

**Roma Activism**  
**Reimagining Power and Knowledge**

## **ROMANI STUDIES**

Edited by Sam Beck, Cornell University

In the course of the twenty-first century, Europe has become aware that the Roma are its largest minority, with an estimated population of eleven million people. As a result, Romani Studies has emerged as an interdisciplinary field that offers perspectives derived from the humanities and social sciences in the context of state and transnational institutions. One of its aims is to remove the stigma surrounding Roma scholarship, to engage with the controversies regarding Roma identity and, in this way, counter anti-Roma racism.

Volume 1

**ROMA ACTIVISM: REIMAGINING POWER AND KNOWLEDGE**

Edited by Sam Beck and Ana Ivasiuc

# ROMA ACTIVISM

## Reimagining Power and Knowledge



*Edited by*  
Sam Beck and Ana Ivasiuc



berghahn  
NEW YORK • OXFORD  
[www.berghahnbooks.com](http://www.berghahnbooks.com)

First published in 2018 by  
Berghahn Books  
www.berghahnbooks.com

© 2018 Sam Beck and Ana Ivasiuc

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, no part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without written permission of the publisher.

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Beck, Sam, editor of compilation. | Ivasiuc, Ana, editor of compilation.  
Title: Roma Activism: Reimagining Power and Knowledge / edited by Sam Beck and Ana Ivasiuc.  
Description: First edition. | New York: Berghahn Books, 2018 | Includes bibliographical references and index.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2018015940 (print) | LCCN 2018027671 (ebook) | ISBN 9781785339493 (eBook) | ISBN 9781785339486 (hardback: alk. paper)  
Subjects: LCSH: Romanies—Politics and government. | Romanies—Social conditions.  
Classification: LCC DX145 (ebook) | LCC DX145 .R587 2018 (print) | DDC 305.8914/97—dc23  
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018015940>

#### **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-78533-948-6 hardback  
ISBN 978-1-78533-949-3 ebook

*We dedicate this volume to Nicolae Gheorghe, the work he accomplished, and all the people he inspired to shape a positive Roma identity and to carry on advancing their emancipation.*



**FIGURE 0.1.** Nicolae Gheorghe interviewing a *Romungro* in 1979. Photo by Sam Beck.



# CONTENTS



List of Illustrations	ix
List of Abbreviations	x
Preface <i>Sam Beck</i>	xii
Introduction. Renewing Research and Romani Activism <i>Ana Ivasiuc</i>	1
PART I. RENEWING METHODS, RENEWING SITES	
Chapter 1. Neoliberalism and the Spirit of Nongovernmentalism: Toward an Anthroposociology of Roma-Related Engagement and Activism <i>Huub van Baar</i>	25
Chapter 2. Emotions and Procedures: Contradictions of Early Romani Activism in a Postconflict Intervention <i>Ana Chirițoiu</i>	45
Chapter 3. Encounters at the Margins: Activism and Research in Romani Studies in Postsocialist Romania <i>László Fosztó</i>	65
PART II. RENEWING EPISTEMOLOGIES	
Chapter 4. Paradigm Shift and Romani Studies: Research “on” or “for” and “with” the Roma <i>Andrew Ryder</i>	91

Chapter 5. Transgressing Borders: Challenging Racist and Sexist Epistemology <i>Angéla Kóczé</i>	111
Chapter 6. Alter-Narratives: Seeing Ordinary Agency <i>Ana Ivasiuc</i>	129
PART III. RENEWING ACTIVISMS	
Chapter 7. Policy Input on the Front Line: Dilemmas of the Ethical Academic <i>Margaret Greenfields</i>	153
Chapter 8. Between Global Solidarity and National Belonging: The Politics of Inclusion for <i>Romanlar</i> in Turkey <i>Danielle V. Schoon</i>	174
Chapter 9. “Be Young, Be Roma”: Modern Roma Youth Activism in the Current Panorama of Romani Affairs <i>Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka</i>	197
Index	218



# ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 0.1. Nicolae Gheorghe interviewing a <i>Romungro</i> in 1979	v
Figure 3.1. Nicolae Gheorghe during the event organized by the RIRNM in January 2011	78
Map 3.1. The locations of the events described in the chapter	71

# ABBREVIATIONS



ACDR	The Civic Democratic Alliance of the Roma (Romania)
AKP	Justice and Development Party (Turkey)
ANR	Romanian National Agency for the Roma
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CHP	Republican Peoples' Party (Turkey)
CoE	Council of Europe
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAHR	Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania
EANRS	European Academic Network of Romani Studies
EC	European Commission
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EdRom	Edirne Roman Association
ERGO	European Roma Grassroots Organizations (Network)
ERIAC	European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture
ERPC	European Roma Policy Coalition
ERRC	European Roma Rights Centre
ERTF	European Roma and Travellers Forum
ESF	European Social Funds
EU	European Union
EUJS	European Union of Jewish Students
EVS	European Voluntary Service
FBO	Faith-Based Organization

FER	Ethnic Roma Federation
FLAS	Foreign Language and Area Studies
FSG	Fundación Secretariado Gitano
GLS	Gypsy Lore Society
FERYP	Forum of European Roma Young People
GRO	Grassroots Organization
HDP	Peoples' Democratic Party (Turkey)
HVIM	Hungarian Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IGO	International Governing Organization
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IREX	International Research and Exchanges Board
IRU	International Romani Union
IST	Institute of Turkish Studies
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party (Turkey)
MS	Member State(s)
NCCD	National Council for Combating Discrimination (Romania)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NISR	Netherlands Institute for Sinti and Roma
NRIS	National Roma Integration Strategies
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSI	Open Society Institute
PKK	Kurdistan Worker's Party
QUANGO	Quasi-autonomous Non-Governmental Organization
REF	Roma Education Fund
RIRNM	Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities
TOKI	Turkey's Housing Administration
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

# PREFACE

*Sam Beck*



This book was imagined in Bucharest, when I was invited to participate in a conference organized by the Roma Cultural Museum in Bucharest in 2014, “Roma Policies in Romania: Between Ethnicity and Social Vulnerability; The Perspectives of Nicolae Gheorghe.” This is where I met Ana Ivasiuc, and where we discussed the importance of Roma activism and scholarship in light of controversies regarding the viability of Roma as scholars, and of activism in scholarship. We held strong views about the importance of demonstrating that the Roma were actively engaged in their struggle for recognition as scholars and in their leadership and participation in Roma liberation, resisting the powerful pressures to give up their identities no matter how they are manifested, and fighting for their dignity.

Among the individuals who come to mind who entered this struggle, Nicolae Gheorghe managed to play important roles, mediating between the political controls of Romanian communism and those of Roma groups he sought to embolden, and daring to explore their unification in the 1970s, when I was carrying out field research in Transylvania. My relationship with Romania was limited as my ability to enter the country ended (Beck 1992b), my academic career choices narrowed, and I adapted to the changing environment.

I met Nicolae Gheorghe during my first two years of doctoral research on the history and political economy of an upland Romanian community (1974–76), supported by the anthropology department of the University of Massachusetts and the International Relations and Exchanges Board (IREX). At that time, I knew him as a sociologist and a student of Romanian sociologist Henri Stahl, himself of Dimitrie Gusti’s Bucharest School of Sociology. My relationship with him intensified when I was alone in the field carrying out postdoctoral research (1978–80) during my second lengthy

stay in Romania. My research, supported by IREX, investigated economic specialization in Țara Făgărașului, a valley system whose ethnic Romanian population was studied by the Bucharest School of Sociology.

After inviting him to Șercaia, where I had a room with a German Saxon family, Nicolae came to visit me often, and I visited him in Bucharest. He was tall, dark skinned, black haired, and always talking fast and furious, with great passion and intellectual urgency. We had long, intense discussions about the history, culture, and future of the Roma. He taught me about the Roma and confided in me his own struggles of identity. I was stimulated by his ideas and wanted to support his efforts to create a language he could use not only to describe the Roma, the various conditions in which they were living, and the diversity of identities they held, but also, and in some ways more pressing, to reform the Roma into a cohesive body that could challenge the state to gain the rights and integrity of other Romanian citizens and to improve their lives. While the Roma were the largest non-Romanian ethnic group in the country, they had no unity. Many of the groups did not even identify as Roma. This was a particularly important point; it was a matter of developing and increasing not only Roma self-identity, but also the recognition assigned to this population by the state as a co-inhabiting nationality, a Romanian minority. The vast majority of Roma were living in abject poverty without access to resources to change this condition. We discussed the plight of African Americans and Native Americans for comparison.

The more I learned, the more I wanted to know. Yet, I was aware even in those early times that to understand the Roma, I also had to understand the social and political-economic environments in which they were situated. Romanian regions differed socioculturally. How Roma were integrated within each region by occupation, by their self-ascribed identity, the identity ascribed by other ethnic groups, their relationships with the other groups in which they were enmeshed, and their relationship with the state—this was the puzzle I was seeking to understand. My work still focused on regional economic specialization from a historical perspective as I gained a deeper understanding of the various social groups in interaction with each other.

I am forever grateful to Nicolae Gheorghe for pulling me into the study of the Roma, but even more so for modeling a kind of activist/advocacy research that I sought to implement in the United States ever since. It is a kind of research we now call public or engaged anthropology/sociology. I found refreshing the work Gheorghe was doing, not just collecting data, not just generating information to be used for writing an ethnographic research report for consumption by others with similar academic interests, not just another entry in a curriculum vitae for career and professional advancement, but perhaps accomplishing all these things while also making a contribution to the people engaged through research; he was making a difference

in people's lives. The research had a purpose beyond scholarship. From this perspective, one may say that his influence continues to inspire activist academics well beyond the boundaries of Romania, where he was born, or Europe, where he carried out his activity. This powerful thought motivated us to dedicate this volume to his memory.

For some, engaged anthropology is not perceived as an academic activity at all because it is seen as a role assumed by anthropologists using academic knowledge outside academia. For others, engaged anthropology cannot be scientific because it is not neutral or value free. This is a shortsighted position because it ignores the important contribution made by feminist theory and the use of situated knowledge production and standpoint epistemology. With a few exceptions, non-Roma men have dominated Romani studies. We hope that our volume helps in bringing about change.

Engaged anthropology takes a moral stance. Engaged anthropology is not biased because it takes a social justice position. It takes advantage of this position. When playing an engaged role, the anthropologist takes a critical stand because the intent of the research, besides producing knowledge—translating and making understandable the “strange” and “different”—is to work with people to improve their lives and participate with them as allies in their struggles. This is about identifying the conditions, processes, and forces that produce unequal power relations and disparities. This is about not accepting ideological hegemonies. It is about challenging inequities and injustices. It is about activism. It is about working with the marginalized and vulnerable people in society and bringing the research back to them in an effort to improve their lives. It is about active participation in political work to promote human rights, the right to work and to earn a livable wage, the right to housing, the right to education, the right to healthcare; it is about human rights.

I was inspired by Nicolae Gheorghe, and, as I returned to the United States from carrying out research in Romania, I dedicated myself to exploring how to resolve the contradictions involved in carrying out anthropological research and being an activist in my own society (Beck 1992a). While Gheorghe focused on the particular people with whom he identified and in whose name he entered the struggle, I entered the struggle for liberation by focusing on oppressed people in my own society, who were seeking to alter their life condition, dignity, and justice. Decades-long efforts in anthropology to make scholarship public and engaged are now legitimized and led me to publish accounts to support such work (Beck and Maida 2013; Beck and Maida 2015).

This book is about research and Roma activism. I am grateful to the contributors who have added to the growing efforts of an engaged academy ready to raise into greater prominence the civil and human rights struggle

in which modern day Roma are leading the charge. More broadly speaking, the contributors of this volume bring to wider attention the plight of the largest ethnic minority of Europe as one of the more marginalized people of the globe living under regimes of oppression. Too often, oppressed people are characterized as victims who must rely on government or outsiders to liberate them. It is time to recognize that even when people are positioned in contexts of poverty, or subjugated politically, economically, and spatially—all ways that oppressed people are held in place—they have the strength and will to resist and struggle for their own liberation. Outsiders have a role, if they are ready and able to contribute, but only as allies.

I am immensely grateful to Ana Ivasiuc, who has played a central and critical role in producing this volume. Her enthusiasm for this project has brought it to conclusion even when we lost contributors and had to replace them in short order and when each of us had to deal with personal matters that held us up and delayed our work. Our contributors have been extraordinarily patient as has our publisher, Marion Berghahn, whose support has been unwavering. Our editors at Berghahn, Lynn Otto and Elizabeth Martinez, have been a great support. We are grateful to all of them.

**Sam Beck** is the former director of the New York City Urban Semester Program and the current director of the Practicing Medicine Program at the College of Human Ecology of Cornell University. An anthropologist whose research interests focus on intergroup relations, liberatory forms of education, and activism among vulnerable populations, Beck has carried out fieldwork in Iran, Yugoslavia, Romania, Austria, Germany, and the United States. With Carl Maida, he edited *Toward Engaged Anthropology* (2013) and *Public Anthropology in a Borderless World* (2015).

## **Sam Beck's Roma-Related Publications and Preface References**

- Beck, Sam. 1979. "Transylvania: The Political Economy of a Frontier." Ph.D. dissertation. University of Massachusetts Amherst.
- . 1989. "The Origin of Gypsy Slavery." *Dialectical Anthropology* 14: 53–61.
- . 1991a. "Toward a Civil Society." *Socialism and Democracy* 13: 135–154.
- . 1991b. "Contested Space: The Symbolic Nature of the Romanian Revolution in 1990." Working Papers on Transitions from State Socialism: Cornell 6 Project on Comparative Institutional Analysis; Center for International Studies, Cornell University.

- . 1991c. "What Brought Romanians to Revolt." *Critique of Anthropology* 11 (1): 7–31.
- . 1992a. *Manny Almeida's Ringside Lounge: The Cape Verdeans' Struggle for Their Neighborhood*. Providence, RI: GAVEA-Brown.
- . 1992b. "Persona Non Grata: Ethnicity and Romanian Nationalism." In *Dialectical Anthropology: Essays Presented to Stanley Diamond*, edited by Christine Gailey, 118–145. University of Florida Press.
- . 1993. "Racism and the Formation of a Romani Ethnic Leader." In *Perilous States: Conversations on Culture, Politics and Nation*, edited by George E. Marcus, 165–186. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Beck, Sam, and Carl A. Maida, eds. 2013. *Toward Engaged Anthropology*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- , eds. 2015. *Public Anthropology in a Borderless World*. New York: Berghahn Books.



## INTRODUCTION



# RENEWING RESEARCH AND ROMANI ACTIVISM

*Ana Ivasiuc*

### Unlearned Lessons

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Reflexivity as Practice: Arguments and Dialogues**

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

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

### *Renewing Methods, Renewing Sites*

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