were prohibited to stir outdoors. If the level of social fear decreased in the course of time, and the epidemic restrictions were later eased to various degrees, March and April 2020 saw the public spaces of towns and cities like Wroclaw empty out. For some members of the Romanian Roma community, this entailed losing one of the basic forms of securing their livelihoods. Specifically, begging became either impossible or pointless, whereas begging had been made one of the few subsistence sources available to the Roma by the mechanisms of excluding Roma from the labor market (importantly bound up not only with their low skills or insufficient command of Polish but also with prejudice against them). As one of my Romani respondents says:

> I keep waiting for some job, but nothing's changed. I must go begging because I have two young children. They need food, Pampers, everything. My husband is deaf; he can't hear well. He doesn't have a job. We don't spend a lot on the rent, but what's left isn't enough to feed the kids. Adults know that there's nothing to eat, but a child won't understand this. We both go begging. On a Sunday, we earn 20, 50 or 100 zloty. Nothing's left of it the next day. I do no harm to anybody. I don't steal, I don't tug anyone, I don't cheat. I only ask for help. If I had a job, I wouldn't be doing that. And with the coronavirus, it's just nightmare. (W03)

With the citizens first banned from going out and then unwilling to leave their homes, urban spaces were deserted, which made it considerably more difficult for some Romani families to provide for themselves. One of my respondents recalls that, when talking with the community members about the practice of begging – particularly begging together with children – before the pandemic, she asked them to imagine the city without people, where there was nobody to ask for money. Back then, this request was treated as a joke, because before 2020 such a situation was unimaginable, probably not for the Roma alone. Importantly, people of Romani origin have long been stereotypically associated with an unhygienic lifestyle and, consequently, with spreading infectious diseases. This has been another factor making it difficult for them to find a job, especially during the coronavirus pandemic. Having no job and no money impairs their sense of dignity, and this effect is only exacerbated during and by begging. My respondents emphasize that asking strangers for money is a bare necessity and involves neither pleasure nor cunning, of which Roma tend to be accused by majority society.

In the context of the pandemic, the remote education of Romani children is another important aspect. Discussed in more detail in section 4.7, the problem pivoted on the fact that a considerable majority of Romani students did not have computers at home and were thus essentially barred from online lessons. Even if some teachers made worksheets for them to complete on their own, those were not an effective educational instrument because they often failed to be distributed among the children. When the students did get the worksheets, they were often unable to complete the assignments, and illiteracy or insufficient command of Polish prevented their parents from helping them with those tasks. At the same time, the students' progress was neither regularly monitored nor reliably verified, and they were as if by default allowed to pass to the next grade. As a result, many of them severely lag behind, which may become an extra difficulty and an excluding factor at the further schooling stages.

As for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022, although this situation does not directly involve the members of the Wrocław-based Romani community, it is implicated in prejudice against people of Romani origin. By May 2022, more than three million refugees had arrived in Poland from Ukraine. This population also included people of Romani origin. Various Polish non-governmental organizations and private individuals uninvolved in humanitarian aid on a daily basis immediately responded to the military conflict by extending help to those fleeing the dangers of war, and social solidarity with the oppressed soared unprecedentedly. Despite that, a division into more and less welcome refugees became visible right away. Along the Polish-Belarussian border, there is still a restricted zone where migrants from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran (including people running

away from war and persecution) are transported by border guards back into the forest. The activists who attempt to offer humanitarian aid to the people entrapped in the border zone are charged with engineering illegal border crossings, an offence punishable with up to eight years in prison. The reason for this disparity lies, according to the social activist Danuta Kuroń, in "systemic racism against those with improper skin color; all their rights are violated" (Rumieńczyk 2022). Racist behavior, including Romaphobia, against the migrants has been registered in interactions with refugees coming from Ukraine to Poland. For example, female Romani refugees have been expelled from a train station[55] at night for fear that they would steal from others; Ukrainian women have complained that Romnis "are dirty" and refused to stay in the same room with then; Romani refugees have been refused clothes donated by the public, because they allegedly "have already grabbed too much"; and refugees of Romani origin have been chased away from temporary accommodations ("I don't want any Gypsies here") (Mikulska 2022). As reported by Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska in an interview in *Gazeta Wyborcza*:

> The first signals that there was a problem came from the border. I was told that Roma had been driven away by volunteers from places where they could get some food or clothes. Their justification had been that the Roma would trade these clothes, like frying pans and carpets. The Roma were said to be taking too much food and clothes. I asked whether any Roma refugee had been seen selling donated clothes in the street. At most, I was told that a neighbor or a cousin had seen that happen or that nobody had actually seen it, but everybody knew what they were up to. When I wanted to find out what "too much" meant for somebody with a dozen kids, the conversation was over. (2022)

Another recurring justification cited for refusing help to Romani refugees from Ukraine was that they allegedly had lice (ibid.). There have also been rumors about Roma eating dog meat or massively stealing clothes from humanitarian aid stations (Mikulska 2022).[56] Emphatically, one is identified as being of Romani origin on the basis of one's appearance, primarily one's skin color. A similar pattern has emerged in relation to other non-white people fleeing from the war in Ukraine. They have been discriminated against at reception facilities and in queues to

[55] Temporary shelters and distribution points of food, clothes, and toiletries for Ukrainian refugees were established at train stations in multiple Polish towns and cities.

[56] The persistence of stereotypes of Roma in Poland is illustrated by a tweet of the President of the Republic of Poland Andrzeja Duda, who posted a video of a Ukrainian Romani man transporting a Russian tank by a tractor. Duda's own commentary, complete with smileys, was: "Roma from Kherson have stolen a tank from the Russians." The President chose not to write about a brave soldier snatching a tank away from the enemy troops, but about a Rom committing a theft (in line with the stereotype of Roma as thieves) (see https://twitter.com/AndrzejDuda/status/1497899381697257475?s=20&t=dvbkGJxY3B39Cq755w4LBw, access 8 May 2022).

trains (Mikulska, Rumieńczyk 2022). All such responses and incidents are signs of racism, which exists in Poland on several levels, starting from individuals' prejudices and ending with the systemic policies. Mechanisms at work vis-à-vis people of Romani origin can be best depicted as a specific form or racism known as Romaphobia. Aiden McGarry asserts that:

> [T]the key to understanding why Roma are marginalized across Europe lies in our conception of territory and space as well as in processes of identity construction and maintenance. This identity work includes European state nationalism as well as articulations of Roma identity and, importantly, the negative ascription of Roma identity by the majority. One example of the latter is the stereotype of Roma as itinerant "nomads" who have no home or fixed roots; this serves to justify their exclusion today because Roma are not regarded as "one of us." (2017, 252)

To make any sense of the manifestations of Romaphobia against the Romani war refugees from Ukraine, one should bear in mind McGarry's insight that Roma are not acknowledged as "one of us" or, in this case, as "one of Ukrainian refugees" and people in need of help. Nomadism, which has been attributed to Roma as their intrinsic feature for centuries, results in a failure of the social imagination to recognize them as people belonging to any nation-state. If they are Roma, they cannot be Ukrainians and, as such, they cannot "really" be running away from an armed conflict. The "otherness" of Roma is enhanced by their non-white skin hue and dark hair. It is by a glance at their looks that Romani people are classified as worse, dangerous, and unwanted. Crucially, as asserted by critical race theorists, race is a concept that is actually unrelated to genetics; rather, it is a social construct which is developed by people and can be instrumentalized in pursuit of several goals, including as part of the hegemonic game. The developments triggered by the war in Ukraine do not concern directly the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community, but they patently exemplify the operations of prejudice against people of Romani origin and highlight the scale of social inequality, which is not lifted even in as extreme a situation as fleeing a present danger to one's life caused by an escalating armed conflict in a neighbor country.

The time I spent researching for and producing my dissertation was marked by another important event. Though not as momentous for the entire world as the pandemic or the war in Ukraine, the staging of the work of the Polish-Romani artist Małgorzata Mirga-Tas at the Polish pavilion during the 59th Art Biennale in Venice marked a salient breakthrough as it was the first time in the Biennale's more than 120-year-long history that an artist of Romani origin had

represented a national pavilion.[57] The show was titled *Re-chanting the World* and was designed as “an attempt to inscribe Roma art in Polish art and in European iconography” (Reiter 2022). Mirga-Tas’s installation consists of twelve large-format textiles (corresponding to the twelve months of the year) in developing which she was inspired by the Renaissance frescoes at Ferrara’s Palazzo Schifanoia. The historic paintings contain three narratives; the top one concerns gods, the middle addresses astrology, and the bottom engages with the courtly life of the 15th century. Mirga-Tas “re-writes” these pictorial stories, filling them with scenes from the life of Roma. The top tier of her textiles presents the history of Roma migrations across Europe (and in doing so engages with and deconstructs Jacques Callot’s prints with their anti-Roma cliches) and pictures Romani mythology. The middle tier offers a her-storical perspective on the history of Roma, and the bottom tier illustrates the daily life of Roma in Czarna Góra (the artist’s hometown) and in other Romani settlements in the regions of Podhale and Spiš. In this way, the artwork brings the fresco images and the scenes created by Mirga-Tas into dialogue. The “re-enchanting” in its title is borrowed from Silvia Federici’s book *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (2019) and depicts a process that is hoped to “reverse the ill-fortune of the world, lift the bad spell from it, and help restore the sense of community, not only among people but also of people with animals, plants, and landscape” (Reiter 2022). In terms of the past and the present of Roma, the installation aspires to dispel anti-Roma prejudice and bring voice to Roma themselves by illuminating their history and their centuries-long and entirely legitimate (though strongly contested and erased) presence in Europe. Mirga-Tas’s work also demonstrates that Romani art is not easily confined in the category of folklore and should be exhibited in other venues than just ethnographic museums.[58]

Joanna Warsza, a co-curator of Mirga-Tas’s project in Venice, explains that:

> [T]hese pieces consist of elements that seem to be ill-matched, and it is through this mismatch that they add up to an amazing aesthetic cocktail. Just the way that different cultures that exist side by side with each other do. The point is not for us all to be the same and become a monolith; the point is for us to learn to come to an understanding and live together despite differences. (Mirga-Tas, Szymański, Warsza 2022)

[57] Notably, this year, the British pavilion is represented by a black female artist – Sonia Boyce – for the first time in history. This is genuinely astonishing, given that the UK has a long and storied colonial history (see Boyce 2022).

[58] For quite a while, Mirga-Tas was not invited to display her art at modern art galleries and only exhibited at ethnographic museums (Mirga-Tas, Szymański, Warsza 2022).

To my mind, this ties in with Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau's ideas of agonistic democracy and radical democracy. As observed by Leszek Koczanowicz in his introduction to the Polish edition of Mouffe's *The Democratic Paradox*:

> [A]gonistic democracy must go along with expanding the range of voices in political life. The more plurality there is, the more democracy there is; this is the fundamental tenet of radical democracy championed by Laclau and Mouffe. The concept gives a radicalized twist to liberalism by demanding that political life should be extended not only by including the classic social movements but also by recognizing the political legitimacy of movements representing previously underappreciated social groups. Such *politics of inclusion* will make democratic societies capable of coping with complicated problems of today's world. The more alternative voices there will be in the political sphere, the greater our chance to come up with proper solutions and the lesser risk that democratic institutions will only become a façade for the authoritarian management of social issues. (2005, 16).

Equality is not supposed to hinge on sameness. Ideal equality anyway cannot come to pass, as Mouffe and Laclau insist, since there will always be hegemonic forces becoming entangled in all kinds of games and interplays in which the essential principles of social identity construction are forged and reforged. Crucially, neither hegemonic configurations nor identity are ever given or fixed once and for all. They are susceptible to multiple shifts and changes. Will the display of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's work at the Polish pavilion incisively affect the position Roma take in the social world? Will it recast the way in which they are perceived by majority society? Will it significantly contribute to reducing their exclusion? Not likely. Nevertheless, it has already produced a shift in the small hegemonic field linked to art.

Similar questions can be asked in relation to the socio-educational programs implemented by the House of Peace Foundation and the Nomada Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society, which I have examined in this dissertation. The programs are not macro-scale undertakings and their interventions do no trigger a universal revolution, but they "are there." They are imperfect and sometimes their actions result in another exclusion, because they inevitably perhaps represent a miniature of the world in which hegemonic play is constantly unfolding and identities engage in relations and clash with each other in discursive space. The programs will not alter the situation of the Romanian Roma in Wrocław within a single project timeframe, as they attempt to redraw the lines of the centuries-long exclusion of this group, which result from the long-standing operations of power while at the same time they themselves are not beyond the reach of this power. However, to reiterate, they "are there." The

reasons why they are there vary from top-down to bottom-up factors. They had better continue to be there, improving themselves and promoting the development of pluralism, because the democratic world will not survive without it.

SYNOPSIS OF THE DISSERTATION IN POLISH

Streszczenie rozprawy doktorskiej

Moja dysertacja dotyczy społeczności Romów rumuńskich, którzy we Wrocławiu mieszkają od lat 90. XX wieku. Grupę tą nazwać można radykalnie zmarginalizowaną – idzie tu o wykluczenie związane z szeregiem czynników, m.in. z pochodzeniem, kolorem skóry, odmiennością języka, niskim poziomem wyedukowania, ubóstwem. W dodatku, obciążeni są oni licznymi uprzedzeniami funkcjonującymi w polskim społeczeństwie. Wykorzystując pojęcia takie jak merytokracja, hegemonia, emancypacja, a także założenia teorii tdyskursu i teorii demokracji agonistycznej czy osiągnięcia teoretyczne z zakresu krytycznej teorii rasy i nurtu *public pedagogy*, pragnę poddać krytycznej analizie działania edukacyjne na rzecz Romów rumuńskich podejmowane przez dwie wrocławskie organizacje pozarządowe: Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Integracji Społeczeństwa Wielokulturowego Nomada oraz Fundację Dom Pokoju. Zatem pytanie badawcze, na które poszukiwałam odpowiedzi w ramach przeprowadzonego procesu badawczego brzmi: w jaki sposób w prowadzonych przez wyżej wymienione NGO programach edukacyjno-społecznych adresowanych do wrocławskiej społeczności Romów rumuńskich odbijają się stosunki władzy i układy hegemoniczne? Celem dysertacji jest w związku z tym przedstawienie sposobów, w jakie kształtowane są owe działania tworzone na rzecz grup mniejszościowych, zmarginalizowanych, a także skutków, jakie mogą one wywoływać, zwłaszcza w kontekście istniejących w świecie społecznym nierówności i stosunków hegemonicznych.

Rozważane przeze mnie kwestie dotyczące nierówności i edukacji mają swe odniesienia nie tylko w przypadku tej grupy. Pytania o pozostawanie na peryferiach (tutaj: fizycznie w przestrzeni, językowo w komunikacji, kulturowo w zachowaniach, społecznie w relacjach, majątkowo w wymiarze warunków bytowych, politycznie w zakresie sprawczości) systemów demokratycznych zadawać można w kontekście innych społeczności zmarginalizowanych – ze względu na rasę, etnos, religię, status ekonomiczny czy pochodzenie.

Rozdziały I oraz II poświęciłam przybliżeniu podstaw teoretyczno-metodologicznych niniejszej rozprawy doktorskiej. Pierwsza część dotyczy założeń teorii dyskursu, refleksji na temat demokracji agonistycznej oraz jednego z nurtów pedagogiki krytycznej określanego mianem *public pedagogy*. Przyjmuję założenie, iż świat społeczny tworzony jest za pomocą języka, bowiem nie może zaistnieć ani myśl, ani czyn, które nie zostały z jego pomocą nazwane. Język jest wytwarzany społecznie, aktywnie przyczynia się do kształtowania świata

społecznego, nie postrzegam go zatem jako abstrakcyjnego systemu znaków. W kontekście namysłu nad teorię dyskursu jako jedne z najważniejszych koncepcji wskazuje się m.in. te stworzone przez Michela Foucaulta (1972), Jürgena Habermasa (1999; 2005) czy Ernesto Laclau i Chantal Mouffe (2007). Refleksja autorstwa ostatnich z wymienionych tu myślicieli w kontekście mojej dysertacji jawi się jako oferująca najciekawsze możliwości interpretacyjne. Zdaniem belgijsko-argentyńskiego duetu teoretyków rzeczywistość społeczna wytwarza się właśnie w dyskursie. W tej perspektywie na dyskurs nie składają się jedynie elementy językowe, ale i pozajęzykowe, a sam język nie jest sferą autonomiczną – podlega wpływom społecznym. Jest społecznie wytwarzany i zmienny w zależności od momentu historycznego, obszaru geograficznego, społeczeństwa, kultury itp. Zatem sensy i znaczenia nie są wyznaczane odgórnie i na zawsze. W Rozdziale I odnoszę się również do założeń koncepcji demokracji agonistycznej i demokracji radykalnej. Zgodnie z tą perspektywą konflikty w świecie społecznym są nieuchronne i nie stanowią świadectwa kryzysu (Mouffe 2005). Napięcia między przeciwnikami nie doprowadzają do zachwiania systemu. Gdy przyjmujemy, że jedynym możliwym środkiem do osiągnięcia stabilności i dobrobytu jest doprowadzenie do konsensusu, to zawsze umniejszamy interesom tej czy innej grupy. Spór nie jest w tym kontekście nacechowany w sposób negatywy. Stanowi on nieodłączną część życia społecznego. W perspektywie Mouffe i Laclau podstawą oraz warunkiem demokracji jest pluralizm.

Ostatnią część Rozdziału I poświęciłam jednemu z nurtów pedagogiki krytycznej – *public pedagogy*. Odnoszę się w niej do refleksji stworzonej przez Henry'ego Giroux (2000; 2004) czy Gerta Biestę (2011; 2012). Istotne są tutaj dla mnie kwestie związane ze związkami pomiędzy politycznością a edukacją, a także sferą publiczną. W tym fragmencie pracy przybliżyłam również koncepcję emancypacji według Biesty (2008), która zasadza się na zerwaniu z koncepcją podziału na emancypatora i emancypującego się.

Druga część dysertacji dotyczy pojęcia merytokracji, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem jego krytyki, a także krytycznej teorii rasy oraz jej zastosowania w zakresie refleksji nad edukacją. Zgodnie z merytokratycznym sposobem myślenia kluczowe dla osiągnięcia wysokiej pozycji społecznej (ale też sukcesu w sensie ekonomicznym) jest posiadanie dobrego wykształcenia (poświadczonego odpowiednimi świadectwami, dyplomami, certyfikatami). Zatem życiowe powodzenie jednostki ma być niezależne od jej pochodzenia, koloru skóry, płci itp. Zależeć ma jednak od odebranej edukacji. Zdaniem krytyków merytokracji (Littler 2018; McNamee, Miller 2009) takie założenie prowadzi do normalizacji nierówności społecznych, a także do prześlepiania ich systemowego charakteru.

Krytyka merytokracji jest również istotna w kontekście krytycznej teorii rasy. W części Rozdziału II poświęconej KTR odnoszę się do inspiracji teoretycznych stanowiących podwalinę tego nurtu, a także przybliżam kierunki jego rozwoju (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Delgado, Stefancic 2001; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman 2011). Jest to obszar refleksji konstruowany przede wszystkim w odniesieniu do społeczeństwa amerykańskiego, jednak wiele z jego założeń ma charakter uniwersalny i może znaleźć swe odniesienia poza Stanami Zjednoczonymi. Badacze KTR kategorię rasy traktują jako konstrukt społeczny stworzony przez ludzi, który może zostać użyty do realizacji wielu celów, również w trakcie prowadzenia hegemonicznej gry. Nie dochodzi więc tutaj do łączenia rasy z genetyką czy biologią. Krytyczni teoretycy rasy zwracają uwagę, iż podziały społeczne są konstruowane na podstawie różnic pomiędzy aktorami społecznymi na podstawie cech takich jak kolor skóry, włosów, budowa ciała, kształt nosa, oczu itp. Dla przedstawicieli KTR kluczowe jest demaskowanie ukrytych mechanizmów zakorzenionych w instytucjach władzy, przyczyniających się do podtrzymywania i pogłębiania nierówności rasowych. Jednym z głównych obszarów zainteresowań naukowców reprezentujących przywoływany tutaj nurt jest edukacja. Przejawów systemowych nierówności wytworzonych w oparciu o kategorię rasy poszukują oni pośród zagadnień takich jak program szkolny, system oceny czy desegregacja. Pod koniec Rozdziału II odnoszę się również do rasistowskich mechanizmów funkcjonujących w szkołach Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej wobec mniejszości romskiej.

Rozdział III niniejszej dysertacji poświęciłam przybliżeniu sytuacji społeczno-politycznej Romów ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem społeczności Romów rumuńskich zamieszkującej we Wrocławiu od końca XX wieku. Odnoszę się w nim nie tylko do historii tej grupy, ale też do kwestii rozmaitych kalek kulturowych i stereotypów przypisanych na przestrzeni wieków członkom tej grupy. Korzystam przy tym z dorobku naukowców identyfikujących się z nurtem *critical romani studies* (Kledzik, Pawełczyk 2014; Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2014; McGarry 2017). Proponuję alternatywny (wobec tradycyjnej romologii) sposób opisywania historycznego rodowodu Romów, zastanawiam się nad kwestią przypisywania osobom pochodzenia romskiego zestawu cech mieszczących się w określeniu „romskość", a także przybliżam zjawisko romofobii, które przez Aidena McGarry'ego nazywane jest „ostatnią akceptowalną formą rasizmu" (2017). Wskazuję też na źródła współczesnej sytuacji społeczno-politycznej Romów rumuńskich, które tkwią w setkach lat stosowania wobec tej grupy różnorakich form przemocy (od rozmaitych wykluczeń systemowych aż po formy tak skrajne jak *Porajmos* czy przymusowa sterylizacja).

Ostatnie części przywoływanego tu rozdziału poświęciłam przedstawieniu historii grup romskich przybywających z rumuńskich miejscowości do Wrocławia. Odnoszę się zatem do deportacji (miały one miejsce w latach 90.), nielegalnej likwidacji romskiego osiedla przy ul. Paprotnej, w następstwie czego członkowie wrocławskiej społeczności złożyli skargę do Europejskiego Trybunału Praw Człowieka, a także procesu sądowego dotyczącego eksmisji z baraków przy ul. Kamieńskiego oraz jego ostateczną rozbiórkę w związku z prowadzonym przez Fundację Dom Pokoju „Programem na rzecz Romów i Romni rumuńskich – mieszkańców i mieszkanek Wrocławia".

Ostatni rozdział (IV) powstał w oparciu o dane zebrane w ramach prowadzonych przeze mnie badań empirycznych. Zawarłam w nim próbę analizy i interpretacji narracji zawartych w 10 wywiadach częściowo-ustrukturyzowanych, które przeprowadziłam z przedstawicielami wrocławskiej społeczności Romów rumuńskich oraz z obecnymi lub dawnymi członkami/pracownikami dwóch organizacji pozarządowych: Fundacji Dom Pokoju i Stowarzyszenia Na Rzecz Integracji Społeczeństwa Wielokulturowego Nomada. Zgromadzone podczas rozmów dane uzupełniłam o informacje zawarte w publikacjach wydanych przez wyżej wymienione NGO. W tej części pracy charakteryzuję również przyjęte przeze mnie techniki badawcze, a także odnoszę się do profilu działalności Stowarzyszenia Nomada i Fundacji Dom Pokoju. W Rozdziale IV poddaję krytycznej analizie cele programów adresowanych do społeczności Romów rumuńskich, które realizują obie intersujące mnie organizacje. Przybliżam również metody pracy ze społecznością romską przez nie wykorzystywane, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem metody *housing first* oraz asystentury, a także przedstawiam genezę „Programu na rzecz Romów i Romni rumuńskich – mieszkańców i mieszkanek Wrocławia" prowadzonego przez FDP. W sposób krytyczny odnoszę się do zjawiska „projektozy", które polega na wprowadzaniu logiki funkcjonowania rynku do prowadzonych przez m.in. organizacje pozarządowe przedsięwzięć o charakterze społecznym, edukacyjnym, kulturalnym. Ostatnia część IV Rozdziału dotyczy kwestii związanych z edukacyjnymi doświadczeniami młodych Romów. Odnoszę się w niej nie tylko do procesu związanego z uzyskiwaniem przez romskie dzieci możliwości realizowania przysługującego im prawa do edukacji w szkołach publicznych, ale też do formuły zajęć edukacyjnych prowadzonych na ich rzecz przez członków Stowarzyszenia Nomada. Analiza wszystkich przywoływanych tutaj zagadnień służy próbie zauważenia i zrozumienia istniejących w świecie społecznym układów hegemonicznych, systemowych nierówności oraz wykluczeń, a także wizji dotyczących „prawidłowego" funkcjonowania jednostek we współczesnym – demokratycznym, kapitalistycznym – społeczeństwie.

SYNOPSIS OF THE DISSERTATION IN ENGLISH

Synopsis of the Dissertation

My dissertation focuses on the community of Romanian Roma who have lived in Wrocław since the 1990s. This community is best described as a radically marginalized group susceptible to exclusion due to a combination of multiple factors, such as their descent, skin color, language difference, low education level, and poverty. Additionally, members of this community are exposed to numerous prejudices entrenched in Polish society. I employ the concepts of meritocracy, hegemony, and emancipation and build on discourse theory, the theory of agonistic democracy, and the insights of critical race theory and public pedagogy in order to critically analyze educational interventions for the Romanian Roma carried out by two Wrocław-based non-governmental organizations: the Nomada Association for the integration of Multicultural Society (Polish: Stowarzyzenie na Rzecz Integracji Społeczeństwa Wielokulturowego Nomada) and the House of Peace Foundation. The research question that I have constructed is: how are the power and hegemonic relations reflected in the socio-educational interventions for the Wrocław-Based Romanian Roma Community conducted by the above-mentioned NGOs? The aim of the dissertation is therefore to present the ways in which these programs are shaped for minority, marginalized groups, and the effects that they may cause, especially in the context of inequalities and hegemonic relations existing in the social world.

The issues of inequality and education that I predominantly address are not specific to this population group alone. Questions around relegation to a peripheral position in democratic systems (physically in space, linguistically in communication, culturally in modes of conduct, socially in relations, economically in living conditions, and politically in agency) are also relevant to other communities face marginalization as a result of their race, ethnos, religion, economic status, and or origin.

In Chapters One and Two, I depict the theoretical underpinnings and methodological toolbox of my dissertation. The first one outlines the ideas of discourse theory, recounts considerations around agonistic democracy, and highlights a movement within critical pedagogy that has been labeled as public pedagogy. My reasoning is founded on the assumption that the social world is produced through language, because neither a thought nor an action can take place without being named in language. Because language is socially produced and actively contributes to the formation of the social world, I do not regard it as an abstract system

of signs. In terms of discourse theory, I fundamentally rely on the concepts developed by Michel Foucault (1972), Jürgen Habermas (1999; 2005), and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2007). Laclau and Mouffe's framework is actually the most productive of insightful interpretations in the context of my dissertation. The Belgian-Argentinian duo of theorists insist that social reality is produced in and through discourse. In their definition, discourse comprises both linguistic and non-linguistic elements, with language itself not being an autonomous sphere, as it is subject to social influences. More precisely, language is socially produced, and it changes depending on the historical moment, geographical area, social organization, cultural formation, etc. Consequently, senses and meanings are neither predetermined nor imposed top-down, nor given once and for all. In Chapter One, I also refer to the ideas of agonistic democracy and radical democracy, which contend that, rather than being symptoms of crisis, conflicts are an intrinsic part of the social world (Mouffe 2005). Tensions between or among opponents do not unsettle the system. Actually, by accepting the notion that stability and prosperity are premised on consensus, we inevitably impair the interests of one group or another. In this context, conflict is not a negative phenomenon. Rather, it inheres in social life. In Mouffe and Laclau's view, democracy is founded and hinges on pluralism.

In the last part of Chapter One, I present public pedagogy as part of a broader development of critical pedagogy. I build on the insights of Henry Giroux (2000; 2004) and Gert Biesta (2011; 2012), essentially focusing on the public sphere and on the interrelations of the political and education. This section of the dissertation also dwells on Biesta's (2008) concept of emancipation, which is stems from the repudiation of the distinction between the emancipator and the one being emancipated.

The second part of my dissertation centers on the concept and, in particular, critique of meritocracy and on critical race theory and its uses in the study of education. In the meritocratic model of thinking, good education (confirmed by recognizable credentials, such as certificates, diplomas, and degrees) is a key to achieving a prominent social position (as well as economic success). Given this, whether an individual "makes it" in life or not is supposed to be unrelated by his/her social background, skin color, gender, etc. Education is considered to be the only factor that matters in this respect. According to the critics of meritocracy (Littler 2018; McNamee, Miller 2009), such a standpoint results in the normalization of social inequality and obscures its systemic nature.

The critique of meritocracy is also salient in the context of critical race theory. In the section of Chapter Two where I discuss CRT, I revisit its foundational theoretical inspirations and sketch the ways in which it has developed (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Delgado, Stefancic 2001;

Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman 2011). Although critical race theory was founded and primarily expanded as a field of inquiry pertaining to American society, many of its ideas are universal and applicable to processes unfolding outside the U.S. CRT researchers view race as a human-produced social construct that can be harnessed in the pursuit of multiple goals, including negotiations within the hegemonic game. While critical race theorists do not link race to genetics and biology, they highlight the fact that social divisions are constructed on the basis of differences between social actors defined in terms of skin color, type of hair, physique, shape of the nose, eyes, etc. The practitioners of CRT are crucially committed to exposing the latent mechanisms rooted in the institutions of power that contribute to maintaining and worsening racial inequality. Among the various fields and processes that lie within the orbit of the interest of CRT scholars, education is counted as a key area. Symptoms and manifestations of race-based systemic inequality are traced, for example, in curricula, assessment system, and desegregation practices. Towards the end of Chapter II, I also address racist mechanisms targeting Roma minorities in the school systems of East and Central Europe.

Chapter Three of my dissertation is devoted to the socio-political situation of Roma, depicting which I focus on the Romanian Roma community that has been living in Wrocław since the end of the 20th century. My depiction offers a short overview of the history of this group and glimpses into an array of cultural cliches and stereotypes that have sprung up and amassed around its members over centuries. In doing this, I build on the findings of researchers affiliated with critical Romani studies (Kledzik, Pawełczyk 2014; Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2014; McGarry 2017). I offer is an alternative to the approach that traditional Romology adopts relating the historical genesis of Roma, reflect on the ascription of a set of features covered by the umbrella term of "Roma-ness" to people of Romani origin, and look into the phenomenon of "Romaphobia," which Aiden McGarry regards as "the last acceptable form of racism" (2017). I also point to the causes of the contemporary socio-political situation of Romanian Roma, which is bound up with their centuries-long experience of violence, ranging from various systemic exclusions to such extreme brutalization as forced sterilization and the Porajmos.

In the last part of Chapter Three, I sketch the history of the Roma groups that came from Romania to Wrocław. I relate their deportations (in the 1990s), the illegal dismantling of a Roma settlement in Paprotna Str., which resulted in the lawsuit filed by the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community to the European Court of Human Rights, and a court case concerning the eviction of the Roma from the Kamieńskiego barracks, which were finally demolished in connection with the House of Peace Foundation's "Program for Romanian Roms and Romnis, the Residents of Wrocław."

Chapter Four is based on the data generated in the empirical research I carried out. The chapter analyzes and interprets narratives contained in the ten semi-structured interviews I conducted with members of the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community and the current and former members/workers of two NGOs: the House of Peace Foundation and the Nomada Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society. The data collected in these interviews are combined with the information derived from publications released by these two NGOs. In this section of my dissertation, I also depict the research techniques I employed and describe the general pursuits of the Nomada Association and the House of Peace Foundation. Further, I offer a critical analysis of the goals inscribed in the programs for the Romanian Roma community implemented by these two organizations. I describe their methods of work with the Roma community, whereby I especially attend to the housing-first method and family assistance, as well as recounting the genesis of the "Program for Romanian Roms and Romnis, the Residents of Wrocław" launched by the House of Peace Foundation. In my explorations, I critically assess the phenomenon known as "projectosis," which involves transferring the market logic into social, educational, and cultural ventures undertaken by, among other actors, NGOs. In the last part of Chapter Four, I address issues related to the educational experiences of the young Roma. I provide an account of the educational program for the Romani children conducted by members of the Nomada Association and relate the process which made it possible for the youngsters to use their right to education. My inquiry into these issues and developments is geared to identifying and understanding the hegemonic relations, systemic inequality, and exclusions at work in the social world and to revealing how the "correct" involvement of individuals in today's society – a democratic and capitalist one – is envisioned.

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