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'Even if we are Roma, we are clean, respectful, and always went to school': Analysing the types, functions, and meanings of capitals that shape the upward educational mobility path of Roma in Romania

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Abstract

The aim of the present research is to analyse how some Roma in Romania become educationally mobile. Based on the cultural wealth model and the constructivist approaches to ethnicity and scholarship in relation to cultural racism, I intended to take stock of the forms of capital Roma persons make use of when ascending. I considered that the narrative type of interviews could be a successful means of generating a better understanding of the meaning and functioning of capitals.

Narratives inform us that the same type of capital may appear in different forms: family capital may denote not 'just' the transmission of the importance of education to children but protection from racial insults, too. Institutional agents (as sources of social capital acquisition) – despite their good will – may equally facilitate the inclusion of and reproduce unequal racial categorization.

Behaving differently, in opposition to the stereotypes associated with the Roma (low educational attainment, early marriage, poverty), is a conscious choice that may help many of the Roma to resist racial attacks.

Keywords: Roma in Romania; upward educational mobility; cultural wealth model

1 Introduction

Reasons for the low educational attainment (and persisting economic disadvantages) of the European Roma have been a major focus for contemporary scholarship. However, relatively little attention is paid to the factors that have already helped some members of this marginal community to succeed 'against the odds'. The issue of upward mobility, especially upward educational mobility, is even less discussed in research on Romania; however, the gap between Roma and non-Roma in terms of school attendance (too) is quite large in this country.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to investigate some aspects of Roma educational upward mobility in Romania. In doing so, in-depth interviews were conducted to gather details about the experiences of Roma people whose educational attainment is higher than their parents' (and is above the nationally assessed minimum of ten classes [years of schooling]). The empirical material is processed with a well-defined aim: in line with literature on resilient

ethno-racial minorities, I assume that the Roma face a series of problems when they ascend: not only social and economic hardships but racial discrimination, too. Thus, like other non-dominant ethnic groups, they may follow a special minority mobility path when they move upward in the social structure. The aim of this paper is to describe the most important features of this path in the case of the Roma living in Romania.

2 Literature review

Compared to the problem of marginality, the upward educational mobility of dominant ethnic groups is a phenomenon less discussed in the literature. Older approaches to examining high educational attainment (of working-class people) identify three types of factors that contribute to success. Goldthorpe and Lockwood consider that aspiration (as an individual but socially bounded phenomenon) is a major trigger for upward educational mobility. Turner considers educational systems an important means for success, while other scholars focus on those macro social contexts (e.g., structure of the labour market) that facilitate social ascension. Recent scholarship pays attention to the role of parents and the socialization of working-class families whose children graduate from higher educational institutions (for a detailed presentation of the literature, see Kupfer, 2015, pp. 3–29). An important item among recent approaches is Kupfer's research, which compares the upward educational mobility of the working class in Austria and in the UK, applying Bourdieu's concept of habitus to identify the social factors, personal skills and attitudes that lead to social climbing (Kupfer, 2015).

   Another area of scholarship addresses the ascension of ethnic minorities from the perspective of the minority culture of mobility (see especially Neckermann et al., 1999; Valejo, 2012; Shahrokni, 2015),[1] stating that 'the minority middle classes possess distinctive cultural elements which we call the "minority culture of mobility" … This culture of mobility is not a complete culture but a set of cultural elements within the larger framework of a given minority culture' (Neckermann et al., 1999, p. 949). 'These cultural elements provide strategies for economic mobility in the context of discrimination and group disadvantage and respond to distinctive problems that usually accompany minority middle-class status' (Neckermann et al., 1999, p. 946).

   Ethnic minorities' social ascension is grasped through cultural wealth theory model too (Yosso, 2005), based either on the perspective of critical race theory or on the Bourdieusian concept of capital. The cultural wealth model shifts the focus from the disadvantages of ethno-racial minority groups to the specific knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts (capitals) that members of these groups make use of in order to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005, p. 77).

   A different body of literature deals with (Eastern European) Roma educational and social mobility. Regardless of the theoretical approach these accounts apply (resilience: Máté, 2015; minority culture of mobility: Durst & Bereményi, 2021; etc.), all of them identify a set of

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[1] The literature on resilient ethnic minorities is, of course much broader. For a review see Bereményi and Carrasco (2017).

conditions, resources, and contexts that help minority Roma people to succeed. Bereményi and Durst affirm that the ambivalent lived experience of upwardly mobile Roma is diminished by reliance on ethnic networks (which reduces mobility costs). Nyírő and Durst (2018) conclude that a set of human and cultural resources facilitate the process of ascension: a strong work ethic, emotional support from extended families, etc. Bereményi and Carrasco (2017) take stock of the types of capital the upwardly mobile Roma in Spain are endowed with. Óhidy (2013) lists the supportive factors necessary for completing the process of social ascension: family connections, scholarships, and supportive educational programmes. Kende (2007) underpins the role of community members' assistance to upwardly mobile Roma.

Literature on the upward mobility of the Roma in Romania is not very rich. A small number of studies deal with the aspects of affirmative action designed and implemented to facilitate Roma social ascension (special university and school places) (see, for instance, Cismaru et al., 2015; Surdu & Sira, 2009; Garaz & Torotcoi, 2017). Meanwhile, Surdu and Sira turn their attention (mainly) to the objective components of mobility (in the case of the beneficiaries), while Pantea (2015a; 2015b) discusses the ambivalences of subjectively lived ascension by the Roma. One of her findings is that Roma persons enrolled in affirmative action programmes regard it a source of dignity for Roma, while for others it is a source of stigmatization.

Being the first attempt to frame the empirical material, this study examines but one aspect of the educational mobility of the Roma in Romania: the resources, skills, and knowledge responsible for educational mobility. The present investigation does not address objectively measured differences between the upwardly mobile Roma and their families, nor subjective perceptions of ascension.

3 Theoretical perspective

Although my research was inspired by the reviewed approaches, I hesitated to apply the above-presented concepts directly to my empirical material.

In contrast to the previously listed literature, I do not consider that (in my case) upward educational mobility goes hand in hand with social ascension. My research also includes those Roma who (as first-in-family university graduates) undertake manual work. Similarly, I conducted interviews with Roma individuals who do come from economically stable, even privileged families, but their parents' educational attainment is very low. (Except in four cases all the respondents' mothers and fathers are/were employed as semi-skilled or skilled workers. There were only two cases when the parents were involved in trade in the informal economy (buying and selling antiques or other goods). The highest level of parents' educational attainment was high school. Thus, I do not consider the concept of habitus (which somehow presumes the existence of a class-specific dispositions) adequate for framing my findings.

It obvious that the notion of ethnic culture is not adequate for analysing the Roma living in Romania; a minority consisting of various sub-ethnic groups. How can 'Hungarian Gypsies' (to use the endonym for a group assimilated into the minority Hungarian society in Romania) be compared to the Gabors (who have specific customs, clothes, language, and tradition)? As the variety of Roma groups makes it difficult to select and identify cultural elements 'associated [with the Roma] minority', I prefer to use the term 'mobility path' for the

Roma instead of culture of mobility in the case of the Roma described in the following sections. By doing so, I acknowledge the presence of those specific hardships that shape the minority strategies of mobility.

Therefore, my theoretical framework relies on two pillars: the concept of capital (coined by Bourdieu and reframed mainly by Yosso) and post-Barthian (constructivist) theories on ethnicity, completed with more or less recent accounts about racism.

Although the notion of capital is – in Bourdieusian theory – a means of framing social stratification, this aspect will be put aside in the following sections. Capital – for the present study – is used (mostly) in line with its initial definition: accumulated labour objectified in knowledge, property, or social relations (Bourdieu in Richardson, 1986, pp. 15–16). Cultural capital is embodied in knowledge, credentials, or cultural goods. Economic capital denotes all sorts of material assets, while social capital refers to social connections, possession of a social network (Bourdieu in Richardson, 1986, p. 16), and membership in a group (Bourdieu in Richardson, 1986, p. 21). Apart from these three basic forms, Bourdieu identified other non-material types of capital such as symbolical capital (Bourdieu, 1993), which initially referred to positions in the field of high culture but later became applicable to other social contexts, too. Symbolical capital – in its broader sense – denotes individual or family prestige, celebrity, honour, and recognition (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 7).

Yosso (and her fellow researchers) reframes this concept of capital, adjusting it to the condition of ethno-racial minority groups. She states that non-dominant communities are endowed with some specific sort of knowledge, skills, and abilities (overlooked in the Bourdieusian model) that help them 'to face and resist macro- and micro form of oppression' (Yosso, 2005, p. 77).

Yosso and her followers identify the following types of capital(s):[2]

Aspirational capital denotes the ability to maintain hope and to dream even in underprivileged social and economic conditions (Yosso, 2005, pp. 78–79). However, in Samuelson and Litztler's view, it also refers to the capacity to find motivation to 'raise high': to get a good job or achieve a better life (Samuelson & Litzler, 2016, p. 102).

Family capital – according to Yosso – derives from the experience of living in large families. But in Samuelson and Litzler's view, this also denotes individual aspiration and emotional support received from family members (Samuelson & Litzler, 2016, p. 106).

Social capital – in this context of cultural wealth theory – refers to belonging to networks (peer groups or of older persons) that facilitate a minority person's access to community resources (scholarships, healthcare, etc.) by providing the emotional and instrumental support necessary to get along (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Among the many types of relations, Stanton-Salazar (2011) place special emphasis on institutional agents; i.e., persons with higher institutional status who provide the following types of support: socialization into institutional discourses, bridging (acting as contacts between the minority person and mainstream institutions), advocacy (providing personal intervention to help students from disadvantaged environments), the provision of evaluative feedback, guidance, advice, or role modelling (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Navigational capital – according to Yosso – denotes the capacity of minority persons to survive in racially hostile institutions (Yosso, 2005, p. 80).

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[2] Yosso includes linguistic capital in her model. At this stage of research, I could not see its relevance, thus it is not listed in this section.

Resistant capital (the skill of minority persons to resist racism) is of different types in this model. Solorzano and Delgado Bernal define conformist resistance as when the minority person seeks individual success (for instance, in school) but does not want to reframe the racist practices of the institutions. Transformative resistance is a type of minority practice that goes against the dominant racist oppression (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 318).

Although according to Yosso cultural capital is a result of these above-mentioned resources, sometimes (when facilitating ascension) I treat it as a separate means of achieving success.

The term ethnic capital is another path to reinterpreting the Bourdieusian framework. According to Jaeeun Kim, ethnic capital does not merely involve tapping into certain resources through membership in an ethnic group. If ethnicity is understood as a category (rather than a group), then Kim states that ethnic capital denotes the different treatment of persons who are classified differently in the process of (ethno-racial) categorization (Kim, 2018, p. 2).

A few studies have applied the community wealth model to understand Roma person's mobility. John Doyle (2022) listed the types of capitals which help Roma youth to ascend in Slovakia. His research – completed with ethnographic observation – (only) stock-takes the types of capitals without offering deep understanding of their function. Gulyás (2019) analyses the life narratives of Roma persons who migrated from Hungary to Canada and pursued non-compulsory education. She applies Yosso's framework only when addressing the issue of social capital. Bereményi and Carrasco (Bereményi & Carrasco, 2017) reveal some new aspects when applying the cultural wealth perspective to the mobility path of Roma living in Spain. They conclude that family provides not only emotional support to young Roma, but helps them to acquire resistant capital, too. Bereményi and Carrasco also state that the group of institutional agents is much larger than captured by Salazar's definition: it includes non-school-based persons, too (NGO mentors, politically active family friends, parents' middle-class employers, etc.).

Post-Barthian approaches to ethnicity and the theories on cultural racism were also relevant for this investigation. Accordingly, ethnicity is a matter of categorization; a moving border between 'us' and 'them' (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007). In line with theories on cultural racism, racial belonging is understood in this study as stigma associated not necessarily with skin complexion or physical appearance but with certain (negatively labelled) attitudes and behaviours (Modood & Wrebner, eds., 2015). The contextuality of Roma identity and the changing Roma-non-Roma ethno-racial classification constitute the subjects of a great many publications (for a few examples, see Kovács, 2006; Kovai, 2017; Ladányi & Szelényi, 2006; Dunajeva, 2017).

Changes in the ethnic categorization of upwardly mobile young Roma is a an area of research that has already been addressed by a few scholars. Abajo and Carrasco (eds., 2004) define two strategies for ascension in the case of Roma in Spain. Ethnic invisibility refers to a coping strategy of the Roma in secondary education. It helps these young persons to hide their identity from classmates and teachers in order to avoid othering (Abajo & Carrasco, eds., 2004, pp. 105–106, as cited in Brüggemann, 2014, p. 442). Apayamiento refers to peer pressure within the Roma community, stating that the behaviour of upwardly mobile persons is not in line with the attitude expected from Roma (Abajo & Carrasco, eds., 2004, p. 38 as cited in Brüggemann, 2014, p. 442).

Brüggemann's findings partly confirm Abajo and Carrasco's: some young Roma in Spain hide their ethnic identity and are accused by their (Roma peers) of 'not being Roma'.

However, others openly admit that they are Roma and use this confession as a strategy to resist racist attacks (Brüggemann, 2014, p. 445). Some Roma peer group members even express pride related to high achieving (Brüggemann, 2014, p. 446).[3]

4 Methods and research design

The empirical body of this research is made up of in-depth interviews. Although these were frequently interrupted with questions, they may show certain similarities with narrative interviews. My interlocutors were asked to narrate their lives as educated Roma persons; all questions were addressed in a way that encouraged 'story telling' (Rosenthal, 2018). Similarly to Kupfer, I consider these sorts of 'narrative' interviews suitable for my research purpose, inasmuch as they reveal the unconscious factors responsible for upward mobility, and they link agency to the broader social context (Kupfer, 2005, pp. 43–44). In addition, in my view, narratives can also inform about capital acquisition 'in motion': how certain forms of capitals are converted into each other during the individual life course. Moreover, narrative structures are able to disclose the content given to certain forms of capitals by the agents.

Unlike the assigned methodology for narrative interviews, I refused to undertake the task of case reconstruction or comparison (Rosenthal, 2018, pp. 166–168). As the empirical material is not so vast, I merely intend to verify which types of capital are presented in the narratives and what their role was in facilitating ascension. In accordance with the rules of analysing qualitative data, I do not insist on providing data on frequency (i.e., to show in each case how many respondents made use of certain strategies, skills, or knowledge) (Kovács, ed., 2007).

4.1 The educational situation of Roma in Romania: some data

According to the official statistics, in Romania, 621,573 people declared themselves to be Roma during the last census in 2011; however, through a more refined framework (external classification by bureaucrats dealing with Roma problems at local institutions), the number of Roma was estimated to be much higher: 1,215,846 in 2016 (Horváth, ed., 2017, p. 36).

According to the 2002 national census data, 7.1 per cent of the Romanian population graduated from a higher-education institute: 7.3 per cent of Romanians, 4.9 per cent of Hungarians, and only 0.2 per cent of Romanian Roma. Further, 3 per cent of Romanians, 2.9 per cent of Hungarians, and only 0.1 per cent of the Roma graduated from a post-secondary education institute (Surdu & Sira, 2009, p. 24).

In 2012, more than half of the Roma children in Romania did not attend kindergarten, while this proportion was approximately 25 per cent for the non-Roma (FRA–UNDP, 2012, p. 13). More than 22 per cent of Roma children in Romania between 7 and 15 years of age did

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[3] The question of Roma identity appears in many pieces of research. For my investigation, the making and remaking of ethnic borders was more relevant.

not attend school compared to less than 15 per cent of the non-Roma (UNDP, p. 14). Only about 30 per cent of the Roma in Romania were in paid employment (excluding self-employment) compared to about 45 per cent among the non-Roma (FRA–UNDP, 2012, p. 16).

Survey data suggest that in 2012 the proportion of Roma between 26 and 32 years of age in European countries with completed university education did not exceed one per cent (Brüggemann, 2012, p. 24). The situation in Romania is similar. According to the last census in 2011, 0.14 per cent of university graduates are Roma, while another 0.13 per cent of individuals with an MA or PHD degree are Roma (Recensământ, 2011).

The position of Roma school mediators emerged in Romania after 1990, initially through transnational projects aimed at the Roma's social integration, but later the initiative was taken over by the national system of education. School mediators are part of the auxiliary teaching staff, are paid by the education system, and have the main task of supporting the participation of all children in the community in compulsory education (Szasz & Csesznek 2019, p. 437). In 2015, there were 520 active school mediators, of whom only 306 were full-time employees, with the others having other jobs, too: mostly (form) teachers of the Romany language, librarians, community mediators, etc. In the period 2005–2012, the number of active Roma school mediators was between 420 and 510, of whom 85 per cent were Roma (Sarău, 2013, p. 31). According to the new Law of Education, their minimum level of education should be a bachelor's degree (Sarău, 2013, p. 32).

According to the legal definition, Romany language teachers should be university graduates. Since the 1998/1999 academic year, a minor for Romany language and culture has been introduced at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, which later, after 2005, gained the status of a major. Since 1999 it was possible to teach the Romany language as a native tongue in schools (if requested). In the 2010s, about 460 and 530 teachers were teaching in the Romanian educational system, 95 per cent of whom considered themselves Roma (Sarău, 2013, p. 32).

Concerning the number of Roma experts in local councils, Law No 430/2001 provides that one out of every three or four employees has to be 'a member of Roma minority' (Hotărâre nr. 430, 2001, p. 6).

4.2 Study sample

The empirical body for this investigation consists of 20 in-depth interviews with persons who identified as Roma and whose educational attainment is higher than their parents' and than the compulsory national minimum of ten classes. Accordingly, respondents with the lowest level of education had completed vocational school (11 classes), and those with the highest had post-graduate degrees (MA). Fieldwork was conducted in 2016 and 2017, and thus all of the findings reveal the situation at that time. Eight interlocutors were female and 12 male, the youngest of them being 20–21 years old and the oldest over 50. Except for two individuals, all of them were beneficiaries of educational policies and projects that explicitly targeted the Roma population in Romania: Roma school mediators (3), Romany language teachers and/or form teachers for Roma-only classes (3), students or graduates occupying special university places for Roma (12), and experts on Roma issues in local or county councils (2).

The Roma school mediators, Romany language teachers (form teachers), the school mediators and the local expert were in charge of (according to their job descriptions) solving problems associated with their co-ethnics: Roma children in schools, and Roma citizens who ask for the authorities' help. No wonder these people had well-developed discourses about their role as 'helpers'.

Beneficiaries of the Roma special educational places are tied less strongly to the world of ethnic entrepreneurs. Although about half of them were doing volunteering (and later) paid work for a Roma NGO that issued them with a certificate of ethnicity (necessary for eligibility for the reserved places), these connections were temporary. By the time of the fieldwork, only two or three of them were active members of organizations serving the Roma. Thus, these respondents did not have a well-developed self-presentation of themselves as Roma 'helpers'.

All respondents lived in Transylvania, Romania. Eleven were born and grew up in villages or small towns, two in orphanages, and the others in cities. Except for one person, who identified himself as a musician of Roma ethnicity (Hu: zenész cigány, Ro: lăutar), the others categorized themselves as Romanian or Hungarian Roma (assimilated into Romanian or Hungarian society). None of them could tell what Roma subethnic group they belonged to; four of them spoke some Romany, but none of them used it at home or with friends. Fifteen persons had Romanian as their first language, two were bilingual (Romanians and Hungarians), and the others had Hungarian as their first language.

Beneficiaries of special programmes were selected both for ethical and practical reasons. Enrolment in such projects usually demands a certificate attesting ethnic affiliation issued by a 'Roma organization'. Thus, for these persons it was not problematic to be categorized as Roma by the majority, and this outward label was identical with their self-definition. These respondents were in contact with – actually, were recommended by – Roma student organizations or NGOs with projects targeting Roma communities.

The question of ethnicity and race was not directly addressed during the interviews. Interlocutors felt free to introduce the topic of Roma identity whenever they deemed it relevant. However, all of the interviewees were aware that they had been invited in as 'highly educated Roma persons', and none of them refused this categorization. There was one respondent who admitted that they did not always disclose their Roma identity in all social encounters, but they considered the interview process a 'safe place' and were open to sharing experiences.

All names and personal data were anonymized.

To sum up, the aim of this research is to identify the types of capital that assisted these Roma persons to become educationally upwardly mobile. After processing the 'narrative interviews', I intended not only to distinguish between the different kinds of capitals but to also look into how these 'work': what meanings are associated with them, and how they are interrelated and converted.

In order to do this, similarly to Kupfer (2015, p. 86) and Abajo and Carrasco (eds., 2014) I made a distinction between certain types of possibilities/modalities enabling ascension Thus, in view of the subsequent sections, I delineated the following: (1) acquisition of skills and capacities, aspirations and traits that helped Roma persons to succeed; (2) connection with agents that helped to ascend; (3) institutional contexts promoting success.

5 Findings

5.1 Skills, capacities, aspirations

5.1.1 Resistant capital

All respondents were aware of racial oppression. Some had been subjected directly and personally to insults because of their identity, while others not – however, all of them had worked out a series of skills and techniques to resist in racially hostile environments. Therefore, analysing resistant capital is extremely important when understanding upward educational mobility. Since with one exception all the unpleasant encounters took place in institutions, resistant capital could also be labelled navigational capital in these interviews.

Conformist resistant capital

The respondents enumerated various strategies that they make use of when facing racist attacks. Only one of them turned to passive ignorance:

> Being a Roma, my classmates insulted me, saying I was a crow, and things like this. But my parents always said I should not pay attention to them. (woman, 22)[4]

Others choose a certain type of behaviour to avoid racist insults:

> I made friends in the elementary school. They hid their prejudices if they had any at all. Why was I able to make friends? It was my attitude that enabled this. I was a respectable person, open, got along well with everyone. (man, 45–50 years)

It may be questionable why this skill is discussed as conformist resistance. This is because since all Roma who act in a friendly and open way somehow accept the existence of such a classification – they only try to negotiate it through individual strategies but do not explicitly question its existence.

Transformative resistant capital

Attitudes, skills, and strategies were classified as transformative if fuelled by a desire to reject the Roma–non-Roma classification according to which the latter are associated with negative stereotypes.

Transformative capital – in the interviews – may be of different types. As the following excerpt shows, it may consist of revealing 'what you are'. It probably seeks to draw the attention of the non-Roma to the fact that (in contrast to the stereotypes), a Roma person can attend a prestigious high school:

> I was the only Roma person in the class in this high school, which was a well-known one. And I told this to my colleagues even on the first day. I went out with my classmates, and we all introduced ourselves. I told them my name, the village I had come from, the marks I got on the en-

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4 All the translations of the interview texts were made by the author of the present study.

trance exam (9.43 out of 10), and many other things. Among these, I also told them that I was a Rom. I was waiting for their reaction, but there was none, so we went on. For me, the most important is to assume what you are. And if you can do this, then others will do, too. It is very important to be honest. (woman, 23)

Transformative capital as a skill or strategy for confronting racist attacks may also take the form of the verbal rejection of insults. A respondent reacted when Roma were depicted with negative stereotypes in a classroom. I consider this transformative behaviour because it intends to dislocate the Roma (as negative) – non-Roma (as positive) classification:

> The teachers were using negative examples when speaking about the Roma in the class. We, the Roma students, let them know that this was an insult. (man, 46)

Narratives reveal that conformist and transformative resistance are – sometimes – inseparable. Reacting informally to unjust institutional treatment (such as erasing an inscription that unlawfully introduced Roma identity into a document) is a form of transformative resistance. However, this is also an example of the acquisition of resilient capital. In this case, the respondent erased a reference to their ethnic affiliation because it could have created problems for them. By doing so, they accepted the Roma–non-Roma dichotomy ('Roma are problematic; non-Roma are decent', as a ticket seller confirmed to her); the interviewee only wanted to 'cross the ethnic border' and no longer be defined as being in the group of despised persons (who are looked at with anger):

> It was written in my course report book [leckekönyv] that I was a Roma person. This is illegal! It annoyed me! Anywhere I go, it is in my student certificate. When I showed my card to get a student pass, the ticket seller gave me a dirty look. So, I erased the inscription. (woman, 22)

5.1.2 Aspirational capital

This is yet another source of upward mobility. Respondents enrol in educational programmes or continue their education because 'I thought I could do better' or 'after a while, I thought I would like to graduate from university... I was wondering what sort of life would await me in my village'.

5.2 Agents and groups whose connection to Roma individuals could be an asset: Acquiring family and social capital

Respondents named a number of individuals or groups who had helped them to ascend: family, peer-group members (friends), Roma, and non-Roma 'helpers'.

5.2.1 Family

Family is one of the most important communities that can help a person to become upwardly mobile. Being a member of a family provides these Roma persons with family capital, as

defined in Samuelson and Litzler's (2016, p. 106) terms.[5] A family helps its members in their aspirations, socializes them through education, and gives them positive feedback when needed:

> My father was an intelligent man. [...] He travelled a lot, as he was doing business with antiques. I cannot say he was good with languages, although he had German and Italian clients, but he was intelligent, despite the fact that he had completed only four classes. He seconded us, encouraged us to go on with education, and paid attention to how we would grow up. (woman, 28)

But the family is not only a supportive environment. It conveys certain values, too.

> In our family, everyone tried to aim high. Even if we are Roma, we are clean, respectful, and we always tried to go to school. And we are respected by the community [...] I am the first university graduate in my village among the Roma. They are proud of me. My parents gave me support, and they said: 'you can do better'. See, what can become of someone who gets pregnant at the age of fourteen? (woman, 24)

Family did not always provide the motivation for attending school. Sometimes the role of parents consisted 'only' of protecting their children from anti-Gypsyism.

> I remember once during secondary school we went to the public pool [strand/fürdő]. The Gypsies were forbidden to enter, as some local [Roma] children had been jumping into the water, which disturbed the others. Besides, they had no swimsuits on them, just their casual clothes. This was the reason why my sisters and I were not allowed to enter. We started to cry because we did not understand why. Is it because we were Gypsies? But we were not stinky and we had swimsuits and floats like anyone else. Then Dad put us in the car and drove 20 kilometres to the managers' house and entered. He said to the manager: 'I can't believe you're doing this! I built your house (my father had welded the fence for his new house) and you will not let us enter the pool?' And then the manager got into our car, came with us to the pool, and said to his employees: 'I told you not to let the Gypsies in, but I did not order you to stop these people'. So, they let us in because of my father.

> [later on, in the same narrative]:

> When I said I want to attend a university, my parents were not very happy. They said I could do whatever I want, but they were not very happy. (woman, 25)

5.2.2 Social mobility, peer group contacts and institutional agents

Upward mobility was in many interviews facilitated through connections with others. The helping persons these Roma respondents are connected to were of two types: peer groups, and institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).[6] The social capital acquired through being in

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[5] Yosso's definition of family capital could not be found in any of the 20 interviews that were processed. This may be because the respondents had not grown up in large families – they had two or three siblings at most. Thus, they probably could not acquire the experience of belonging or caring, which – according to Yosso – is the essence of family capital.

[6] Institutional agents in Stanton-Salazar's understanding are those persons who hold important positions in various institutions. In this research, institutional agents are those individuals who occupy positions vital in terms of ascension (no matter how 'high' they are in the institutional hierarchy).

contact with these latter is differentiated in line with Stanton-Salazar's typology. In this sense, institutional helpers aid socialization into institutional discourses act as a bridge between the person and the institution and as advocates for the minority person when they are prevented from accessing certain institutional resources, as well as provide emotional and moral support for the minority persons, and act as role models (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

The only fragment about the assistance of a peer reveals that the social capital obtained from this relationship was at the same time help in meeting the criteria of the university entrance exam, but it also provided motivation and support for the Roma person:

> I did not want to attend university. But I met a guy who said I should go. He wrote my essay for the entrance exam for the special places, and he submitted my application. He is here, too, at the university, but we are not together. We were friends but he wanted more, and I did not want that. (woman, 22)

Advocacy was an important task of the institutional agents. Here, the non-Roma teacher (together with her family) restored justice as s/he helped the Roma child to obtain the diploma she deserved:

> I was the best pupil in the first grade; I only had the best grades (10 out of 10). But the headmistress did not let my form teacher give me a diploma for excellence, saying that a Gypsy child cannot be the best among the twelve non-Roma. [...] And I told this to my parents, who came to the school and made a complaint. A huge scandal arose, and my form teacher supported us. For me, it was very inspiring that she had put her job at risk just to help us. Later, she openly admitted that she would not be allowed to give me a diploma. This was because (in the eyes of the headmistress) it would have diminished the value of the class if a Gypsy girl had done better than the Hungarian children. After this scandal, the headmistress was dismissed. (woman, 25)

The connection with institutional agents may consist of receiving positive feedback, emotional and moral support. But, in contrast with the previous example, in this case a 'helper' (also a non-Roma teacher), although encouraging the student not to give up, unconsciously rebuilt the frame of racial categorization. In his view, it was unusual (and unexpected) for a Roma girl to attend high school (instead of marrying at an early age):

> I got 4 out of 10 for my first test in mathematics in high school. It was unusual for me, as I had got only 9s and 10s before, at secondary school. The math teacher saw me crying because of my poor performance, so he said he was sorry but I had got the grade I deserved. And he also said he saw I was a Rom, and he was very proud of me. He said in public that everybody should pay attention to me because I got here at the age of 14–15, while others got married and had children. Because this is what people think: the Roma marry at an early age. And he encouraged me many times, which helped me to grow strong and show that I could do more.

Social capital acquired from relations with institutional agents may also serve as a bridge between the Roma person and the institution. Roma and non-Roma 'helpers' may assist with getting into affirmative action programmes: non-Roma school secretaries draw the attention of Roma children to special places, and form teachers and secondary school teachers help their Roma students to fill in application forms. (See the following sections for details). But it can also happen that non-Roma 'helpers' (involuntarily or driven by honest conviction) change the track of their students and suggest to them that it is safer not to reach too high. In the following excerpt, the local Orthodox priest dissuaded the young Roma per-

son from applying to a faculty of orthodox theology. Although it is well known that such a profession confers high status and much respect on its practitioners, the priest suggested that the respondent take up Romany language and culture at university as it is 'more safe' inasmuch it would protect the student from racist attacks. However, the path this person had been suggested to take led to success. Thus, defining who can be considered an institutional agent and what role an institutional agent has is not an easy task:

> I applied successfully to the Orthodox theology [course] and simultaneously to the university – to the specialization on Romany language and culture. It was difficult, as the former was in Cluj and the latter in Bucharest. After a year, I started to teach as an unqualified form teacher in our school at the village. One day, the Orthodox priest came to me and told me: 'Look, I think it is better for you to choose the career of a teacher. I know a person who graduated from theology and was not accepted in the congregation because the topic of race is an issue in the church. It is better for you to be a teacher because this is the path for you. You can come and sing at the services whenever you want to.' (man, 35)

5.3 The role of institutions (programmes) in capital acquisition

Institutions (training programmes) were considered special 'places' of capital acquisition. As the following excerpts inform, they act as a 'matrix' of resources; an interrelated set of different types of capitals. Three kinds of institutions were identified in the interviews: the orphanage, the church, and Roma educational policies – all offering support in the process of social climbing.

5.3.1 Orphanage

Two of the respondents were brought up in communist-type orphanages (when there was no possibility of living in a foster family). According to the experiences, teachers and educators (as institutional agents) acted there as bridges and socializers: 'dropping out of school was out of the question at the orphanage. They simply handed the application forms to us, and we had to fill them in' (woman, 54).

But, similarly to the non-Roma schoolteachers, the social capital acquired through the relations with educators served as a source of motivation. According to the 'helpers', educational attainment is key to not living a 'Roma' life: 'We were told we had to study. Otherwise – they said – we would end up where our parents had'.

Social capital embodied in peer-group membership with other children in the orphanage might serve as a role model and be a driving force for continuing education: 'I applied to the university, as many of my friends from the orphanage did' (man, 35).

5.3.2 Churches

Three of the respondents were members of religious communities. Two of them attended neo-Protestant congregations, and one belonged to a small, Orthodox one.

The social capital (in Bourdieusian terms: denoting only membership) acquired from being in a religious community was converted in various ways. For one person, this social capital was turned into family capital, as the neo-Protestant church was the place where she met her husband who 'convinced me to attend a vocational school. He said if I did not continue with it, I would regret it later' (woman, 45). But the social capital obtained there did not come down to this relation alone. It was the neo-Protestant kindergarten educator who let the same person know about the Roma school mediator programme, which she would later successfully graduate from.

Attending a small religious community enabled another interviewee to get in touch with a person who later became a school inspector assigned to Roma education (a person in charge of all the issues of Roma education at the county level). This social capital was converted into cultural and economic capital (as Bourdieu frames it), as the inspector helped the respondent to get employment as an unqualified form teacher in a school with predominantly Roma children (after his unsuccessful attempts to find a job as a secondary school teacher with a university degree):

> I could not find a job, as there were no vacancies with my specialization. I met S., the inspector in the congregation. During those times I had no financial possibilities, and I had to work during my university years. So, S. invited me to work at a Roma kindergarten. After graduation, I could not find a job, as there were no vacancies in my field, so S. offered me this position of an unqualified form teacher at this school. (man, 35)

5.3.3 Roma affirmative action; educational programmes for Roma

Although an evaluation of affirmative action for Roma is not among the objectives of the research, it must be mentioned that attending courses for Roma school mediators/experts on Roma issues at the local council, completing a specialization on the Romany language and literature, or occupying reserved university places for the Roma may be opportunities to acquire different types of capital for the same person.

It is also important to mention that accessing such programmes enables the possession of ethnic capital: according to the official documents, the applicant usually has to prove their Roma identity in order to become eligible. Self-declared Roma identity (in other words: categorization as a Roma) as a condition of accessing such training programmes or university places may be considered a form of ethnic capital, as defined by Kim.

Interviews demonstrate that this ethnic capital is just a starting point that enables the persons attending these programmes to acquire new forms of capital or convert old forms into new ones within the life course of the same person.

All the interviews with Roma university students or graduates confirm that shortly after the university year had started they were 'spotted' by the Roma student organization, which offered them a REF (Roma Education Fund) scholarship (facilitating ethnic capital conversion into economic capital in Bourdieu's understanding). The newly recruited Roma students were invited to participate in transnational projects aimed at improving the conditions of the Roma. Such opportunities initially meant volunteer work or internships, but later these were turned into paid jobs. If not, such occasions provided the necessary work experience to the young Roma that enabled them to find a job on the labour market. Thus, ethnic

capital (in a Bourdieusian sense) could easily be converted into cultural capital (knowledge) or even economic capital (in a Bourdieusian sense) (workplace):

> As soon as I started my first year as a student, I became a member of the Roma student organization. [...] This membership and the possibilities at the university helped me to participate in many projects such as Soros's OSI [Open Society Institute], and many others that had projects for Roma community development. [...] We, my colleagues and I, all agreed to pick up on such opportunities. Initially, we participated as volunteers. [...] We did fieldwork in communities to gain experience, and this is how I got experience in Roma community programmes. Later, we obtained REF scholarships. But the condition was to participate in community work. (man, 45, local council expert on Roma problems)

Sometimes graduation from one programme was completed with an application to another better recognized one. Eligibility for the school mediator course did not just involve training but the possibility to meet like-minded colleagues, and the connection with them led to a new opportunity (Romany language teacher with a university diploma). This new path allowed the respondent to obtain a better job (employment in a school as a teacher). Thus, the ethnic capital opened up the possibility to acquire social capital, which later was converted into cultural (and economic) capital:

> I met Mary on the Roma school mediator course. We decided together to apply for the university places, the special ones for Roma on teaching Romany language. I finished that, so I am now employed both as a school mediator and as a Romany language teacher. (woman, 47)

Conversion of ethnic capital into social capital may also consist of finding Roma role models during internship years or later on, when the person is hired at an NGO for Roma projects:

> I got along well with my boss, who is also a Roma. She always dressed modestly. After a while, I decided to take off my big golden earrings. I gave them to my sisters. (woman, working at an NGO)

Almost all the people who had graduated from the educational programmes for Roma confessed that they had met their spouses in these institutions and training events. Thus, ethnic capital was transformed into social capital in this way: 'I met my wife there. She is Roma, too, and she had one of the reserved places, too' (man, 32). 'My wife is now a stay-at-home mum, but she graduated in theatre and psychology and taught in Chicago and Roehampton. She was a volunteer at the NGO for Roma where I was working as an ∂i [assistant]' (man, 42).

6 Discussion

Roma (respondents) seem to be convinced that racist attacks are related to certain behaviour or attitudes: the friendly, 'open', non-conflictual ones, who 'get along well with everyone' can avoid discriminatory treatment – and this attitude is not an inborn trait; it may be a matter of choice. Therefore, conformist resistant capital in this context refers to a knowledge or strategy; a choice to adopt a certain behaviour (that proved to be successful in the process of mobility) in order to avoid negative labelling.

Transformative resistant capital is the skill of combatting actively, face to face, racist insults. One such strategy is the technique of overcommunicating one's Roma ethnic identity (Eriksen, 2010); others take a stand against those who attack them. Transformative resistant capital consists of reminding the non-Roma world that labelling the Roma negatively is unjust and wrong. The non-Roma may believe that Roma are not capable of attending good schools or that they can be humiliated in the classroom, but persons endowed with transformative resistant capital remind them that this classification is entirely wrong.

The analysed narratives offer us an improved understanding of how family capital works. Interviews do not just reveal the fact that families transmit values to their children, but they also specify what values are conveyed. Parents do not only encourage their Roma children to 'look high'; they also teach them how to resist racist attacks. The older ones seemed to have socialized their kids to adopt behaviour associated with the non-Roma, like not starting a family at an early age. In other words, these parents inspired their children to live a life associated by the non-Roma with the dominant group 'even if they are Roma'; and school was considered a proper means for doing this. In this way, family capital – as the following fragments reveal – consists of raising awareness that education helps to erase the Roma stigma.

The source of the power to confront racial attacks lies in the symbolic and economic capital of the family. The father featured in the excerpt about the pool was able to intervene and negotiate entrance for his children because he occupied an important position in the local labour market (working for the non-Roma pool manager), which conferred high status on him, too (enough to convince the manager to let the family enter the pool).

Institutional agents play an important role in facilitating upward mobility. Advocacy was an important task of theirs. As the excerpt about the diploma shows, the advocacy of the form teacher did not take the form of informal negotiation: s/he officially seconded the family in their complaint. To go even further, advocacy here achieves far more than helping an individual: it (consciously or not) attacks the frames of institutional racism, too (questioning the practice that 'Gypsy girls cannot be better than the Hungarian children' in the local school).

7 Instead of conclusions

The aim of this research was to identify the factors shaping the minority's path that facilitate the Roma in Romania becoming educationally mobile. Based on the cultural wealth model as well as constructivist approaches on ethnicity and scholarship that discuss cultural racism, I intended to take stock of the forms of capital these Roma persons make use of when ascending. Inspired by the works of Kupfer, I considered that interviews (similarly to narrative interviews) could be a successful means of generating an improved understanding of the meaning and functioning of capitals.

Narratives confirm that acquiring resistant capital is an important vehicle of success. The respondents had to face and fight against (or avoid) racial attacks on their paths. But narratives also specify the content of this resistant capital: the skill of engaging in certain types of behaviours and taking on certain types of attitudes. Unlike Abajo and Carrasco's findings (Abajo & Carrasco, eds., 2014), the respondents did not intend to hide their ethnic identity, although it was linked by non-Roma to negative stereotypes. Unlike Brüggemann

(2014), my respondents (except for one) did not disclose it to surprise others in order to attack systems of racial classifications. Members of their non-Roma environment know that they are Roma. The Roma persons I interviewed deliberately chose behaviour associated by the dominant group with the 'non-Roma'. To go further, these Roma persons do not feel 'angry and sad' (Brüggemann, 2014) when adopting this behaviour. The ambivalence and confusion mentioned so frequently in the literature was not present in this empirical material.

Family capital in these narratives – similarly to Bereményi and Carrasco's conclusions – did not only involve the support given by the family. Families (or some family members) do not (necessarily) transmit the importance of education to their children. Sometimes the family protects the upwardly mobile person from racist insults, but this protective power is obtained from the symbolic capital some family members possess.

Narratives inform that the role and function of institutional agents is very different. Performing the task of bridging and advocacy is always based on the intention of the institutional agents to provide help and facilitate the upward mobility path. However, despite their honest intentions and firm beliefs, these persons may reinforce the unequal systems of categorizations and may rebuild the racial stigma aimed at the Roma.

Interviews draw attention to the role of institutions in the process of capital acquisition and conversion. Orphanages, religious congregations, and Roma educational programmes can be considered matrixes of resources that enable not just access to different sources of capitals but their conversion too.

Finally, let us get back to the issue of racial classification. Narratives confirm that negotiating the 'position' of the Roma in a non-Roma world sometimes remains in the realm of individual actions and strategies: the agents seem to succeed in erasing the stigma aimed at them from the non-Roma, but – in all cases, except with transformative resistance – they leave the system of oppression untouched. The upwardly mobile just do not want to live a life that is associated with the Roma, and that is labelled negatively by the dominant groups: one involving low educational attainment, early marriage, and poverty. One can say – in line with Dunajeva (2017) – that the mobility path for these Roma respondents consists of escaping the category of 'dirty Gypsy'. But learning where these high achievers end up is the subject of further investigation.

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