

**THE RISE OF A CONNECTED TRANSNATIONAL  
NETWORK**

**MPhil in Geography**

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I, Ana Bleahu, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

**Abstract:**

The thesis explores the online practices and the transnational mobilities of a community of Pentecostal Gypsies. The community has diffused from their central hub a Romanian village and is now scattered across Europe. The thesis asks: how does a mobile ethnic group remain united as it transforms from a geographically intensive community to a spatially extensive one? The research design combines analysis of geo-referenced YouTube videos, offline machine code metadata and real world ethnographic data in order to contribute to conceptual debates within migration studies about deterritorialization and the maintenance of social ties after geographical dispersion.

The thesis argues that Gypsies nurture their transnational network via two key mechanisms: self-made online videos and the journeys made by religious artists and leaders. The videos support transnational life and help to perform belonging and identity. Though video-makers present themselves as individuals, by sharing their own films and watching and commenting on the films of others, they create a strong feeling of co-participation. Second, the religious artists and leaders carry the same songs and sermons from one place to another, ensuring homogeneity within the community. The thesis concludes that though historical forms of mobility have changed, the idea of mobility remains key to Gypsy identity. Travelling still has an important social role that structures their internal hierarchies and mutual control, legitimates leaders and generates popularity. Yet, unexpectedly, the place of origin has become more important, not less important – it is increasingly a fixed, home territory that is also key to the community's identity.

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# Chapter 1- Introduction and research framework

## 1.1 Introduction

This thesis is about the rise of a transnational network of a group of Pentecostal Gypsies from a town in South-East Romania (described as T- throughout the thesis to preserve anonymity), and how migration and the use of new technologies influenced their collective life. It describes their physical and online mobilities and how they nurture and maintain their identity in a new form of transnational mobility. According to the National Institute of Statistics' Censuses, from 2002 and 2011, approximately 4,000 out of 12,000 inhabitants of the town (mainly Gypsies) emigrated to different countries in Europe. Facing various challenges, in particular discrimination, this transnational community is defined nowadays by their extensive geographical mobility, consisting of a repeated separation and reunion. The community is held together by the use of the Internet (especially of YouTube and Facebook) and by the work of mobile religious artists. In particular, the thesis follows one individual artist (referred to as V. throughout to preserve their anonymity). The artist V. is a man on his fifties, born in T., a well know Pentecostal minister and traditional singer. The research analyses how this community, who is geographically dispersed, is united by their mundane transnational practices and their virtual interconnections.

The thesis interrogates their transnational sociality and socialisation pattern, the mobilities of people, videos, songs, and other cultural objects, in both physical and

online spaces. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the UK, Spain and Romania and on Youtube video analysis, the thesis captures their geographical mobilities and describes their online practices.

The novelty of my methodological approach casts new light on the widely debated issue of Gypsy identity. If most of the scholars who have written about Gypsies (like Michael Stewart, Ada Engebrigtsen, Paloma Blasco, Nando Sigona) have analysed Gypsy communities who are marked by their intensive geographical proximity, (Stewart, 1997; Okely, 1983; Blasco, 2002; Engebrigtsen, 2000; Sigona, 2006) my research identifies a new more extensive spatiality. The thesis brings new empirical material to debates in migration studies about belonging and spatial diffusion in the age of the internet.

From considering Gypsies communities as '*geographical communities*', glued by their propinquity, in my thesis, I decide to define them as a 'transnational community', linked by interconnectivity and communication. Therefore their ethnic identity, solidarity, and internal relationships are filtered through two primary lenses: their transnational mobilities and online interconnectivity. Alongside, the thesis focuses on how their migration experience and their style of using digital technologies challenges their traditional identity, brotherhood, neighbourhood, socialities, marginality, and social cohesion.

The thesis argues that Gypsies nurture their transnational network via two key mechanisms: self-made online videos and the journeys made by religious artists and leaders. The self-made online videos generate a 'network of conversations' that support their transnational life and helps to perform belonging and identity. Though the people making videos seek to present themselves as individuals, by sharing them

and reciprocally watching other people's videos, they create a strong feeling of co-participation. Second, religious artists and leaders carry songs and sermons from one place to another, ensuring homogeneity within the community. These artists promote unity and obedience and hold the community together by travelling to different groups around Europe and even beyond. The thesis concludes that historical forms of mobility that were distinguished by the geographical proximity of people moving together over relatively short distances have been replaced in recent decades by an extensive form of spatial mobility. Though different, this new pattern retains social value and meaning. Travelling still has an important social role that reveals the internal social logic of the community, structures their internal hierarchies and mutual control, and legitimates leaders and generates popularity.

Conceptually the community of Gypsies could be described as a *'meta-geographic community'* (Nashleanas, 2011), or as a *'network of social change'* (Castells, 1997, p. 428). The current boundaries of this community are defined historically by their common origin, geographically by large scale dispersion and virtually by strong inter-connectivity on social media networks (especially on YouTube and Facebook).

Central to this research is the analysis of their transnational social relationship, best described, in line with Manuel Castells, as a *'networked community'* defined by having *'a complex system of relationships, permanently reinforced by the use of new technologies, [...] where the network's component parts, connected by nodes and hubs, are both autonomous and dependent upon each other'* (Castells, 1996, p.13).

In parallel to the literature about transnational practices and mobilities, the thesis also draws on the social theory of Urry, Levitt & Glick-Schiller, Faist, Vertovec and Appadurai, (Urry, 2000; Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004; Faist, 2000; Vertovec, 2009;

Appadurai, 2003). Combined with the new data collected for this project, these theories frame the analysis to show how transnational practices modify everyday social life and the universal human values of both the people who emigrated and those who are left back home.

Essential to my analysis is the unique character of the transnational Gypsy migrants. On the one hand, they have never articulated their vision of ethnicity as being related to any '*homeland*' or any formal political organisation. As they are '*stateless*', they have no official or legitimate voice on global, national, or regional levels. On the other hand, in their case, '*marginality*' is a fundamental attribute of their identity, and not a characteristic added to their status as migrants. They are marginalised whether they are migrants or not.

Gypsy transnationalism is not captured in the typical equations of political space described by '*here*' / '*there*' or '*being*' / '*belonging*'. These usual oppositions cannot frame their transnationality, which is instead described by the association of '*dispersed everywhere*' but '*belonging nowhere*'. Following this idea, Zoltan Barany argued that '*The uniqueness of the Gypsies lies in the fact that they are a transnational, non-territorially based people, who do not have a home state to provide a haven or extend protection to them*' (in Barret & Johnson, 2002, p. 2).

One of the central axioms of global networks is that '*transnational communities can be sustained by virtuality*' (Delanty, 2003). The literature review for this thesis therefore includes various social theories about digital connectivity and communication. Scholars have demonstrated that the Internet is a powerful social transformative force that empowers the excluded people and communities, even perhaps changing human nature itself (Castells, 1996; Rheingold, 2002; Patterson et

al., 2002). According to these authors, the '*self-mass media online communication*', (a concept introduced by Castells) changes the discourse about power in society by empowering religious or ethnic groups, reshaping social relations, and giving people a new form of self-expression. Therefore, the digital world is a form of decentralised governance characterised by interconnectivity and simultaneity, which generates new ways of belonging. In this context, digital mobility becomes a critical feature of the new virtual transnational life and offers new forms of intimacy and sociality.

In traditional mass-media discourses and social dialogues, Gypsies were considered culturally incompatible with others, 'unwanted guests', trapped by conventional stereotypes and left without any choice but to break social norms. The thesis records these old stereotypes but also shows how they are challenged and changed by the new self-mass media technologies. It also helps to understand the online pattern of opinions and how they reinforce pro and anti-Gypsy reactions.

Though the thesis was initially designed to be a conventional ethnography, it ended up as a project that uses both conventional and online ethnography (Hine, 2000), and real and virtual data. It combines the qualitative iterative-inductive approach with the quantitative approach of social network analysis. The research tools used are face-to-face interviews, life histories, and video data analysis. The variety of sources enable the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative findings and provide the depth needed to understand how social ties are maintained within the community despite its spatial dispersal.

In summary, the thesis provides a detailed exploration of the transnational social network of a group of Gypsies and the changing meanings of mobility within the community. In particular, the focus is on how the community is sustained despite dispersal. The thesis is methodologically structured into two parts: an analysis of the real, physical, offline network and an analysis of the virtual, digital, online network. In the following sections of this opening chapter, I introduce the research question, give a synthesis of the key theories and concepts, describe the research design and tools, and presenting an outline of the conclusions.

## 1.2 The research statement and the research question

The research question was inspired by two ideas. First, Arjun Appadurai's claim that *'there is an urgent need to focus on the cultural dynamics of what is called now de-territorialisation of an ethnic group, which increasingly operates in ways that transcend specific territorial boundaries and identities'* (Appadurai in Khagram & Levitt, 2008, p. 51). Second, John Urry's statement that mobilities re-make the social fabric, transforming the *'social as society'* into the *'social as mobility'* (Urry, 2000, p. 2). The ambition was to frame a research question in terms of this mobile and deterritorialised ethnicity.

Empirically, the object of the research question is a Gypsy community and its transnational network at a time when it seemed to be under considerable pressures of change.

The general aim is to ask: how do they maintain their cohesion despite this transformation? The central question for the thesis therefore is: how does a mobile and deterritorialised ethnic group remain united as it transforms from a geographically intensive community to a spatially extensive one?

From the outset, it seemed clear that as well as the role of mobile artists in the 'real' world, the role of the internet was central.

This raised a series of more empirical questions: Who is virtually active? What do they upload? Why? Who travels? Where? How? Why? How do they perform their transnational socialities in both 'online' and 'real' contexts? The research objective was to capture the real migration patterns of the group of Pentecostal Gypsies, their transnational online practices, and the activities of itinerant performers/leaders means in order to understand the means by which they secure their identity.

The primary working hypothesis is that in its expansion from a geographically settled community to a networked transnational community, the unity of the Gypsy community would decrease due (1) to the high rate of social fragmentation and (2) to the capacity of the internet to foster self-promotion and self-empowerment.

As well as contributing to long-standing debates in migration studies about the means by which identities are maintained despite spatial dispersal, this topic makes some more specific contributions. First, it contributes to theories about highly discriminated ethnic communities, and second, it contributes to the design of policies regarding the '*Gypsy issue*' at national and European level.

## Chapter 2 – Literature review

### 2.1 General Overview

I start this chapter with a conclusion. After reviewing Gypsy studies and the literatures covering transnationalism and virtual reality, I conclude that there is a lack of empirical studies at the intersection of these three fields. There is a gap in the existing research relating to the intensification of transnational Gypsy migration and their mundane online practices. This chapter sets out to support that claim and to make the argument that there is a need for more research in this area. Although numerous studies indicate that new social media empower migrants and enable them to maintain contact with their transnational families and kinship, there are fewer studies focused on marginal and discriminated ethnic groups and their use of new technologies.

In this chapter, I describe my research context, and I synthesise the literature on Gypsy issues, the literature on transnational migration, and the literature on virtual life, touching on Pentecostalism as well. I also include the main theories that conceptually framed the context of my research, and I show how my investigation relates to previous studies and how it adds something new.

## 2.2 Theories relevant to my research

There are three main bodies of research that constitute the theoretical background of my study: the literature on Gypsies and Pentecostalism, the literature on transnational migration, and the literature on virtual life.

The leading scholars who define the theoretical framework of my research are John Urry, for his theory on mobilities, Manuel Castells (Castells, 1996), for his theory of networked society, Daniel Miller and Mirca Madianou, (Madianou & Miller, 2012) for their theory about mediated transnationalism.

Methodologically, I embrace Michael Strangelove's enthusiasm for the imminent potential of YouTube as a '*window to everyday practices*' (Strangelove, 2010). I also list those scholars who helped me clarify what I do not want to focus on my research. I certainly do not include nor use any of the online methodologies promoted by Boellstorff & et al. (Boellstorff & et al., 2012) , and I disagree with Rheingold's vision of online communities (Rheingold, 2012).

## 2.3 Gypsies and Gypsyess

### 2.3.1 Gypsies in Romania and Europe

*'Gypsies are paradigmatic outsiders'*

(Bancroft, 2005, p. 33)

The Gypsies are one of Europe's oldest minorities, and across the continent, they experience systematic and widespread discrimination. At the same time, they are one of the largest minority groups in Europe. There are approximately 12 million people living in segregated groups and communities in several countries, most of them in the Balkans. The Gypsies, Roma, Romani or Romanies, Tigani (Romania), Romji (Slovakia), Gitanos (Spain), Zingari (Italy), Ghurties (Northern Cyprus), Sinti (North Europe) share a distinct social heritage despite having a diverse mosaic of languages, religions, and lifestyles.

The latest research in linguistics (Hancock, 2002) and genetic studies (Moorjani, 2013) have located their origins in the Indian subcontinent, suggesting that the Roma migrated into Europe from South Asia about 1,000-1,500 years ago (Moorjani, 2013). Other studies on genetics indicate that the Gypsy diaspora constitutes a single initial founder population that originated in North/North-West India 1.5 thousand years ago: *'We provide evidence for Eastern Europe being a major source of European ancestry, and North-West India being a major source of the South Asian ancestry in the Roma'* (Mendizabal, 2012). Most of the Gypsy studies focus either on a specific group, like Ghurbeties (Kabachnick, 2012), Gabori (Oliveira, 2012) or on a specific country, like Greece (Alexandrakis, 2013), Hungary (Stewart, 1997), Italy (Sigona, 2006), Czech

Republic (Budilova & Jakoubek, 2011), Argentina (Carrizo, 2011), Romania (Zamfir, 1993).

In Romania, the Gypsy population consists of a large number of distinct and diverse groups, ranging from the very poor to the very rich, from the very traditionalist to the very 'assimilated': Ursari, Cortorari, Gabori, Lingurari (Zamfir, 1993). These groups were formed based on kinship, profession, place of origin, clan. Though they are all Gypsies, the 'community' has a history of internal real and symbolic conflicts. According to Fonseca, for centuries, the Gypsies were slaves everywhere in Eastern Europe, including Romania (Fonseca, 1996). Although, the emancipation law of 'the Gypsy slaves owned by boyars' was adopted from 1855, when the owners received compensation for '*liberating*' their slaves (Achim, 2010).

According to the National Romanian Census from 2011, there were about 619,000 Gypsy people in Romania, but the real estimated number is over 2 million (Zamfir, 1993). The official records are not accurate, and there is a large gap between the recorded and estimated figures. There are a few social and economic reasons why Gypsies prefer not to declare their ethnic origins. Being a Gypsy is a massive social stigma; therefore, capturing their real number in a Census is a sensitive issue. To explain the difference between the official number and the estimated number, Catalin Zamfir, introduced the distinction between auto-identification, when Gypsies declare their ethnicity, and hetero-identification when outsiders label them as being Gypsies

(Zamfir, 1993). Although determining if somebody is a Gypsy or not should be a matter of auto-identification, often, it is a matter of hetero-identification.

Someone could be identified as being a Gypsy based on two main criteria: their physical look and their social behaviour. According to Karaman (Karaman, 2009), the first Roma people who had entered Europe were identified by their dark skin colour and black hair. Nowadays Roma people can have light skin and hair colour. Since the colour of their skin is not a defining characteristic, their behaviour and speech are sometimes used in identifying Roma. Gypsies are called using various local names in different countries and regions. They are named Romani people, Rom, Roma people or Rrom, and Rroma people, Romanies, although they are a singular "*ethnic group living in many communities all over the world*" (Karaman, 2009).

In Romania, there are various Roma groups, like the Tigani and Corturari. Generally, the Corturari are rather conservative and focused on preserving their cultural codes. As I show later, their community is divided along patrilineal lineages and preserves '*typical*' Romani institutions such as arranged marriage, the kris, the rom baro, or ethnic purity. Corturari work as mobile coppersmiths, traders, and service providers and speak a distinctive Romani dialect. Corturari men, women, and even children wear a traditional costume. All Corturari set great store on strict endogamy and cultural exclusiveness. They are proud of being the only '*true*' Roma and – apart from economic interaction – restrict their contacts to both Gadge and other Romani groups (Ries, 2007). Other Romani groups such as Rudari, Cocalari, Silk-Gypsies, (or

Romanised Gypsies, when recording their ethnic identity for Censuses) identify themselves as Romanian. Non-Roma ('*gadje*') identified them as Gypsies (Zamfir, 1993).

For over forty years, Romania was a closed country. It was ruled by a Communist dictator, Ceausescu, for the last 25 of those years. Between 1945 and 1989, the state apparatus was very oppressive and restrictive in terms of civil and human rights (including the rights of the Gypsy minority). In December 1989, the people took to the streets, asking for freedom and democracy. After the so-called '*Romanian Revolution*', a new 'democratic' regime was installed. The transition from the planned economy to a market-oriented one was a complicated process. The local industries, mainly the extractive and processing ones, collapsed, and land reform and restructuring of agriculture led to considerable suffering. In 1990, due to these hard economic conditions, a massive emigration process to other European countries started (Sandu, 2006). Although the Romanian borders were closed between 1990 and 2002, and EU legislation only permitted Romanian citizens into the European Union with a visa, a few hundred Romanian Gypsy families settled in different locations in Europe, especially in Austria, Germany, Italy, and Spain. Later on, especially after 2002, when Romania was granted access to the Schengen Space, the visa requirement for entering EU countries was lifted, and Romanian emigration, including the Roma, increased dramatically (Anghel, 2008). By 2011, according to official data, about 600,000 Romanians (including thousands of Gypsies) lived in Spain and more than one million in Italy (Bleahu, 2005: Bleahu 2007)

Western European countries were seen by many Gypsies from Central and Eastern Europe as a 'safe haven', where they could ask for benefits and social rights. For a few years, this illusion generated waves of Gypsy migration from all Eastern Europe to all of Western Europe, where they were generally treated as asylum seekers. Unfortunately, from 2005, due to the spread of an acute anti-Gypsy sentiment, some European states started to sign inter-governmental agreements to deport Gypsies back to their countries of origin, but mostly to Romania. As Palmer & Stanley concluded: *'The dream of many Roma for a better life' ended with them struggling all over Europe in illegal camps, living a dirty and excluded life, marginalised everywhere, being subject to economic and legal discrimination'* (Palmer & Stanley, 2012).

Discrimination and exclusion of Gypsies in Europe is not a recent social phenomenon and has a long history. Michael Stewart argued that their "exclusion has always been a matter of state domination and regulation" (Stewart, 2012). Okely observed that:

*'from the sixteenth century, the state has attempted to control, disperse, deport, convert, and destroy them. Over the years, despite many attempts to constrict and even expel them, Gypsies managed to survive as an ethnic group. In the long run, the use of force against Gypsies has proved to be ineffective and only of expressive worth [...] the Gypsies have been classed as problematic because they refused to be*

*proletarianised, and have instead chosen to exploit self-employment and occupational and geographical flexibility. [...] The threat which the Gypsies, as a minority, appear to represent to the larger society is mostly ideological. They are seen to defy the dominant system of wage labour and its demand for a fixed abode'* (Okely, 1983, p. 203).

Other scholars, such as Bancroft, argued that all European identities are manufactured as being distinct from one another, and in clear opposition with the Gypsy identity: *'Europe is a place where outsider minorities such as Roma/Gypsies are excluded'* (Bancroft, 2005, p. 102).

In defining Roma identity's specificity, scholars as Stewart consider their language as being the main aspect of their identity. For instance, Michael Stewart showed that for *"Baiesi Gypsies"*, their dialect *'was their substitute for the territory. They lived in their language'* (Stewart, 1997, p. 234-235). However, in Romania, not all Gypsies are fluent Romani speakers, so it is hard to conclude that language defines their identity.

Nowadays, each European country has its political position regarding the Roma issue. However, they only differ in the intensity of their shared xenophobic anti-Gypsy reaction. Unfortunately, for centuries, the judicial authorities in Germany and Italy, treated Gypsies as an exceptional minority placing them *'out of law'*. The statute of

being *'out of the law,'* in a *'state of exception'*, defined them as an ethnic group of stateless people, persecuted and lacking fundamental human rights (Illuzzi, 2010).

In 2012, Michael Stewart stated that for the first time at a continental scale, the Gypsies, *'became a central focus of radical, xenophobic politics. Dependency, illegality, and poverty are a heady combination and caused a radicalisation of anti-Gypsy politics across the region'* (Stewart, 2012). According to Stewart, 2005 represented *'the time of shift'* regarding European anxieties about Gypsies and ordinary European citizens transferred their fears and frustrations onto the Gypsy minority (Stewart, 2012). After they started to migrate massively to Europe, they were perceived more and more as illegal migrants, welfare claimants, squatters, nomads, beggars (Stewart, 2012), being abused continuously and easily arrested and/or deported, especially those from Romania and other Balkan countries.

Angus Bancroft called the European discrimination against Gypsies: *'the 21st Century Racism'*, a new-old form of exclusion. He argued that *'in a free movement Europe, Gypsies are subject of state regulations'* (Bancroft, 2005 p. 12). For instance, in 1992, Germany, under a signed agreement, paid 30 million pounds to the Romanian government to accept its Roma asylum seekers back (Bancroft, 2005). In 1997, the UK reported that half of the Slovak and Czech Gypsy asylum seekers were returned to France. Around the same time, the Czech and Canadian governments issued statements to discourage Gypsies from leaving the Czech Republic. *'As a result, there is a widening gap between those who can move freely*

*between states and those who can expect to be subject to harassment or interrogation at every border'* (Bancroft, 2005, p.7). In 1998, many of the Czech asylum seekers at Dover were detained in Rochester Prison: *'An agonising disorientation has overwhelmed the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe since they emerged from a total anonymity into a new harsh world and the glare of the international media'* (Bancroft, 2005 p7).

Politicians and the media exacerbate the anti-Gypsy politics across Europe. In Italy, Silvio Berlusconi signed a decree announcing *'a state of emergency in relation to settlements of communities of nomads'*, collecting fingerprints of all nomads, including children. In Slovakia, Roma children were separated from families and placed in boarding schools. In 2009, there were forced departures of Romanian Gypsy families from Belfast, Northern Ireland. In Bulgaria, the Prime Minister asked Bulgarian migrants from Canada to send money for *'dealing with the bad human capital'*. There were lots of signs of radicalisation of anti-Gypsy policies in Hungary as well.

More than that, in Italy, xenophobic tensions and incidents appeared within the Roma group, too. Bosnian Gypsies, already present in Rome, became very racist against the Romanian Gypsies, the newcomers. Solimene accurately described the complex and ambiguous tensions between the Gypsies and the majority of the population and within the Gypsy group as well, who are *'oscillating between the unifying principle of being Roma and being categorised as Gypsies (Zingari)/Roma/nomads by Italian*

*society, on the one hand, and the claim of specificity and differentiation between Roma groups on the other'* (Solimene, 2011).

In other countries, along with political decisions, they also faced aggressive attacks from the local population, for instance, in Ireland and Italy (Fox, 2012; Solimene, 2011). Media exploited and aggravated the situation, describing how Zingari stole Italian babies from the nomad camps and how Italian women were raped and beaten by men of Zingari ethnicity (Vasat, 2011; Sigona 2006). The scale of their impact was magnified: *'These Romanians [Gypsies] have ruined Italy'* (Solimene, 2011). *'Normal reactions'* against the expulsion of Roma people from France in the summer of 2010 were very few and very weak. They have unleashed interesting political debates, which unfortunately remained limited to the academic environment.

Most of the public reactions primarily analysed the incompatibility of the expulsions of nationals of EU member states, such as those that took place in France, with EU laws that guarantee the right to free circulation and residence, as well as the provisions of the Charter of Fundamental Rights that strictly forbid group expulsions (de Nanclares, 2011). They also addressed the risks that these kinds of actions can pose in the future about the role of the Commission as the institution charged with safeguarding the observance of EU Law (de Nanclares, 2011).

Concluding, long debates about the history of persecution, suffering, and forced assimilation raises two questions about the Gypsies: *'First, just what makes them so*

*threatening to their host population? And second, the central question (...) how and why do the Gypsies go on?* (Stewart, 1997, p 13). It is to the second of these questions that this thesis responds.

Over the years, although their condition of being *'out of law' and in a 'state of exception'*, remained constant, there was a shift regarding European anxieties about Gypsies, and labels such as illegal migrants, welfare claimants, squatters, nomads, beggars started to be attached to their identity. In reaction, political scientists and sociologists argue that a possible rational argument against the negative emotions attached to Gypsies is to generally accept *'the need to share with them the western wealth' to equilibrate the 'weight of difference across Europe'* (Berezin, 2011). This thesis does not seek to add to the existing literature documenting the extent of hostility directed towards Gypsies as that literature is extensive. However, it is the context in which this account of transnationalism operates, so it is vital to appreciate the challenge of maintaining networks. Or perhaps the hostility all Gypsies face actually has the effect of strengthening their unity and, therefore, difference.

### **2.3.2 Gypsies and Pentecostalism**

Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity is defined by Allan Anderson, in a very simple way, as a form of Christianity in which believers receive the *'gifts of the Holy Spirit'* (Anderson, 2004, p. 11). The origin of this religious movement can be traced to early twentieth-century within Christianity in the West and North America. In 2008, some

statistics, (questioned by Stoll and others) claimed that the numbers of the global adherents range between 250 million and 523 million (Stoll, 1990; Martin, 2002), with nine million people being converted each year (Anderson, 2004).

Prominent scholars, such as Casanova, consider that Pentecostalism is *'the most dynamic and fastest-growing sector of Protestant Christianity worldwide'*. He predicts that it will surpass Catholicism *'to become the predominant global form of Christianity of the 21st century'* (Casanova, 2001, p. 435). From the theoretical point of view, alongside strict morals, the core Pentecostal doctrines are formed by four elements: Jesus offers salvation, heals, baptises with the Holy Spirit, and is coming again. The main characteristics of most of the Pentecostal churches are that they emphasise the power of the Holy Spirit in the church, manifested through healing, prophecy and speaking in tongues (Anderson, 2004). Anderson and Robbins argue about how difficult it is to draw lines between different types of Pentecostal churches by using sociological, phenomenological or theological criteria (Anderson, 2004; Robbins, 2004). Also, Robbins distinguished different frameworks of interpretation, considering Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity as being a *'world-breaking'* and a *'world-making'* at the same time. (Robbins, 2004).

There are two main groups of studies regarding the conversion of Gypsies to Pentecostalism: one that emphasises the role of the Pentecostal church as a social institution, the other one where Pentecostalism is seen as a source for a new social identity. Since the 1950s, the Pentecostal mission has been increasingly successful

in 'saving souls' among Gypsies all over the world (Acton, 1979), creating '*new heavenly citizenship*' (Palmer & Stanley, 2012). A substantial literature, launched by Blasco, Delgado, and Rodrigues, found that conversion to Pentecostalism produced massive transformations among the Gypsies, alleviating discrimination and directing to better integration (Blasco, 2002; Delgado, 2010; Rodrigues, 2000). On the other hand, Pentecostalism is seen by these scholars as reinforcing their Gypsiness and allowing them to maintain the distance from the others, thus helping to preserve Gypsy norms regarding gender relations, leadership, honour, control within the group, socialisation of children. According to Palmer & Stanley, the Pentecostal religious experience restructures the life of the converted Gypsies entirely and gives them a new identity used to escape from their stigma (Palmer & Stanley, 2012). As Ries observed, the discourse of trans-ethnicity, promoted by Pentecostalism does not mediate between different ethnic groups, but argues beyond all ethnic ascriptions (Ries, 2007) – thus Gypsies can cease to be Gypsies in this worldview.

For a long time, Gypsy communities, territorially fragmented, have been classified as an '*acephalic minority*' and considered apolitical, non-institutional and non-religious (Engebrigtsen, 2000; Blasco, 1999). Ries argues that Pentecostalism offers them access to a new '*hyperspace*', defined by shifted ethnic boundaries and relocated discourses (Ries, 2007). According to Delgado, Pentecostalism has become one of the most original 'organisational experiences' developed by Gypsies (Delgado, 2010). She also insisted that Pentecostalism helped ethnic groups (including Gypsies) to strengthen their process of ethnogenesis and cultural reinvention, by redrawing their image from the angle of Evangelism (Delgado, 2010).

In conclusion, the process of constructing a new sense of Gypsies' ethnic and religious belonging has been marked by a double suspicion that hangs over Evangelical Gypsies. Firstly, they are seen as part of a stigmatised ethnic minority and secondly, as members of sectarian religion. It is, however, an explicitly transnational religious movement – so for the purpose of this study the literature on Pentecostalism is not just about the characteristics of the empirical subject group used in the case study – it is also part of the discussion concerning the means by which unity, identity and belonging are preserved despite dispersal.

### **2.3.3 Pentecostalism in Romania**

Rooted in the USA, the Pentecostal movement has spread in Europe, especially in Germany, Spain and Norway, and later in Eastern Europe. Across the whole of Europe, there are myriad of forms of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. Each European state has taken its particular approach in accommodating them. The first Pentecostal congregation in Romania appeared in Arad county, in 1922 (Rusu & Tarnovschi, 2006). Until 1950, when they were officially recognised, the denomination was not accounted for in censuses, and the members of the denomination were included in the same category as the other Evangelical sects (Baptists and Evangelical Christians). After the 1989 Revolution, churches affiliated to the branch called Church of God also appeared (Rusu & Tarnovschi, 2006).

The network of Pentecostal Gypsy churches from Romania and abroad is part of the European Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. *'In our country [Romania, A/N] and the Diaspora, there are over 2,500 local Romanian Pentecostal churches [including the Gypsy ones, A/N] which carry out their activities in different communities in the country and abroad'* (President of the Romanian Pentecostal Union).

The Gypsy Pentecostal movement started in the West of Romania, where the first Roma church was set up in a Caldarari community in the middle of the 20th century: *"At the Zion Mountain-Brotherhood"*. The early converted Gypsy Pentecostals started preaching among their people and spreading the religious movement widely within their group.

#### **2.3.4 Gypsy identity**

*'A Gypsy is anyone who says they are.'*

(Rehfisch and Rehfisch, 1975)

There are many different groups of Gypsies all over the world, and their only commonality is their low social status and their general marginalisation and exclusion. Amartya Sen stated that any *'Identity can be a complicated matter'* (Sen, 2006, p. xi), but *'Gypsy identity'* is even more difficult than others. It is grasped so

differently around the world, and there is no unique, nor officially approved narrative about the Gypsy identity.

There are many myths and preconceptions about the origins and identity of the Gypsies. They are representative of both phenomena of de-territorialisation and de-temporalisation. Most theoretical narratives related to Gypsy identity are based on different antagonisms: a) nomadic versus sedentary, the identity of travellers (Okely, 1983; Liegeois, 1983); 'placeless people' (Kabachnick, 2012), 'nomad identities' (Sigona, 2006), 'sedentary Gypsies' (Zachos, 2011); b) traditional versus assimilated (Acton, 2007; Acton & Mundy, 1998); c) autochthon (Oliveira, 2012) versus stranger (Sigona, 2006); d) '*stigmatized*', '*relational*' and '*attributional*' identities (Stewart, 2012; Fox, 2012). The '*unified Gypsy identity is a project of "outsiders"*' (Nicolae, 2013).

Generally speaking, their identity is built on the logic of both similarity and difference, and in opposition with the majority. If the majority is considered 'normal', everything about Gypsies would be classified as 'non-normal'. According to Okely, outsiders '*have credited Gypsies with the inverse of all that they consider normal. Thus the Gypsies have been represented as lawless, amoral, unclean, and part of nature in opposition to others' notion of culture*' (Okely, 1983, p. 197). Benedict Anderson pointed out that identity is marked by similarity (people like us), and difference (Anderson, 1983). In the relationship between Gypsies and others, both parties are searching for differences rather than similarities. Other theorists of identity

emphasised the profound dependence of identity on 'otherness' arguing that both Gypsies and non-Gypsies use the same logic of 'opposition' and 'contrast':

*'Gypsies talked about many features of their life in terms of their contrast with "gadjo" customs [...] Gypsies had a strongly performative model of identity and personhood and lived in a world where they are despised by the non-Rom.'* So 'policing the boundary between themselves and outsiders were central parts of their cultural activity' (Stewart, 1997, p. 17).

*'Everywhere, Gypsies are the lowest of the low. Why? Because they are different. Because they steal, are restless, roam, have the Evil Eye, that stunning beauty that makes us ugly to ourselves because their mere existence puts our value in question'* (Gunter Grass in M. Stewart, 1997, p.1 ).

*'The Gypsy versus peasant ethics are constituted by a series of structural oppositions: no attachment to place/attachment to the land, circulation/production, brotherly sharing/familial accumulation, past unimportant/past weighs on living'* (Stewart, 1997, p. 237).

Gypsies symbolise a moral ambiguity: they resist categorisation, myths of origin, and sometimes even deny their identity. Angus Bancroft called them '*mobile objects and*

*restricted subjects'* (Bancroft, 2005, p. 150). They are perceived as violating the spatial control system. *'For the politicians of Europe, they are matters out of place [...], they must be Gypsies somewhere else'* (Bancroft, 2005, p. 150). Dan Pavel, a Romanian sociologist, observed that Gypsies are *'recurrent objects of institutional regulation. [...] The plight of the Romanian Gypsies, ignored by the world for the past century, is now everybody's problem'* (Pavel, 1998, p. 73).

Sociologists who have Gypsy ethnicity, such as Nicolae Gheorghe observe that Gypsy identity *'is an ongoing adjustment and adaptation to a changing environment'* (Acton & Gheorghe, 2001), while Valeriu Nicolae proved that there is no single Romani standardised language, no common cultural traits, no unique or similar community rules and symbols and only a small minority of Gypsies *'know and care about the Romani flag and Romani anthem'* (Gelem, Gelem – a Serbian Romani song), both adopted artificially by the World Romani Congress in London in 1971 (Nicolae, 2013).

There is a gap between how Gypsies see themselves and how others perceive them. There is also a gap between how some of them promote their ethnic identity while others avoid it. One can observe a general tendency to 'escape' and to avoid the stigmatic setting of Gypsy identity, either by borrowing another ethnic identity (usually through mixed marriages) or by negation and non-self-identification (Nicolae, 2013). Several writers cite self-identification as a way of proposing Gypsy ethnicity/identity (Okely, 1983).

Valeriu Nicolae argued that *'Roma identity is mostly ideological, but the Roma lack the mechanisms needed to transform such ideology into a functional social truth'* (Nicolae, 2013, p. 15). He described Gypsy identity as a *'Ghetto identity'*, *'resistance-based identity'*, a *'Frankenstein identity'* (that encompasses all the negative stereotypes of the majority populations) or *'reactive identity'*. In conclusion, Gypsy identity is a *'multi-layered identity'*, which is socially controlled and manipulated by *'outsiders'*, and mainly framed by the antithesis of exclusion versus resistance.

A remarkable shift in the idea of identities legitimated by the social institutions and different political regimes is Zoltan Barany's concept of *'social marginality'* when referring to Gypsy identity (Barrett & Johnson, 2002). In his view, *'social marginality usually entails a condition in which an individual or a group of people is shunned, rejected or ostracised by another'* (Barret & Johnson, 2002, p. 55). Gypsies were always socially excluded, and they did not have control over the management of their identity. Their identity was decided and legitimated by external institutions, created and led by the *'outsiders'*, as Croucher stated: *'Identity relies upon an Other and belonging to an Us'* (Croucher, 2004, p. 40). Although identity emerges from processes such as identity creation, maintenance, protection or negotiation, the Gypsies could not negotiate their identity. They had to accept it, react or not, but could not resist. Therefore, the dichotomy *'us and them'* is unbalanced, and they can be considered genuinely underprivileged. *'Both as individuals and through collective action, it is possible to redefine and reconstruct our identities'* (Woodward, 2000, p. 39). She also said that *'who we understand ourselves to be is not a static 'fact' but can change over time. Identity is a 'production' which is never complete, always in*

*process, and always constituted within, not outside representation'* (Woodward, 2002, p. 154).

I conclude that most of the studies on Gypsies and Pentecostalism have addressed the question of how Gypsy identity is built on various antagonisms and how integration is mostly debated and negotiated among various social actors. The complex theoretical structure of their identity becomes even more multifaceted in the context of transnational migration, and the development of new digital technologies. However, outside the authors advocating self-identification, there is little sense of Gypsies own agency. There is scope then to add to this literature by treating Gypsies as more dynamic in terms of the production of their own identity. The sense this thesis adds to this account is one in which Gypsy identity is actively produced through activities like producing Youtube videos of Pentecostal sermons.

In the next two sections, I debate the question of Gypsies' identity and belonging within the framework of the other two key concepts and fields: transnationalism and virtuality.

## **2.4 Transnationalism**

Since the group of Gypsies who are the empirical case study in this thesis are living across borders and countries, the literature on transnationalism and mobility is an

obvious source of ideas. Mainly, I have focused on those scholars who linked transnationalism to an intensification of the borders-crossing process beyond state boundaries. I also discuss the relationships between transnationalism and locality, identity and ethnicity. Regarding the role of the place and space in transnationalism, I revisit the theory of de-territorialisation/re-territorialisation and nomadism versus sedentarism (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986; Appadurai, 2003; Okely, 1983). Also, I follow Dwyer's perspectives on transnationalism as a multidimensional space of connections, and I adopt and adapt her methodology of tracing the commodity culture of an ethnic group (Dwyer, 2001). The last perspective incorporated is Erving Goffman's theory of identity as performance, embraced while analysing transnational digital objects created by Gypsies (Goffman, 1959).

Although there are many studies on globalisation and migrant transnationalism, few have addressed the question of how a '*stigmatised community*' like the Gypsies may 'live' transnationally. The focus on the '*transnational life*' of a community is a novelty I would like to stress in my approach. Rather than focusing on the individual as a transmigrant (Glick Schiller & Caglar, 2011), or on families as transnational families (Miller & Madianou, 2012; Bryceson, 2002), I focus on the transnational life of a community of these marginalised Gypsies, who live across multiple borders and are physically dispersed and connected online.

Therefore, I consider transnationalism as a valuable theoretical concept that disrupts the narrow logic of classic migration from here to there, from national to international

and from sending to receiving countries. Nowadays, transnationalism is one of the most popular theoretical frameworks used to analyse the experience of migrants across various countries.

A pioneering definition of transnationalism was provided by Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Szanton Blanc: *'a new kind of migration population is emerging, composed of those whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies. [...] We call this new conceptualisation "transnationalism" and describe the new type of migrants as transmigrants'* (Glick Schiller et al., 1995). New transnationalism studies, which are still deeply rooted in the classic migration studies (Portes, 1997), are highly fragmented and include new topics such as: the globalisation of the networked ties, the new *'state'* of migrants with multiple identities and localities (Gupta 1997), the circulation of social remittances and the disintegration of boundaries (Vertovec, 2009). Much of this literature has been central to framing this thesis, but in reviewing these ideas, the research on transnationalism, space and place were particularly important.

Given the interest in this thesis between a shift from an intensive, geographically-limited place-based pattern, to an extensive, diffuse, transnational pattern, the literature on space and identity also seemed relevant. There are a few space-related features that define transnational identities: local/trans-local, imagined/spatial, national/transnational, here/there, longing / belonging. Scholars such as Morley,

Robbins, Appadurai, Cohen, have debated the relations between a territory and an identity (Morley & Robins, 1993; Appadurai, 2003; Cohen, 2006).

Morley and Robins stated that *'Places are no longer the clear support of our identity'* (Frederiks & Nagy, 2015 p. 21 ). Appadurai also shows how, globally, there is a deterritorialisation – a cultural distancing from the locality, and how, through mediatization, people expand their imagination to an *'alien culture'* (Appadurai, 2003). These ideas were challenged by Deleuze and Guattari, who introduced the concept of *'re-territorialisation'*, alongside with *'new territoriality'*, in opposition to *'primitive territoriality'*. They argued that distinct areas of land are distributed to different groups of people, and that territory is divided, regulated and owned by others; therefore the movement across this kind of territory is determined by borders and boundaries. They demonstrated that *'there is no de-territorialisation without an effort of re-territorialisation'*, which is different from a return to the *'primitive territoriality'* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986). Deleuze and Guattari also distinguish between sedentary and nomadic distribution of land and population. Robin Cohen observes that the phenomenon of de-territorialisation accepts *'permeable and multiple forms of identities'* (Cohen, 1997, p. 157), while Levitt and Khagram argue about the effects of the fluid conception of territory on the re-construction of the identity, stressing *'the changing social, territorial and cultural reproduction of group identity'* (Khagram & Levitt, 2008, p. 50).

Nomadism and sedentarism is a widely accepted binary that defines Gypsy identity in opposition with almost any other ethnic identity. While nomadism is mostly associated with Gypsy culture (Okely, 1983), sedentarism is linked to almost all European cultures. From this perspective, Bruno Riccio's study about the Senegalese migrants in Italy and how the socio-political understanding of 'space' changed in time, was very useful for my research. He argued that 'sedentarism', seen as a constant attachment to a specific place, can be a prerequisite to full integration, due to *'the logic of sedentarism'*, which is traditionally linked within European family culture (Riccio, 2000).

Despite other forms of belonging, many studies on transnationalism continue to focus on groups defined by their ethnic identities. Extending the empirical border of the transnational space beyond the ethnic dimensions would be a useful methodological approach for the understanding of both intra-group and out-group Gypsy identity. Erika Polson stated that research in transnational identities has *'ethnicity as a primary identification that is somehow altered through a combination of interactions with new cultural forms and the maintenance of links to a home culture'* (Polson, 2011, p. 144). In Woodward's opinion, 'racial and ethnic are not fixed', and the meanings attached to them can be influenced and changed (Woodward, 2002). According to Dwyer and Bressey, race and ethnicity are unstable concepts and contradictory constructions that live through intersections of class, place, gender and religion (Dwyer & Bressey, 2008). Other social scientists, like Hopkins, have also argued that each individual has multiple identities (of age, gender, race, sexuality, class), which *'interact, overlap and play off each other in complex ways'* (Hopkins, 2010, p.10).

A refreshing approach from a methodological point of view is Claire Dwyer's method of broadening the concept of transnational space by including both national majorities and ethnic minorities. By tracing transnationalities through commodity culture, she expanded the idea of transnationalism as a multidimensional space of connections, and as a *'lived social field'* (Dwyer, 2008).

Along with the idea of ethnicity as a fundamental component of a transnational identity, there are *'lateral arranged identities'* (Jenkins, 2006), which are negotiated mainly in the social sphere. Jenkins was concerned with the relationship between ethnicity and these other, laterally arranged identities. He considered that *'lateral identities'* could be more or less equally significant, although one individual may use one identity or the other, stressing the idea that they are *'in a hierarchical arrangement, one category tends to dominate or colour all the others'* (Jenkins, 2008). Identities are formed through interaction between people and are shaped by social structures and core institutions such as family, work, church, school.

For Castells, *'the search for identity is as powerful as a techno-economic change in charting the new history'* (Castells, 1996, p. 4). He differentiated between legitimate identities, imposed by dominant institutions, and resistance identities, derived from marginalised groups that resist domination. He considered identity as *'the organising principle in an informational society'* (Castells, 1996, p.22). Castells describes primary identity as the identity that frames the others and is self-sustaining across

time and space: *'From sociological perspectives, all identities are constructed. The construction of identities uses building materials from history, geography, biology, productive and reproductive institutions, and collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and from religious revelations'* (Castells, 1997, p. 7). For Castells *'Ethnicity, while being an essential ingredient of both oppression and liberation, seems to be usually framed in support of other communal identities (religious, national, territorial), rather than inducing either resistance or new projects by itself'* (Castells, 1997, p. 422).

While considering Gypsies in different transnational contexts, from country to county, I would introduce Yen Le Espiritu's concept of *'differential inclusion'*. She described how American Filipinos, through their self-made subject positioning and transnational connections, repeatedly pushed against the borders within and between nations (Espiritu, 2003, p. 211). Thus I consider the *'differential inclusion'* of Gypsies across different nations of Europe to be a useful concept in terms of developing my interest in articulating the agency of Gypsies in maintaining their own identity despite spatial dispersal.

In this research, Erving Goffman's concept of *'identity as a performance'* is fully embraced and implemented (Goffman, 1959). In any performance, specific symbols and markers are used and developed. In the same theoretical register, Margaret Mead demonstrated that identity is related to *'the capacity to imagine how others*

*would see us and our capacity to carry images in our heads: pictures, images, gestures'* (Mead & Metraux, 1970).

## **2.5 Transnational mobilities and networks - conceptual and methodological clarification**

In this study, I define any corporeal travel from one place to another, which involves any type of national border crossing, made by any member of the Romanian Gypsy community from T. (name of the original locality), in any direction and at any distance, with any purpose and using any type of transport (car, aeroplane, train) as 'transnational'.

Mobilities are described as a continuum, where, at one end is the theory of sedentarism, and at the opposite end, the theory of hyper-mobilities. Many Gypsy travellers groups (Kalé in Wales, Finland, Sweden, Norway; Gitano in Spain; Sinti in Germany and Austria) have been researched extensively over the years, and their spatial movements and orientations were debated mainly from the theoretical angle of nomadism versus sedentarism (Pantea 2013; Vlase 2012).

Trying to capture the transnational social dynamics of the Gypsies, I argue that 'mobility' and 'network' would be the most appropriate concepts to describe their community. However, in social sciences, human geography and anthropology, both

concepts have a variety of meanings. Unfortunately, both concepts, of network and mobility, mean different things, to different people, in different social circumstances (Adey, 2006). Conceptually, the multitude of theories could be grouped into two main trends: scholars who concentrate on describing the actual movement and ties, and scholars who mainly study the social actors involved rather than their physical or online movements.

Within the first category, John Urry stated that mobilities became the new social unit that re-make the social fabric, transforming the 'social as society' into the 'social as mobility' (Urry, 2000, p. 2). Various other scholars proposed different definitions. Zygmunt Bauman proposed to re-think the social in terms of flows and fluidities and developed the metaphor of waves, flux, liquidity (Bauman, 2000). Manuel Castells suggested that networks and the 'network of places' could be the basic frame of societies nowadays (Castells, 2004). Henri Lefebvre emphasised the importance of the spatial networks and mobilities, within and across societal borders, recommending the use of routes and points of insertion (Lefebvre, 1991). Along with the new paradigm of mobilities (Urry, 2007), there are the theories of 'de-territorialisation' (Appadurai, 2003) associated with 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000) and 're-territorialisation'.

In the second category, consisting of academics who focused on describing the social actors involved in mobilities, there is Deleuze and Guattari, who named people involved in mobilities/migration 'pilgrims', 'vagabonds', 'residents/foreigners' or

'interconnected nomads' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986); Bauman, who used the term 'postmodern nomads' (Bauman, 2000); and Braidotti with de-territorialised nomads' (Braidotti, 2011). Also, Paul Virilio described them as a fluid mass of migrants caught between gates and barriers (Virilio, 2012).

Although there is a plethora of research on physical mobilities, very few studies link them to online mobility and social network analysis of people and cultural objects. Most of the studies on physical mobilities are focused on the idea of 'annihilation of space' and 'death of distance' (Cairncross, 1997) or the use of transport (Urry 2007), or tackle the access to transportation and the effects of transportation inaccessibility on social exclusion (Lucas, 2012).

Although mobility is a powerful social force that undermines societies and communities, its core substance, the 'mobile' itself, is still disputed and under-theorised. In my thesis, 'the mobile' itself is formed by the networks of geographical places, online channels, paths, ties, created by Gypsies while living their life transnationally.

In my analysis, the theoretical concept of 'mobile' has 1) materiality, which can be quantified spatially (as how far, where) and temporally (how often, when), and 2) subjectivity, which is condensed into the purposes and motivations of the actors involved (why and how people initiate and experience the physical or digital movement of people and objects). The materiality of their mobilities would be seized

as physical mobilities and described through geographical maps and spatial visualisation, and the subjectivity of their mobilities would be captured through maps of interconnectivity based on their motivations and socialities.

In the next two sections, I capture both physical and online mobilities of my case study subjects, describing their materiality (the quantitative aspects of their mobilities, how often, how far, where, from where to where); and their subjectivity (why do they travel, motivations and purposes).

At the heart of transnationalism and mobilities lie a few theories that describe the transmigrant as living within and across various borders. In this context of intensified border-crossing, I explore the link between transnationalism and locality, identity and ethnicity, insisting on some aspects of de-territorialisation, re-territorialisation, nomadism, sedentarism but not finding any one of these sufficient. The transnational theories that address the role of identity and ethnicity emphasise the new challenges that transmigrants have to face in their movements. I also conclude that Dwyer's approach of the 'multidimensional space of connections' (Dwyer, 2008), and Goffman's theory of the 'performance of the identity' create an appropriate methodological and theoretical framework for my research (Goffman, 1959).

## 2.5 Virtuality and the online space

In this section, I review existing research on how new technologies assist communities and support individual people to position and reposition themselves within groups/communities/societies. Various attempts have been made to capture the new online world in a definition, and new concepts and paradigms are launched continuously in order to analyse the new digital world and its influence on people's real/offline life. In 1982, Gibson coined the term 'cyberspace' as a 'consensual hallucination'. Later on, many other concepts came up, such as '*second self*' (Turkle, 2011), '*Turing's man*' (Bolter, 1984), '*terminal identity*', '*surveillance society*' (Lyons, 1994), '*cyborg-self*' (Kinsley, 2013).

I start with John Perry Barlow, who produced a Declaration of the Independence of the Cyberspace, '*a world that is both everywhere and nowhere, but it is not where bodies live. [...] Your legal concepts of property, expression, identity, movement and context do not apply to us. [...] We spread ourselves across the Planet so that no one can arrest our thoughts. We will create a civilisation of the Mind in Cyberspace*' (Barlow, 1996). Other scholars, like Diane Saco, described the features of cyberspace less poetically as containing hardware (physical components), software (conceptual blueprint, a system of verbal signs, logical space of data, comprising both memory architecture and the user interface), and wetware (the human element). She concluded that '*technologies produce new kinds of spaces and new senses of self*' (Saco, 2002, p. 77).

A range of other scholars linked virtuality with depthlessness and superficiality, and see it as a poor substitute for the co-presence, face-to-face interaction (Hine, 2000). Mirzoeff considered that '*virtuality is an image or a space that is not real but appears*

to be' (Mirzoeff, 1999, p. 91). Virtuality could be perceived as a 'social laboratory where identities and "mediated identities" are performed, constructed and reconstructed' (Madianou & Miller, 2012; Horst & Miller, 2012; Baudrillard, 1988).

After careful examination of the literature on virtuality, I decided to follow Manuel Castells, for the concepts of '*culture of real virtuality*' and '*networked society*' in an informational era, and Daniel Miller, for his methodological frame in researching transnationalism and the Internet.

As I already mentioned, Castells introduced the concepts of '*real virtuality*' and '*mass self-communication*'. '*Real virtuality is a system in which reality itself (that is, people's material/symbolic existence) is entirely captured, fully immersed in an online image setting, in the world of make-believe, in which appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become experience*' (Castells, 1996, p. 372).

Castells also analysed the distinction between '*the net*' and '*the self*', replicating the classic sociological distinction between the structure and the agency. He created the new concept of '*networked society*' to describe the new world, and considered the new global system of power and counterpower, where '*the excluded exclude the excluders*'. Castells concludes that '*Power is a foundational type of relationship in a society and is constructed in the human mind as a communicational process*' (Castells, 2009, p. 9) and that '*Mass self-communication is based on horizontal*

*networks of interactive, multidirectional communication on the Internet and, even more so, in wireless communication'* (Castells, 2012, p. 220).

While exploring how groups/communities position and reposition themselves in the new online world, I analysed the status of online communities as a new type of social organisation, the digital inequalities and the power relationships amongst them. As a result it becomes important to define and clarify the concept of “community”. George Hillery came up with 94 specific definitions of the term community (Day, 2006). Ferdinand Tonnies defined it using the contradiction between '*Gemeinschaft*' and '*Gesellschaft*'. '*Gemeinschaft*', characterised as natural and organic, occurred in the context of proximity, where people were tied together on various levels: kinship, mutual interdependence, historical ties to the place and the land. '*Gesellschaft*' refers to a collectivity where people are rational, as opposed to natural and emotional, which is based on choice, formal contract and convenience. Sociologists like Engels, Durkheim, Simmel followed more or less Tonnies' dichotomies (Delanty, 2003).

Over the years, the constant erosion of communities was widely debated, culminating with Miller concluding that the concept of community is inadequate and cannot be adjusted to the modern world: '*The "community" is not the most appropriate term to describe the current state of social relations in contemporary post-industrial societies*' (Miller, 2011, p. 197). The development of the Internet and the expansion of the online world generated new narratives about 'community'. The newly created online

space was considered a possible 'new home', where communities would bloom: '*The age of globalisation is the age of community*' (Castells, 1996).

The concept of 'online community' was introduced in 1993, by Rheingold, to describe a form of computed mediated communion that has been formed virtually. In his definition, '*online communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on discussions long enough with sufficient human feeling to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace [...] Online participants can co-produce a sense of intimacy by getting to know each other from the personae they project on the Net. Virtual communities can be used to expand social and knowledge capital and do not have any material limits; they are potentially less exclusionary than offline!*' (Rheingold in Renninger & Wesley, 2002, p. xxvii ).

Some thinkers claim that a remarkable shift occurred between '*my community*' and '*a community*', from place-based groups to person-centred social networks. Wellman et al. suggested that a community is not a workable concept for online sociability, not even for contemporary social life (Wellman, Salaff & Dimitrova, 1996). In contrast, Craig Calhoun considered that virtual communities must be seen as an expression of indirect forms of social relationships (Calhoun, 1998). The Internet matters much more as a '*supplement to face-to-face communities*' (Delanty, 2003). Calhoun considers that the Internet produces communities of similarities rather than strengthening local networks of diverse people. It brings people together just on one

interest, rather than on more activities: *'They are communities of sharing a single concern, compartmentalisation of community life'*. (Calhoun, 1998)

Along with Castells, Deborah Chambers considered that *'Virtual communities are in fact communication communities. Communities are becoming more discursively constituted, opened new possibilities for belonging. Individuals are not placed anymore into one community, but they "situate" themselves in a community. Community is an antidote to homelessness and insecurity'* (Chambers, 2006, p121). In this research, I adopt Castells' argument that the community is mainly reactive to globalisation and offers a *'defensive communal heaven'* (Castells, 1996).

Further on, by investigating how individuals position and reposition themselves in the virtual world, I discuss self-identity, multiple identities, virtual discrimination and stereotypes. Manuel Castells and Sherry Turkle are the two sociologists whose theories I embrace for this discussion of Gypsies individual identity. One analysed the impact of the Internet at the society level, the other at an individual level. Castells introduced the concept of *'community of choice'*, which stresses the new capacity of an individual to rebuild the structure of his sociality from bottom up. Turkle found an unprecedented diversity of reconfigurable selves that can be sexless and fluid may have no off-screen presence or can be the avatars of the same off-screen individual: *'Computers do not just do things for us, they do things to us, including our way of thinking about ourselves and other people'* (Turkle, 2011, p. 461).

Concluding, the central debates in the social theories regarding virtuality are built around questioning whether the digital space is replacing, overlapping, excluding or completing real life. All these theories have their strengths and their limitations. Methodologically, instead of choosing one or another, I consider it more productive for this research to pick useful ideas and concepts, without questioning to which theoretical delineation they belong. The main concern is to be able to analyse and answer the research question using the most appropriate theoretical tools.

To summarize the review as a whole, I have read widely in three main bodies of research: the literature on Gypsies and Pentecostalism, the literature on transnational migration, and the literature on virtuality. The first is a relatively narrow field, which has emphasized the distinctive but challenging character of Gypsy identity. What has been dealt with less well in this literature is the spatial dispersal of Gypsies, because the preoccupation has been with Gypsies in their 'home' context. The other two kinds of literature (transnationalism and the character of the virtual) are squarely in the mainstream of contemporary sociology and migration studies. These are fields that have provided the terrain for some of the key western sociologists trying to grapple with human mobility and the rise of the internet. Taken together, they provide a useful set of concepts for answering my core question: how does a mobile and deterritorialized ethnic group remain united as it transforms from a geographically intensive community to a spatially extensive one?

## Chapter 3- Methodology and research design

### 3. Methodology and research design

In this chapter, I outline the research question and describe the research design. I also discuss the sources of data and their dual character of online/offline, primary/secondary, qualitative/quantitative, acknowledging the limitations of the methodological approach and debating the ethical difficulties of the Youtube cartography. From the methodological point of view, I mainly follow Marcus' approach of '*multi-sited imaginary ethnography*' (Marcus, 1998) and the Les Back's principle of using '*life methods*' (Back & Puwar, 2013). I borrow concepts, clarifications, and classifications from other scholars. For instance, I adopt Arjun Appadurai's concept of '*trans-localities*' (Appadurai, 2003), and I implemented Patricia Lange's classification of YouTubers (Lange, 2007).

#### 3.1 Research objectives and research question

The overall research question is: how does a mobile and deterritorialized ethnic group remain united as it transforms from a geographically intensive community to a spatially extensive one? From this are derived a series of research objectives and

sub-questions. The first research objective is to describe the social change within a community of Gypsies from T., and the rise of their transnational network, due to their transnational migration and the impact of the Internet (especially YouTube).

To achieve this objective, I ask the following questions:

### **1) What is the pattern of the T- Gypsies migration?**

Sub-questions:

- Who travels where, why, when, how?
- What role does the precise place of origin play in this migration?
- What role does Pentecostalism play in shaping this migration?

### **2) How do the Gypsies use YouTube videos to maintain their social network?**

Sub questions:

- What do YouTube videos reveal about Gypsy values and hierarchies?
- What role do antagonistic comments on videos from outsiders play in maintaining the social network?
- What specific role do the Pentecostal videos play as a sub-set of the broader group of videos in maintaining the network

### **3) How do the face-to-face aspects of travel, particularly by religious artists and leaders, maintain the social network?**

Sub-questions:

- How does travel legitimate leaders and generate popularity?
- What do face-to-face travels reveal about Gypsy values and social hierarchies?
- What is specific about the face-to-face travels associated with Pentecostalism?

Practically, I was interested in finding out how the Romanian Gypsies, actively engaged in transnational migration and how social media platforms (mainly YouTube and Facebook) are maintaining and strengthening their dispersed community. The primary curiosity was to check if their social cohesion and ethnic identity were going to be diluted by their geographical dispersion, or whether the opposite is happening.

## **3.2 Research design – Structure and flexibility**

In choosing the most appropriate research design, I advocated the idea that the research would respect an *a priori* fixed methodological frame and at the same time would be driven by the research questions.

For each stage of the analysis, I used different research techniques. To map their social and geographical network, I used quantitative techniques (descriptive statistics and inferential statistics). To describe their networking practices, I used qualitative techniques such as classic ethnography and interviews, and virtual ethnography (mainly video and picture analysis). I also used spatial data visualisation techniques to plot the qualitative and quantitative findings (Knoblauch et al., 2009). Therefore, I mixed and matched the qualitative and quantitative methods with grounded visualisation techniques.

The diagram below shows the usage of different research techniques: the qualitative offline fieldwork in the UK and Spain, between 2010 and 2011; the online qualitative analysis, between 2011-2013; between 2014 and 2017, I was planning to complete both the offline and the online data analysis and to write the thesis.

### 3.3 Challenges in choosing the appropriate research design

*'A research design must be flexible and adaptive.'*

(de Munck, 2009, p. viii)

In this section, I describe how the decision to combine primary fieldwork data with secondary online data, is based on my past fieldwork experience, practical fieldwork

difficulties, and inspired by the current theoretical and methodological debates in social sciences and human geography.

Before I started the MPhil at UCL, I worked for ten years as a researcher at the Romanian Academy of Sciences, where, being involved in many projects on Gypsy communities in Romania, I always applied conventional methodology, mainly interviews and participant observation. After many years of fieldwork and considerable experience in various Gypsy communities, I still felt frustrated that due to the social and ethnic distance between myself as a 'researcher' and 'my subjects', the Gypsies' unspoken thoughts and unrevealed aspects of their life continued to exist. Being vulnerable, marginalised and excluded people, Gypsies I met tended to protect themselves, either by altering their everyday behaviour, avoiding answers or sometimes even by lying. However, regardless of the level of intimacy reached during the fieldwork, some areas concerning their home life, their rituals, their worries, remained untold.

Therefore, finding their public YouTube videos and having access to their public Facebook pages, I decided to complement the primary data collected through classic ethnography with the online data. The plan was that in this way, I would have better access to the internal dynamic of their transnational community. There was also a practical reason. This Gypsy group is now spread all over Europe, the US and Australia and due to their high rate of dispersal and spatial mobility, it would have

been almost impossible to follow and interview them in many places, and it would have taken too much time and resources.

When trying to plan the research methods, I reviewed some classic books focused on research design methodology and considered their methodological narratives as appropriate to the research question and the dual nature of the data, real/offline and virtual/online (de Munck, 2009; Greenfield, 1996; Greenfield & Cocking, 1996). Also, while investigating their debates, I realised the limitations of the established social research methodology, which somehow is not in tune with the 'newly coordinated nature of social reality' (Back & Puwar, 2013, p. 18) that I was aiming to reveal in my research.

The methodological doubts were in line with considerable methodological deliberations in sociology, anthropology and human geography, which are interrogating the capacity of the classic research methods to investigate and reveal the new hyper-connected world and its mediated nature. Although it is generally accepted that the Internet is changing something fundamental about human interaction and communication, adding another dimension to the current social order by creating an extra-space for social interaction, the development of the adequate research methods is still at the beginning (Berger, 2001; Bernal, 2006; Fisher, 2010).

Also, it is acknowledged that the Internet divides social life into two spaces, the physical and the digital, which according to Miller, Slater, Kitchin, are different, but

not separated (Miller & Slater, 2000; Kitchin, 1998). Despite this, there are still misunderstandings about how to do mixed research (online/offline), to separate the method from the object of the study, or to clarify the most suitable criteria of reliability and validity that should be applied. There are also ongoing debates about the double standards regarding online/offline spaces and their ethics, privacy and publicity. Some scholars, like Christine Hine, avoided the online/offline divide by pointing out the richness and the complementarity of the online data, observing that 'a general tendency for people to disclose more about themselves online provides a considerable resource for the researcher' (Hine, 2005, p. 18). Along with Hine, I argued that the diversity of the videos uploaded on YouTube by the Romanian Gypsies, the richness of their comments posted there, and the passionate conversations, sermons and events, offered me the opportunity to be an 'invisible observant' and 'asynchronous participant' to some of the most private moments of their mundane transnational life.

Regarding the development of the most appropriate research design able to inquire both the real and non-real / digital world, scholars such as Mike Savage and Roger Burrows, Law and Urry, Les Back and Nirmal Puwar or Howard Becker agreed about the 'empirical crisis', disputing the possible solution for 'how to do the craft of research differently' (Back & Puwar, 2013, p. 29). Savage concluded that '*we cannot simply carry on interviewing or sampling as if the world is unchanged by fifty years of extensive research*' (Savage, 2010, p. 249). Les Back followed him by considering that '*we have reached a moment where interviews have limited usefulness as a means of understanding and investigating social life*' (Back & Puwar, 2013, p. 27).

Although the need for innovation and creativity is widely accepted, the source of the methodological change is rooted differently. Some scholars elaborated in detail new methodologies like virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000; Hall, 2000), 'netnography' (Kozinets, 2010), 'viral ethnography' or 'connective ethnography' (Kim, 2012 ), while others, like Les Back and Nirmal Puwar claimed that methodological innovation and new 'live methods' must be embedded in past research. According to them, the process of inventing future methods must be linked to the re-examination of the historical, social methods that would offer new possibilities to re-imagine observation and re-order the relationship between data gathering and analysis (Back & Puwar, 2013, p. 13). Their methodological suggestions (using poems or photography analysis, research walks or the involvement of local citizen scientists) are very courageous and original. However, it is still confusing how the actual research methodology should be designed to respect the scientific rigour and criteria of validity. The main principles, proposed by Les Back's 'live sociology', ask to include the multiple registers of life, giving equal attention to all the senses, to work on the move, using ambulant techniques, to use new media for iterative analysis, to find alternative ways to do research such as *'thinking with sounds'*, and to blur the boundaries between social research and other disciplines (art, film, photography) (Black & Puwar, 2013).

While Les Back was concerned with the *'ideological design'* of social research, elaborating principles and norms, others, like Howard Becker (Becker, 2007), cared more about *'practical aspects'* of the most appropriate methodology, presenting a

collection of various research methods and debating their respective strengths and limitations in *'telling the story better'*. They recommended to tell *'social stories'* by importing new techniques *'from the social sciences, such modes of representation as mathematical models, statistical tables and graphs, maps, ethnographic prose, and historical narrative; from the arts, novels, films, still photographs, and drama; from the large shadowy area in between, life stories and other biographical and autobiographical materials, reportage (including the mixed genres of docudrama, documentary film, and fictionalised fact) and the storytelling, mapmaking and other representational activities of laypeople'* (Becker, 2007, p. 4). Becker does not claim that one form of telling is superior to the other. Still, he suggests that researchers should provide a more productive analysis of the social world by considering and incorporating these innovative methods. In his opinion, every type of representation is suitable for conveying some things and eliding others. It would be up to the researcher to decide which one they consider works best in a particular study.

If some scholars are optimistic about re-thinking, re-inventing and re-imagining new methodologies, there are some pessimistic ones as well, who are pointing out possible anxieties related to multi/inter/and trans-disciplinarity (Savage & Burrows, 2007; Fife, 2005). Savage and Burrows argued that due to the global changes and the rise of the Internet, empirical social research is overshadowed by the capacity of the IT corporations and freelance fact-makers to inquire into patterns in human behaviour. I found their concerns relevant to my study. Therefore, I tried to be aware of how YouTube searching algorithms were influenced by the specific advertising policies and by the restriction imposed by Google's 'declared' or 'undeclared' aims

and of how to correct this limitation of the data. Since the online data collection was an automatic process, and I could not avoid the algorithms, I paid much attention to this issue while cleaning the data manually.

The disputes regarding the state of the methodology applicable to the digital space are accompanied by the debates regarding the difficulties of researching multinational and transnational physical spaces. Ulrich Beck stated that social research is inhibited by '*methodological nationalism*' (Beck, 2005) and the fact that nationality is no longer united with the nation-state. Along with him, David Held stressed the idea that nation-states are no longer adequate to solve the global issues and to handle global problems. In his view, the collaboration between nation-states does not seem to be effective. He questioned the capacity of human nature to collaborate cross-border, introducing the concept of '*parallel crises*' in parallel worlds. He pointed out the 'moment of potential stagnation in global decision making' as "*the paradox time*" when a world of growing integration is in opposition to '*the world of identity politics*' which remains rooted to the territory (Held, 1997). The Gypsy case is eloquent for validating Beck's and Held's theories. Their endless geographical journey from one country to another and from one type of exclusion to the other, their repeated eviction from France, from Denmark or the UK, illustrates clearly the inability of national governments and European forums to collaborate in solving the transnational '*Gypsy issue*'.

Taking into consideration all the difficulties enumerated - 1) the online-offline divide, 2) the need for innovative methods, 3) the challenges encountered during any 'transnational' fieldwork and 4) the necessity to combine various techniques - I decided that my research should involve both online and place-based ethnographic fieldwork and I should use a hybrid methodology, respecting '*live methods*' principles. This approach would also partially address the previous methodological frustration, experienced in the past fieldwork.

In conclusion, the principal constituents in designing the research, following both dimensions, virtuality and transnationalism, are the optimistic solution of Les Back and the principles of 'live sociology', respecting Becker's request for considering innovative and non-conventional ways of producing and presenting knowledge and Beck's paradigm of '*methodological cosmopolitanism*' for unfolding transnational practices (Beck, 2005) . The dissertation uses the YouTube platform as a lens for exploring, along with ethnographic data, the complex transnational relationships of a group of Romanian Pentecostals Gypsies. I also, use a combination of classic/conventional ethnographic methods, such as participant observation, life histories and face-to-face interviews, with virtual ethnography (including video analysis, and network analysis of videos shared on Youtube).

### 3.4 Justification of the methods and methodology

In this section, I justify why, to describe the transnational mediated life of a group of Romanian Gypsies, I combine primary/offline/ qualitative data (collected via participant observation and interviews) with secondary/online/ quantitative data (YouTube videos). The design of the research is grounded on two main reasons: the particularities of the ethnic group being researched and the opportunities and richness of data uploaded on the YouTube platform.

I argue that the research methods are chosen to take into consideration the particularities of this ethnic minority group and are adequate to the challenges raised by them: their demographic characteristics and the structure of their families; their constant marginality, along with their high geographical mobility; their inclination to cross new borders and to conquer new places following each other and living in dispersed extended families; and their disposition to be in perpetual motion finding new niches to make ends meet (Harrison, 2013).

Zoltan Barany argued that 'the uniqueness of the Gypsies lies in the fact that they are a transnational, non-territorially based people' (Barany, 2001, p. 2), who do not have a 'home state to provide a haven or extend protection to them' (Barret & Johnson, 2002, p. 2). On the one hand, they are, and they always have been (at least the traditional Romanian Gypsies) geographically very mobile, travelling from one place to another, but, on the other hand, they were very stable, almost stuck in their ethnic identity and the attachment to their ethnic group. They can easily move from one space to another, but with no desire to belong to the new place, to become

integrated or even less, assimilated. Interesting to notice is the paradox between their high geographical mobility and their low social mobility. Despite their eagerness to travel and their social flexibility, they were quite immobile socially, being almost captive in their community of origins.

The group of Romanian Gypsies who are at the centre of this study emigrated using the 'snowball migration' strategy (Sandu, 2006), following the information and the routes provided or designed by their first pioneers. As a rule, in opposition to non-Gypsy Romanian migrants, they would never emigrate on their own, but only in groups of a few relatives, mostly men. At first, the men would travel, search and prepare a place for the others to come. Their extended families would follow them shortly. Their wives would never emigrate on their own, nor both parents without their children. Most of them are not educated, and some (especially women) are completely illiterate, so migration could be seen as a temporary strategy for finding a source of income or a niche to earn their living. In their view, the new places should be inspected and conquered, extracting the maximum benefit without caring what would be left behind. They are commuting from one status of marginality to another one, without any claims for integration or assimilation in the destination societies. The rules, regulations and the system of laws of the destination countries are significant, not necessarily to be followed but to be avoided. Therefore, some of their earning strategies are at the edge of legality and are informal rather than official.

There is a need to make a clear distinction between their patterns of migration and their spatial mobilities. While the pattern of migration defines their transnational space and comprises the countries and the borders involved in their migration, their spatial mobilities refer to their geographical flows and circuits.

They have a double status, as migrants and as mobile people. As migrants, they would have temporary accommodation in one country or another, but they would still often travel very long distances. For instance, they would travel weekly from one church to another (e.g. from Edmonton Green to Luton), from one town to another (from London to Birmingham), and when necessary, from one country to another (from the UK back to Romania). Artists, leaders and ministers travel extensively to visit their 'brothers' and to maintain the linkages within their extended families. There are also regular visits back to Romania, especially to take back their dead and organise their funerals, to supervise the construction of their new houses, to find partners for their sons and daughters, or to consult Romanian doctors. Their extended families are nowadays living across a few national borders. Cousins, parents, brothers and sisters are divided by national borders. Most of them have their own large families with lots of children, who are an essential source of self-esteem (being called by their parents 'my king' or 'my princess') and a strong reference point for their individual and ethnic identities. Taking into consideration their high geographical dispersion and mobility, it would have been practically impossible for me as a researcher, to follow them and collect empirical data.

Another essential characteristic of this ethnic group is their status of '*double exclusion*'. They are not only discriminated against because they are migrants. They are doubly discriminated: firstly, as migrants and secondly, as Gypsies. Therefore, their marginality and social exclusion are carried as an inherent part of their identity. Almost everywhere in every country, they are always 'watched' by local authorities and excluded residentially. For instance, in Italy, Spain or Norway, they are living in illegal camps, on the outskirts of the cities, where they are incredibly vulnerable and exposed to evictions or informal exploitation. They are trapped into the conventional stereotypes and left without any other choice, but to exploit or sometimes break the social norms. In dealing with vulnerable and marginal groups, the simple presence of a researcher in this type of environment could distort their behaviour. Being used to protect themselves, they would keep the distance, performing roles and wearing a sort of social mask. Although YouTube is a public platform, apparently they found a space where they can express themselves and 'take off their mask'.

Romanian Gypsies have a predominantly oral culture and a proportion of them are still illiterate or not confident with the written word, so it was less likely to find them following Twitter or sending emails. Writing and reading are for them, artificial and unnatural ways to communicate and stay in touch. Therefore, watching videos, filming themselves, singing or dancing for their relatives or friends, come more instinctively for many of them.

Apart from the particularities of the Romanian Gypsies mentioned above, the second main reason for designing this methodology was rooted in the YouTube special features: it allows the storage of self-made videos (user channels); it permits asynchronous communication (through open comments); it is easy to use; it allows searching criteria. Also, using video data analysis presents essential advantages. Due to the high fidelity of the recordings, the traditional concerns about validity, reliability and errors are diminished. Also, video recordings preserve details. They are available to the analyst for analysing and 're-analysing' the first interaction from a distance, as an unseen observer. The presence of the researcher does not distort the data and, as Anna Grimshaw noticed, *'interactive media communications permit to gather network data unobtrusively'* (Grimshaw, 2001, p.8).

There are thousands of YouTube videos that contain the word 'T. (name of the locality)' in the title and short description, and hundreds of YouTube channels and profiles that contain it in the self-presentation rubrics. 'T. (name of the locality)' is an identity marker that is attached to hundreds of online profiles, account names and channel users.

Having in mind all these particularities of the chosen group and the chosen social media platform, I advocate the idea that the research should be driven by the research question rather than an a priori fixed methodological frame. Although I used strict and rigorous techniques, when it came to sampling, data retrieval, descriptive

statistics, the research design as a whole was relatively flexible, open and sensitive to any emergent and unidentified aspect that could occur.

Practically, I integrated and triangulated qualitative with quantitative findings, and connected first-hand data with ready-made online data, involving a mixture of online and offline, of primary and secondary data. I mixed and matched various techniques, clustering and classifying different types of data: videos, video statistics (likes, views), songs, spoken words, printed text, hypertext, images. The ethnographic data was collected using mostly semi-structured interviews and participative observation. The ethnographic approach tried to cover both real and online spaces, revealing aspects of their online/offline mobility, their online/offline identity, their online/offline solidarity. Going regularly to their churches in London (Edmonton Green, Seven Sisters and Luton), visiting their houses on various occasions (baptisms, for instance), I met and spoke with ordinary members of the community of all ages, including teenagers, as well as Pentecostal artists, ministers, YouTube video consumers or uploaders.

As for the online data, these derived from a continuous, fourteen months-long YouTube ethnographic investigation which combined intensive crawling with various data importing procedures. YouTube videos were analysed using descriptive social network analysis (Moreno, 2013) and video content analysis. I applied social network analysis to describe both the linkages between videos and the linkages between channels/users considering videos/channels as nodes in the network. I question their pattern of linkages and clusters. For content analysis, I selected a sample of 360

videos, uploaded them in NVivo, watched them, and partially transcribed them and use them as empirical data in the analysis.

The population under study was explored using two units of analysis: people and videos. The sample of people consisted of inhabitants or former inhabitants of T. (name of the locality), individuals and extended families, with or without the experience of transnational migration, Pentecostal or not, computer literate or not. The video sample contained videos imported from YouTube, together with their connected videos, i.e. the first-hand network of videos.

### 3.5 Data and datasets

Before introducing the procedure used for data collection, I would like to address the distinction introduced by Shani Orgad, between virtual/online and real/offline data. Real/offline data *'is obtained using methodologies in offline settings'*. In contrast, virtual/online data are 'materials obtained using what has been often described as virtual methodologies: methods implemented by and through the internet' (Markham & Baym, 2009, p. 37).

Technically, the data are stored and analysed in three different databases:

- 1) The first database, built-in Excel, with 5,800 geocoded cases out of 8,400 imported videos, comprises the data imported from YouTube.

2)The second database, built-in NVivo (Version11), contains the 360 videos, a sample selected from the Excel database, transcribed religious songs and sermons and transcribed interviews, Facebook pages, pictures and videos, the literature review.

3)The third database, built-in ArcGIS, is an interactive Story Map which tries to visualise both types of data. Practically, all the data (numbers and quotes) were geocoded and imported into ArcGIS, then plotted on the map or compressed into other data visualisation tools. All reported locations were geocoded (longitude and latitude) using the Mondeca website (<http://mondeca.com/index.php/en/any-place-en>). In terms of mapping, the geocoded data was then incorporated into a geographic information system (GIS). The geocoded data was used to map their migration patterns.

### **3.5.1 YouTube – as an online reservoir of social memories**

In this research, YouTube is considered: 1) the leading social media platform where the Gypsies interact by uploading, watching, recommending videos to others, commenting, or only using 'like'; and 2) a significant source of data, an online reservoir of their archived social memories covering the last nine years.

Although research using YouTube is still at the beginning, there are many studies focused on measuring and analysing the technological features of YouTube. Some

scholars examine how YouTube functions on a large scale, from the perspective of system design, with a focus on measurement and modelling: usage patterns, files properties, traffic, transfer characteristics, video popularity, referencing behaviours, detecting mechanisms of legitimate videos or spammers. Others, like Benevenuto et al., approached YouTube as a communication tool, inspecting its features as an online social platform (Benvenuto et al., 2009). Their studies focused mainly on user behaviour in the YouTube social network and on the properties of the social graphs ( a model that represent a social network), created by videos and users interactions. Also, they identified patterns of user behaviour and showed evidence of anti-social behaviour such as self-promotion and content pollution. However, others, like Zhou et al., considered the view sources of YouTube videos, and found that related video recommendation is one of the essential sources (Zhou et al., 2016).

In these studies, the user-behaviour and a video-behaviour are not linked to the user-profile and the video-content, and this could be seen as a limitation. I argue that they do not reach beyond the statistical properties of the channels or the videos, and do not describe the social fabric of the real people who interact among themselves by using and exchanging videos.

In my research, I was not interested in depicting the YouTube algorithms or its 'imperfections' (Strangelove, 2010) as a search engine, nor in debating its 'marketable and manipulative' features. The aim was to understand if the online network of videos and users found and formed online (searching by 'T. (name of the

locality)' and 'V. (name of the artist)') has any social significance in real life, if it describes a real community and reveals the real structure of this community. In particular, the goal was to understand the role it played in maintaining unity in the context of dispersal.

### **3.5.2 Mixing online and offline data**

One of the main challenges of the research was to mix online and offline data. I permanently had to wander between these real and online spaces, back and forth, without being very clear how to draw the demarcation line when combining and analysing them.

In the academic literature, there are three main tendencies regarding the practices of mixing online and offline research methods. The first one, supported by scholars like Miller, Don Slater, Kitchin, is stating that although the Internet divides social life into real, 'offline', and virtual, 'online' life. These two spaces, the physical and the digital, are different, but not separated. In other words, the online/offline spaces are intertwined. They are mutually reinforcing, each participating in the other as significant parts of more widely distributed social lives (Kitchin, 1998; Miller & Slater, 2000).

The second tendency, stated by Ronald Hallett and Kristen Barber, argues that the online space is part of the real-life of the people and that studying a group of people in their 'natural habitat' now includes their 'online habitat': *'We conclude with a call for ethnographers to consider how digital spaces inform the study of physical communities and social interactions. The latter can be modulated on realities, but also accepts new forms of sociality, new identities, and new relations to gender, race or ontology'* (Hallet & Barber, 2013). This second tendency ponders the two spaces inclusively, with the offline space including the online space. The third trend, described by Tom Boellstorff, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce and T. L. Taylor, specifies that the online space is separate and should be treated as a distinct world, with its own rules and specificity, seen as an additional space rather than an overlapping one (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012). In other words, the third trend debates that the online/offline spaces are equal but independent.

Since in the research, offline and online data complemented each other, I considered appropriate to follow the methodological approach launched by Miller, Slater and Wellman&et al, who claimed that online and offline social networks do not exist as such, but they are useful analytic constructs for understanding social dynamics (Miller & Slater, 2000; Wellman & et al, 1996). Miller and Slater consider online life as being rooted and entangled with the real-life:

*'We find ourselves alienated from that early generation of Internet writing that was concerned with the Internet primarily [...] as "cyberspace" or "virtuality" [...] "apart from" the rest of social life [...], as spaces in which new forms of sociality were emerging,*

*as well as bases for new identities, such as new relations to gender, "race" or ontology'* (Miller & Slater, 2000, p. 4).

From a methodological perspective only, I classify the data in real/primary/offline data (collected through classic ethnography) (Scott-Jones & Watts, 2010) and virtual/secondary/online data (collected through virtual ethnography on YouTube and Facebook). The 'real' is opposed and overlapped with the 'online data', to identify cliques, kinships, relationships, networks, spaces, types of engagement, types of communication. However, the online/offline data dichotomy is used for examining the interconnection between the two methodological spaces and for stressing how the data complement each other. In line with Castells, Miller and Slater, Derek et al. the Internet, (particularly social media platforms), is considered as a tool for mediating the relationships between people, and not as a separate, distinct space (Castells M. 1996; Miller & Slater, 2000; Derek & Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011).

### **3.5.3 Mixing primary and secondary data**

I classify as real/offline/ethnographic primary data all the data collected by myself, using classic methods such as interviews and participant observation. I labelled as virtual/online/secondary data, all the data produced by others, mainly members of the community (or related to them), imported from the Internet using different extraction tools. The distinction between online and offline data was only used from a methodological point of view and is based on the data collection techniques.

The sample of the videos contains mainly two types of videos: 1) videos created and posted by the Gypsies from T. (name of the locality) on YouTube and/or Facebook, with and about their community and 2) videos created/copied by 'outsiders', like official TV channels or random uploaders who uploaded videos related to the Gypsy community from T. (name of the locality). Chen observed that 'with its slogan "Broadcast Yourself", YouTube has been designed for sharing user-generated content. However, many of the videos are not originally from YouTube but are instead simply copied from other places, such as TV channels and other professional video websites.

I labelled a video as an 'individual production', being uploader content generated if it was initially created and generated for using self-mass media (YouTube or Facebook), and as 'public uploader copied content', if the video was initially designed and distributed through mass-media channels or broadcast on TV, outside social media platforms.

### **3.5.4 Mixing qualitative and quantitative data**

#### 3.5.4.1 Quantitative data

I approached YouTube videos as 'circulating entities' (Latour, 1999), which could trace the Gypsies' high spatial and temporal mobilities, capturing significant aspects

of their social life. I analysed the digital connections between users - channel owners (and the subscriptions among them and to others) and videos (linked through shared comments) as empirical 'proofs' which could reveal the online pattern of their transnational social connectivity and communication. The nature of the quantitative data (self-made videos) allowed me to 'seek a subjective understanding of social reality rather than statistical description and generalised prediction' (Dwyer & Limb, 2001).

The initial dataset had approximately 10,000 YouTube videos. The searching criteria was 'T. (name of the locality)' and 'V' (the name of the artist), ordered by the relevance criterion Youtube allowed different types of sequences. To extract the videos I used Netvizz, (<https://tools.digitalmethods.net/netvizz/youtube/index.php>) a tool created by Bernard Rieder. Each YouTube video and channel owner was automatically assigned by YouTube a unique ID, an 11-digits code composed of 0-9, a-z, A-Z, and '\_' and also a series of metadata: the channel's owner, the date when it was added, category, number of views, ratings and comments. For each video retrieved (defined as seed-video if it contained 'T. (name of the locality)' or 'V. (name of the artist)'), I retrieved 'related videos' as well. A related video could have either similar title or description, tags or identical commentators. To retrieve 'related videos' I used 'crawl depth two' option incorporated into Rieder's extracting tool.

The YouTube search option allows users to list the results of a query in two distinct ways: according to relevance and in order of the date the video was uploaded.

Displaying videos in a relevance list is the default mode of YouTube search, and one can safely assume that users most likely use this option. Although there was no description in the Netvizz tool presentation or on the YouTube platform of how relevance was determined, systematic observation of the videos from the dataset suggested that it was based upon at least three criteria: to contain 'T. (name of the locality)' or 'V. (name of the artist)' within the channel's name, title, description, or comment; to have high user ratings, and to have a large number of views and comments. Due to the technical limitation of the YouTube 'relevance' search criterion, I could not rely exclusively on it, so I combined various sampling procedures using other extracting tools created by Rieder (Channel Network and Video Network). Then, I merged these two datasets with the initial one, to check if I had missed any essential or representative videos or channels.

The result of each search was a Geographic Data File, which supports attributes to both units of analysis (nodes) and links among them(edges) These files contain the necessary information and statistics about the videos and channel owners and all the retrievable comments. The actual statistical analysis was done in Excel, the network analysis in NodeXL, and the spatial analysis in ArcGIS.

From the initial search result, about 1,500 videos have been removed as duplicates, as empty links or for violating the General Terms and Conditions. The final working dataset comprised 8,402 videos. Out of the 8,402, I managed to geocode 5,980, using both manual and/or automatic techniques. The main criterion used to geolocate

a video was the place where the video was shot. In most of the cases, the geographical location (respectively, the locality where the video was filmed), is included in the title or the short description of the video.

In some cases though, I had to watch the video and associate it with images from other videos to deduce the actual location (for instance, I noticed that the church in Dortmund has yellow curtains, or that a specific church has a particular design/colour of the chairs). Some videos specified the name of the church leader/minister (like 'filmed at M.'s church', who I knew was based in London and 'his church' was in Edmonton). Other descriptions contained the name of the church: Maranatha, Philadelphia.

When possible, for some videos, I created two different variables (named 'location' and 'guest-location') with two different geo-locations - one for the place where the video was shot and the other for the location of the people who were filmed. For instance, if the description of a video contained '*A brother from Paris visits his brothers in Leeds*', it was geocoded for both Leeds and Paris.

Also, if V. (the artist) was filmed in different cases, I geocoded the video firstly for the location where the video was shot, and secondly in a separate variable the place of his origin. To describe a location, I used a few descriptors: the name and type of the location, the county, country, latitude and longitude. For most of the analysis, I used the variable 'location', and only when I described celebrities' itineraries, I used the

variable 'guest location'. Based on the analysis of all these characteristics of the videos and channels, I recreate their geographical trajectories and draw their pattern of migration.

#### 3.5.4.2 Qualitative data

As I stated, the core data involved a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data. This section describes the types of qualitative data and how qualitative data was collected, processed and analysed.

The qualitative data comprised: offline data (17 interviews, semi-structured interviews and ethnographic notes based on 18 church visits on Sundays) and online data from YouTube (12 transcribed sermons, 24 transcribed songs and online messages, YouTube comments of 100 imported videos and Facebook posts from 12 profiles). The offline qualitative data were collected using conventional methods: interviews and life histories from 17 members of the Gypsy community, seven women and ten men aged between 20 and 60. The main selection criteria were their involvement or lack of involvement in transnational migration, and in the use of new technologies (especially YouTube and Facebook), either as producers or as consumers. Each participant was assigned a code (a number between 1 and 17) to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Most of the interviews were carried out in their homes or churches, one in a park, one in a car, and one in a coffee shop, in the UK, Spain and Romania. I interviewed ordinary members of the community as well as artists,

leaders, YouTube celebrities, YouTube users and video consumers, geographically based in T. (name of the locality), UK (Luton, Ilford and Edmonton Green) and Spain. I recorded eight interviews, and I took notes for the rest of them.

As with the online qualitative data, the qualitative data derived from an ongoing, fourteen months-long YouTube ethnographic investigation that combined intensive crawling with data importing procedures, video screening and Facebook screening.

First, I created 17 transcripts of over 30 hours of interview data from the digital-recorded interviews. This transcription process involved 'active' listening and note-taking, enabling me to become familiar with the data set. For each case, I wrote personal and theoretical memos in NVivo tools, while listening to the recorded interviews and scanning the transcripts for 'patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 82). The personal memos kept a record of personal ideas and reflections, which emerged while listening to the data. The technical notes indicated points where transcript data reflected ideas or concepts from the research literature. While reading the transcriptions, I created codes, labelled into themes. Braun and Clarke describe a theme as *'something important about the data concerning the research question, and [something] that represents some level of patterned response'* (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82).

While watching and geolocating videos, I classified them into religious (sermon, Christian song, baptism) and non-religious (dance, music, conflict, arrest, public

space). Mixing information from the interviews, notes from participant observation and social network analysis of videos from YouTube, I determined how widespread their extended families are, how far they live from their family members, what is their pattern of communication and connectivity and their interactions in transnational spaces (Gal, 2002). Since I consider the community as being formed by a few extended families, solidly interconnected, in my analysis, I overlap data about extended families, nuclear families and individuals.

## **3.6 Ethical considerations**

In this section I underline the main concerns regarding the ethical considerations of the research: 1) working with marginalised people, 2) dealing with online and offline data, 3) privacy and 4) aspects related to data visualisation techniques.

### **3.6.1 Working with marginalised people**

As a qualitative researcher, I was always inspired in the fieldwork by Scheper-Hughes' principles of doing ethnography, especially in working with Gypsies. She argued in favour of a 'scholarship with commitment and engagement', and she considered more unethical refraining from doing research simply because it is difficult or dangerous (Scheper-Hughes, 2004). Working with vulnerable and marginalised people like the Gypsies from T. (name of the locality) is not an easy task. Since the

life of some of them has been severely disrupted (family members in prison, internal conflicts), they were not always easily approachable. The aim was to work with them without disturbing or harming them and without exposing them to unnecessary stress. In doing this, I used my communication skills gained during various fieldwork in deprived areas or illegal migrants camps in Romania, Italy, Spain and France.

Their vulnerability passes beyond the physical space into the online space as well: their lack of knowledge in setting their account's privacy and their practice to upload on public platform videos with intimate moments of their life. Annette Markham and Elizabeth Buchanan (Markham & Buchanan, 2012) demarcated some fundamental principles - such as respect for person, justice, beneficence) - that I considered compulsory to follow while doing the online ethnography. One important principle was to protect and show consideration for all possible sensitive aspects of their life. Also, their advice was to define contextually any potential harm and to consult as many people and resources as possible. Anonymity was used in all such cases.

### **3.6.2 Authenticity and credibility**

While visiting one minister at home and recording the interview, I asked for his opinion about the Internet. His remarks, especially about Facebook, were highly negative, and he denied having a personal Facebook account. I was in a problematic position. Days before, I had seen his Facebook photos, with family, grandchildren, wife and sons. I became a bit anxious, and I did not know how to react. Since four of his sons

assisted in the interview, I could not put him in a disadvantageous position telling him that I have seen his Facebook account. Therefore, I could not ask him more about how he used it, who helped him with his posts and others.

The ethical dilemma was how to react when the subjects are inconsistent and not reliable, on either face to face interaction or online. This incident raised questions about the level of trustworthiness and validity of the research findings. Consulting a broad spectrum of literature on research ethics, especially related to online/offline identities (Markham, 2005), most of the debates were focused on the risk of 'identity fraud', on how to obtain informed consent from online participants, or how researchers determine if the online users are those whom they claim to be (Binik et al., 2011; Flicker et al., 2004).

### **3.6.3 Covert versus overt ethnography**

The particularities of the researched group and the dual character of the data, real/offline/qualitative and virtual/online/quantitative, implied exceptional attention concerning the ethical approach and to the mixing of both covert and overt approaches. In the literature, especially among social scientists, it is mostly accepted that covert research and the use of covert methods have always been a problematic issue. While some scholars, like Miller, stressed its positive side arguing that it offers access to information that otherwise would have been denied to the researchers (Miller, 2001), his opponents repudiated it as being ethically and professionally

unreliable. This is in general, the position held by the UCL Research Ethics committee too.

In line with O'Reilly, who concluded '*Most ethnography takes place along a covert-overt continuum*' (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 65), during the offline fieldwork, I involved both covert and overt approaches, while for the offline data, I used only covert virtual ethnography. When I started the fieldwork, the semi-covert ethnography consisted of being introduced by the local minister, as a Maths tutor and not as a researcher. While interviewing them, I disclosed the research aim and my position as a researcher interested in migration and how migrants use the Internet and social media to stay in touch.

I also, disclosed that I grew up in a village with various minorities, including Gypsies, with grandparents baptised to Adventism (seen by them similar to Pentecostalism) and very sympathetic to the discrimination they have to experience day by day. O'Reilly argued about the advantages of posing temporarily as having another social position as a researcher as 'people often find it much easier to relate to someone in terms of a role they understand and which is accepted in the setting' (O'Reilly 2009, p. 9). I was also aware that formalised research approaches could have raised feelings of suspicion and mistrust; therefore the covert strategy of playing roles helped me to create and nurture social bonds that later were developed into relationships based on trust. Also, knowing some of the interviewees for a few years prior to the research was another significant advantage in building reliable

connections. As O'Reilly observed, 'time allows us to build rapport with research participants and to gain their trust and confidence' (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 11).

### **3.6.4 The dual character of the data: offline and online**

The main concerns while doing virtual ethnography, were 1) the copyright issue, 2) the tension between publicly available data and confidentiality, and between the private and public sphere. The initial worries were also about the ownership of the videos and about the permission to use them.

I found the answer to all these questions in the YouTube Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Online Video, which specifies the circumstances under which one is allowed to use excerpts from copyrighted material (Kim, 2012). Those relevant for the research are: 'adding new expression or meaning to the original' and 'borrowing small bits of material from an original video', both under the YouTube Standard License. Also, I started from the underlying claim that Youtube is a public space where people could share publicly sensitive and private issues. Therefore, Youtube was treated as a virtual public space and where videos are public objects openly exposed by their owners and producers.

To protect the community, I anonymised the name of their locality, the artists' names and interviewees' identity. Also, the pictures do not show any identifiable individuals.

Although I am aware of the inventories of regulations, such as ESCR Framework for The Research Ethics [http://www.esrc.ac.uk/\\_images/framework-for-research-ethics-09-12\\_tcm8-4586.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/framework-for-research-ethics-09-12_tcm8-4586.pdf) (updated in 2012), The Association of Internet Researchers 2002 Guidelines <http://aoir.org/documents/ethics-guide/>, and the UCL Data Protection Registrar <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/research/images/research-ethics-framework> regarding data collection and analysis, it was difficult to resolve the uncertainties related to privacy and confidentiality.

The dichotomy of privacy and confidentiality versus publicly available data has raised intense theoretical disputes. Sheehan defined privacy '*as a relationship between someone with others*' and someone's 'right to be left alone' (Sheehan, 2002, p. 997). He considered that somebody's privacy is delimited by the degree of how much the other has access to information about him/her (Strangelove, 2010).

Also, there are relatively new debates on the distinction between public and private in mediated contexts. Weintraub and Kumar distinguish between public and private fears, "*what is individual, or pertains only to an individual, versus what is collective, or affects the interests of a collectivity*" (Weintraub & Kumar, 1997, p. 13), or between "*what is hidden or withdrawn versus what is open, revealed, or accessible*" (Weintraub & Kumar, 1997, p. 23). Rainie and Anderson pointed out that due to the Internet, 'Public and private life become increasingly transparent globally', and the problem of privacy protection completely recalibrates 'the social contract', and the relationships between individuals and corporations (Rainie & Anderson, 2008, p. xi).

Fred Baker, the Chairman of the Internet Society, emphasised that 'data mining techniques and other kinds of analysis make the globe more similar to a small town than it is now [...] One characteristic of a small town is that everybody knows everybody's business' (in Rainie & Anderson, 2008, p. 126). Similarly, Barry Wellman quantified privacy as an expensive commodity designed for socially privileged people rather than for disadvantaged people, arguing that 'the less one is powerful, the more transparent his or her life' (Barry Wellman in Rainie & Anderson, 2008, p. 131).

Unfortunately, those researchers who, in doing research, adopt various identities or play roles, are criticised as being engaged in 'duplicitous' research (Herrera, 2010). Indeed, by drawing on my personal experience while conducting online research, I felt like I was duplicitous at times, and I struggled with guilt. The online public exposure of the videos' content and comments, and their availability to be watched or downloaded, introduced a moral dilemma. Although everything was publicly available, I still felt morally responsible for using them without informing the owner or asking for his/her consent. Also, not to be transparent was a matter of morality and ethical discomfort. Although, according to the YouTube regulation, what I was doing was completely legal, I was anxious about invisibly witnessing crucial moments of their lives, without them being informed or at least aware of it.

Another moral concern had to do with the Gypsies' perception and expectation regarding privacy when uploading videos on YouTube or creating Facebook pages. I was wondering to what extent they were aware of the possible consequences of

reinforcing their vulnerability and stigma by exposing their private life. There were also issues related to some practicalities, like how to ensure anonymity. I wondered whether I should use the real names for the YouTube celebrities, channel owners or users or how to create data visualisation outlines without exposing them.

### **3.6.5. Youtube cartography and its limits**

Burges and Green argue that Youtube has the potential to provide a new space of social interaction, engagement and community formation (Burges&Green, 2009). Although, I found thousands of videos filmed by the members of the community I followed it has to be stressed out that these videos do not reveal a complete and exhaustive image regarding their social and spatial mobilities. It has to be emphasised that only a part of the community upload and consume videos, they do so on an irregular temporal basis and also exclude, intentionally or unintentionally, crucial moments of their life. Therefore, there should be lots of other places unmapped, also lots of other members of the community that are not followed or included. In conclusion, the cartographical analysis based on Youtube videos is incomplete, scattered and irregular.

In conclusion, I chose to design the methodology around the dual nature of the data online and offline. I reflected on the limitations and the ethical challenges raised by the dual character of online/offline data. I explain in detail the process of capturing and classifying the Youtube videos arguing that the research techniques used try to adapt the dual nature of the social realities.



## Chapter 4 – Transnational virtual communication

### 4.1 Transnational online practices

In this chapter, I analyse my findings to explore the extent to which the geographically dispersed network of the Gypsies maintains its connectedness using Youtube and Facebook. Therefore, I identify the main online actors (YouTube users), the type of videos uploaded on their channels and how people and videos are linked together in the virtual space. This is the first step to answering the overall question: how does a mobile and deterritorialized ethnic group remain united as it transforms from a geographically intensive community to a spatially extensive one?

Using the database of the traces of the videos, I interrogate the flows of the virtual objects (mainly videos) and classify the YouTube users who produce and consume videos and describe the type of the videos circulated among the members of the community. Also, I pay attention to how they make use of the technical characteristics of the Internet to fulfil their needs.

In building my argument, I also cover a number of related questions: Is face-to-face communication superior to mediated communication (Baym, 2010)? Are social network sites going to break down classic communities or even '*dehumanise*' community life (Jones, 1999)? Is social media going to destroy social connectedness, or allow deeper engagement (Miller and Slater, 2010)? At the individual level, there is a large amount of evidence that proves that by using new technologies, the personal relations including the '*weak ties*' are expanded, maintained or even deepened (Granovetter, 1973). Unfortunately, the evidence is less clear and often contradictory, when it comes to the effect of new technologies in nurturing offline communities, especially marginalised communities.

Some scholars suggest that people, (especially young people), use digital media in the same manner, regardless of their social context and cultural background (Davidson & Martellozzo, 2013). Other scholars, as Daniel Miller and his team, demonstrate that by using digital platforms, people not only communicate plainly but they '*socialise*' in their very own specific way (Madianou & Miller, 2012). In this chapter, I argue that Gypsies use social media in a very distinct manner, which reflects the values and social structures of their ethnic group. I claim that their online transnational practices mimic and supplement their offline interactions, strengthening their existing internal social bonds. Starting from their strong desire to be continuously together and to perform as a community, I identify new forms of '*togetherness*' that emerge through the use of new technologies and digital platforms.

My starting point is the supposition that a record of the recent social history of the Gypsies from T. is now spread across a few social platforms. Therefore, I try to *'harvest' their cultural products or 'circulating entities'* (Latour, 1999) and to describe their sociality and sociability in the transnational context. However, it is crucial to also emphasize the importance of 'real' mobility. In the next chapter, I show how important it is for the community to meet each other face-to-face. So from the beginning, I rule out the premise of a *'mediated ethnic identity'* (Madianou & Miller, 2012). They are not a community maintained mostly through online social platforms. They invest a lot of energy and resources in order to meet face-to-face and to participate physically in community events, but they also have a vivid virtual collective life.

I follow both YouTube users and videos, and I have two central units of analysis: videos and people (Youtube channels owners and video commentators). I also stress that I am not concerned with highlighting the technological choices offered for fulfilling their togetherness. Therefore, I do not pay attention to the appropriateness of using one platform or another, or to the switching from one digital platform to another according to the theory of polymedia, launched by Madianou and Miller (Madianou & Miller, 2012).

Using video links, tags, categories, views, likes, dislikes, comments, playlists and subscriptions, I focus on describing the *'social substance'* hidden under algorithms and technological links (Bonini, 2011), trying to understand how Romanian Gypsies use the new technologies to sustain their transnational life.

## 4.2 Who gets involved online

*'The search for identity becomes the fundamental scope of social meaning.'*

*(M. Castells, in Prologue to The Rise of the Network Society, 1996)*

On YouTube, any user can create his own channel or a few channels, to upload their videos. Automatically, this generates a profile page with personal information (name, age, gender), containing a profile picture and personal widgets. The channel profile page includes 'Discussions', where other users can leave their comments and interact directly with the owner, a log of the user's recent activities, a list of the uploaded videos, and playlists.

The metadata about the *'apparent identity'* of a *'channel owner'* is retrieved from channel profiles and is rather weak, including only their unique ID, the name of the channel (*'channel title'*), the number of subscribers and the number of views. The retrieving tool<sup>1</sup> does not import personal information about the user (such as name, gender, age, even if declared on the channel page), nor the links to his/her subscribers (only his/her subscriptions).

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<sup>1</sup> [https://tools.digitalmethods.net/netvizz/youtube/mod\\_channels\\_net.php](https://tools.digitalmethods.net/netvizz/youtube/mod_channels_net.php) YouTube API

Therefore in designing the 'user profiles', I selected a sample of 500 channel owners, and I cluster them based on their mode of engagement and participation within the YouTube platform. I describe their virtual social '*behaviour*' and networks based on what type of videos they upload, to whom they subscribe and how they comment and react to comments. Most of the channel names are their offline nicknames ("The King", "The Mondial", "Loan Shark", "The Emperor", "The Boss"), including their social position within the family or group ("The Emperor' s brother, or B\_\_\_'s son), their place of birth (Sam from T. ), or their place of migration ("The Irish One", "The Spanish One").

#### 4.2.1. The pattern of video uploading. Who is uploading videos with content related to Gypsies from T.?

Using filtered search, I could identify on YouTube more than 1,000 channels containing the word T. (name of the locality)', and 179 channels are containing the word V. (name of the artist).

I define a 'YouTube user' as any person who has uploaded at least one video or any person within the community, who has watched or commented on videos or channels related in any way with 'T. (name of the locality)' or V. (name of the artist). I defined a '*YouTube celebrity*' as the most famous religious or non-religious artists from T.,

who are filmed continuously and followed (online and offline) by other members of the community.

Also, I make a clear distinction between video producers and video consumers, and respectively those who are active or passive users. Active users are those engaged actively in creating, uploading, sharing and commenting videos, while passive users are those who are 'consuming' videos by watching them, commenting and/or subscribing to other channels.

I noticed that some of the channel' owners are '*self-vloggers*' - those *who "promote themselves"*, and others '*community vloggers*' - those who promote other members of the community (such as artists, ministers, religious brothers). Therefore, based on their relationship with the community and the type of engagement and participation, I clustered YouTube users into three categories: 1) self-uploaders, 2) celebrities-uploaders and 3) outsiders.

#### 4.2.1.1 Self uploaders and self-vloggers

Self-uploaders are amateur channel owners who upload videos about themselves (user-created content). They are identified as belonging to the Gypsy group from T. since their channel name contains the word T(name of the locality), they are '*self-*

*centred*' and less interested in promoting the collective life of the community. Out of 1,000 channels, around 80% belong to self-uploaders.

Most of the self-uploaders upload short videos (under 4 minutes) containing self-shot footage of them dancing, singing, listening to music or compilations of their selfie pictures. They also film and comment on cars, food and friends. Self-created videos can be directly addressed to an imaginary community. The producer aims to transmit a message to a specific audience (who can be physically distant) or to a general audience. For instance, a young man is singing in a park in the UK for his parents, declaring his deep love and respect for them, the day before he was going to be jailed. Although the self-vloggers may appear to be self-centred, the final aim of the video is to communicate with their peers and improve or re-confirm his social image (as a good dancer, as a strong fighter, as a devoted 'brother', as an experienced traveller). Generally, they have a small number of videos, and only a few of them own more than one YouTube channel.

The population of YouTube uploaders is profoundly gendered and age biased. Most of the uploaders are male, youths and adults between 12 and 30:

*'All our children know how to use the Internet. We had the Internet in our neighbourhood for a while ... then I saw that kids were learning nasty things and I said: It'd be better without the Internet! Because sometimes we'd leave home and they'd be on their own, watching unsupervised ... and I don't like that in our*

*home. I said we better cut the Internet than having children learn immodest things. (Church Minister, interview, Romania)*

Based on 'apparent identity' there are very few young girls active online. While for a young man to own a YouTube channel is seen as a positive gesture, and it confers prestige and popularity among peers, for a young woman, this behaviour is not encouraged. Young females are not necessarily punished, I did not hear about any punishment while interviewing members of the community, but they are supervised to some extent by adults, male or female while using online platforms. Also, there is a definite age bias, as well. If for a young girl, it is acceptable to have her own channel, for a married woman there are only specific social contexts in which she is allowed to have her own YouTube channel or Facebook account. The use of new technologies is part of their transnational daily life, and it has been internalised into their traditional customs. There are already specific procedures regarding who, when and why a member of the community could use the Internet.

One rule, for instance, is that a married woman is allowed to open an online account if her husband left her or cheated on her:

*'We, married Gypsy women, are not allowed to have Internet accounts. It is the Gypsy law! However, when my husband left me for a Romanian girl, 18 years old ... [both husband and wife are 24, and they have seven children]... He went to Spain with*

*her and left me with all the children. I went back to my parents, and I opened a Facebook account. I posted a picture of me ... to find a new husband! Why not? ... I put makeup on my face, red lipstick and I wore earrings ... My parents allowed me to do it. And the elders as well. It was fair...When my husband saw me on the Internet, he came back to me' (woman, 24 years old)*

There are 'Gypsy laws' (an oral set of rules agreed and applied within the community) about how to use the Internet, and they are well known in the community and openly accepted.

Popularity on social media platforms is more about the quantity and the number of followers or subscribers, and less about the artistic quality of the videos, the identity of the channel owner, or the status of the followers. The most famous self-uploader is a young boy from T. who only uploaded three videos, the last one three years ago. In two of them, he is dancing alone, and the third is a compilation of his pictures. He has 2,893 subscribers and 2.5 million views.

'Self-performing' (singing, dancing, describing a new car or house) has different meanings, from proving strong commitment to other members of the extended family to showing off about wellbeing and material prosperity. It is essential to highlight that the performer's online popularity is not sustained by his offline popularity among his

peers. His online visibility could be a matter of algorithms and technological characteristics of the platforms, rather than the conscious behaviour of the users.

#### 4.2.1.2 Community vloggers or celebrity uploaders

'Community vloggers' or 'celebrity uploaders' are those who film 'celebrities' from T. (name of the locality), such as religious artists, ministers and traditional leaders. They upload videos about collective ceremonies and gatherings but only rarely about themselves or their families. Most of them create their content through direct filming of live events in various locations. Lately, since developing their skills, the youngest 'community vloggers' are editing their videos and creating new 'virtual objects'. For instance, they create picture compilations for songs by their favourite artists or sermons, they create '*religious messages*' by mixing well known Christian songs with quotes from the Bible, or they assemble various recordings of their favourite artist and create albums.

A 'celebrity' can have more experienced or just ad-hoc uploaders. For instance, videos with a particular artist have been uploaded from various geographical locations by different uploaders. Some of them accompany him during his religious missions, and others are ordinary churchgoers who are settled in various locations and film his performances there.

Investigating the uploading patterns, I noticed that many people upload infrequently, but when they do, they often upload several videos at a time. Somebody who uploads multiple videos may only do it once during his/her YouTube channel's lifetime. I noticed that the 'active time' of an uploader varies very much, from a few months to a few years. Also, some have up to ten channels, which can be linked or not. They sometimes have almost identical names for different channels: 'M\*\*\*\*\* from M', 'M\*\*\*\*\* from M1' , 'M\*\*\*\*\*from M2' or 'm\*\*\*boss', 'M\*\*\* boss', 'm\*\*\* T. (name of the locality)'.

'M from M' channel owner has the highest number of uploaded videos, approximately 330, mainly with the artist V. (name of the artist). He has three different channels with similar names, which are formally subscribed to one another, created in 2008, 2010 and 2011, having 4.8, 1.8 and 5.8 million views respectively. Although he has thousands of subscribers, he himself has subscribed to very few channels. He uploaded the oldest and the most popular video with V. (name of the artist), with the highest number of views (700,000), likes and comments. He followed V.'s performances in various churches, most of them in Romania. They still have a stable relationship, although they do not travel together anymore.

#### 4.1.1.3 Outsiders

This category consists of local television stations, reality TV, news channels, public institutions, all with millions of subscribers and high visibility. Also, there are several

*'engaged haters'* channels which are *'anonymous'* and are specialised in producing and reproducing videos that emphasise the cultural differences between Romanians and Gypsies.

Although the number of videos about Gypsies from T. (name of the locality) uploaded by outsiders is not high, they have a substantial impact in forming public opinion. In some cases, they are in search of scandal and publicity, so they filmed Gypsies begging on the street, being expelled or being arrested, spreading slightly negative and discriminatory stereotypes. In other cases they claim to be more objective - some of the videos are long documentaries (for instance the BBC broadcast two 50 minute documentaries), which are widely watched and generate many comments.

I noticed a strong correlation between the type of videos uploaded and the characteristics of the uploaders. The 'outsider' - uploaders generally promote a powerfully negative image of the Gypsies, presenting them as a deviant ethnic group (emphasizing begging, illegal activities, and arrests). The 'community uploaders' promote an image of a religious community pursuing their spiritual growth. The 'self-vloggers' promote videos about themselves, portrayed as members of a strong 'brotherhood', who enjoy to perform and love to "be watched". So a key finding is that different videos make different contributions to the project of sustaining Gypsy unity after dispersal.

Most of the offensive videos in which Gypsies are portrayed negatively are uploaded by 'outsiders' (Lee et al.; 2009). Since most of them are local or national TV stations, they upload their videos in the 'News & Politics' category. Private and public television channels film most of the videos with Gypsies being arrested, or living in uncertain and illegal environments. Other videos with them performing in public places, playing, singing or begging are filmed by individuals with strong opinions against them and uploaded under 'Comedy', expecting that consumers enjoy them.

The main message of 'engaged haters' like 'Death to Gypsies' is to convince Europe that Romanians and Gypsies are two different nations living in the same country. In most of their productions they use the same arguments: Gypsies and Romanians have different historical roots, Gypsies are from India and Romanians are descendants of ancient Romans; Gypsies are considered subhuman, dirty, 'born to lie and steal':

*'This is not Romania, excuse me, these are Gypsy swindlers, rude, who dare to step on the dignity of an honest and humble people, who always knew how to respect itself and others; the Romanians who work abroad are well-mannered and worthy of being called Romanians; so make sure you don't confound the Romanians with this morally contemptible people' (Youtube comment)*

*'A correct and proper Romanian law would deprive them of the Romanian citizenship they don't deserve and which leads to the*

*imminent confusion of being called Romanians.'*(Youtube comment)

*'These crows should be isolated on a deserted island, so they don't come in contact with civilisation... f\*\*\* filthy thieves ... they shamed us everywhere they go, the illiterates ...'*(Youtube comment)

*'Don't call them Romanian Gypsies. They're not Romanian at all. They belong to 'mother India'. I don't know why they've been granted Romanian citizenship!'*(Youtube comment)

4.2.2 Patterns of subscription. How 'channel owners' from T. (name of the locality) subscribe to other channels.

Most channel owners do not have many subscribers, and most of them do not subscribe to other channels. Subscribing to a channel is a unilateral action, and it doesn't require the approval of the user. Subscribing is a public recognition of somebody's online engagement.

Being YouTube literate means not only being able to create and consume videos but also to comprehend its technological characteristics. Based on the analysis of their egocentric networks, one can conclude that most of the YouTube users possess minimal skills, knowledge and interest in manipulating and exploiting the platform to

increase their popularity and visibility. The YouTube users are generally self-educated, therefore the pace of learning is slow. They also teach each other new skills, and they imitate each other's virtual behaviour. They are very inexperienced and unaware of privacy settings, and their accounts' privacy settings are not filtered (including for Facebook). To avoid 'haters' they sometimes close accounts, or abandon them and create new ones under a different name. Sometimes the details of the new account are transmitted verbally, possibly over the phone.

There is no correlation between the number of videos-uploaded and the number of subscriptions, or between the number of views and the number of subscriptions. Therefore it is difficult to conclude what the characteristics of an 'active' channel owner are. One can say that they have different patterns of being active online: some of them are uploading more, others are subscribing more. Those able to subscribe have thousands of subscriptions to various channels, mainly about cooking (in Romanian or English), music (pop music like Indian, Arabic or 'Romanian Manele') and other forms of entertainment (comedy, car presentations, lifestyle).

There are very few subscriptions and formal linkages among channel owners from T. (name of the locality), which leads to the conclusion that their digital social network is heavily supported by real connectivity, outside the YouTube platform. Although they watch, share and comment on videos of their peers, 'self-vloggers' do not often subscribe formally to one another's channels. Since they are in touch over the phone and other devices, they would find out about the new videos directly from their peers,

so they don't need to subscribe. There is not much desire to get more subscribers or to become a highly rated YouTuber and increase one's online popularity. They are very interested in attracting more viewers and likes but do not make any connection between the number of subscribers and the number of views and likes.

#### 4.2.3 Patterns of commenting

Between 2007 and 2012, most general announcements about community events (sermons, baptisms), religious missions, artists or minister's phone numbers were transmitted virtually by posting them publicly on YouTube. In 2012, the community 'discovered' Facebook, and although they continue to upload videos on Youtube and embed them on Facebook, their private discussions moved to Facebook. Therefore, the density of Youtube comments decreased substantially. Also, many uploaders, to avoid 'haters' and discriminatory messages against them, deactivated the 'comments' option when uploading their videos on YouTube.

#### **Types of commentators**

Commentators congregate into two main categories: 'incidental commentators' and 'loyal commentators'. 'Incidental commentators' are mainly 'outsiders', people who are not part of the community, such as Gadge (Romanians or foreigners) or Gypsies from other groups. 'Loyal commentators' are mainly people from T. (name of the

locality), relatives or just random acquaintances of the uploaders or of the people who were filmed.

### **Personal versus general messages**

Regarding the content of the messages, one can make a clear distinction between personal and general messages, depending on whether the commentator and the uploader know each other personally or not, or whether the comment is made by an 'insider' or 'outsider'. Most 'collective' videos, (videos about the community not about one individual) attract general messages, either positive, like 'God bless you!' or 'Amin!' or negative, like 'Gypsies should die!' or 'Go to hell!'. They could be made by both 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in various languages.

Personal comments are those in which the commentator addresses the message directly to the channel owner. In this situation, the commentator uses name or nickname of the channel owner and is well informed about the place, time and context of the filmed scene, information that could have been obtained using other channels of communication (face-to-face, phone, WhatsApp). The general comments are messages that are not necessarily related to the content of the video or the profile of the channel owner. They are generalised stereotypes and frustration directed against "Gypsies" as an ethnic minority. Most of the messages are short and straightforward, with minimal information, most of them in Romanian or Romani (or mixed), and have lots of grammar and spelling mistakes.

Many scholars have researched cyberbullying and abusive behaviour on various social media platforms (Chen et al., 2012). Recent socio-psychological studies have focused on online prejudice and online discrimination. Kahn, Spencer and Glaser argued that, while the Internet increases the expression of online prejudice (due to anonymity, freer expressions and less self-censoring), it decreases offline discrimination, leading to a reduction in the behavioural component of intergroup bias (Barsamian - Kahn & et al. , 2013).

On Youtube, cyberbullying and the invasion of privacy are done mainly via public comments under the videos or on the channel owner's profile page. Cyber-harassment and negative comments posted by Gypsy 'haters' (Lange, 2007) are considered the 'normality' when it comes to analysing comments of Youtube videos about Gypsies. The pattern of promoting or encountering prejudice and discrimination shows that individuals are likely to seek out information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs.

*'It's a shame Antonescu Prime Minister of Romania during World War II didn't finish the job, today they'd have all been by the Bug River, in Russia'*

*'To the crematorium with all the Gypsies, have some hot tar poured over them beforehand and have their stolen riches confiscated'.*

At least one abusive comment can be found on most of their private pages or under their videos, and the negative remarks of 'haters' are mixed with the positive messages of gratitude and thankfulness.

To manage the online bullying, Gypsies use a plethora of strategies, ranging from a neutral attitude and defensive behaviour to offensive or aggressive ones. In dealing with YouTube bullying, they adopt various kinds of reactions, from closing the comments page to ignoring them. Their lack of computer and writing skills could be a possible explanation for their absence of reaction.

Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that Gypsies from T. (name of the locality) who are 'online victims' do not confront the offender and rarely react directly by responding with a message. The violent dialogue and message exchange take place between 'outsiders'. Some scholars claim that anonymity is one of the primary mechanisms responsible for increasing prejudice but reducing discrimination. However, the latest findings demonstrate that anonymity has been declining as Internet use was expanding.

Another reason why Gypsies are easy victims of online bullying is that most of their videos exhibit some private behaviour publicly and far from being anonymous, they become "named". 'The Internet becomes a tool to discover the real identities of individuals, both online and offline (Barsamian - Kahn & et al. , 2013). They not only expose their names, their look, their skills (singing, dancing), but they also expose their deep emotions, which can become a source of jesting and mockery for 'outsiders'.

Barsamian - Kahn & et al concluded that: 'While YouTube may spread prejudice by making bigoted rants instantly accessible to millions of people worldwide, it may reduce discrimination by documenting offline incidents and holding individuals responsible for such actions. YouTube can reduce discrimination by documenting and publicising discriminatory events that might otherwise have gone unnoticed' (Barsamian - Kahn & et al., 2013, p. 209). As a partial conclusion, by becoming anonymous, an individual experiences more discrimination, as their social and ethnic identity cues are more visible. The use of social media, like YouTube and Facebook, encourage and even require Gypsy users to disclose more aspects of their real selves online (Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008). Therefore, impression management is a crucial factor in their online self-presentation. Videos posted by the Gypsies on YouTube are subject to prejudicial comments. Fenton warns that online social capital may maintain social inequalities through modes of social exclusion based on class, race, and gender (Neumayer, 2013)but my findings suggest something more complex. On the one hand, these comments are a site for articulating hate, but in managing that shared experience of cyberbullying the Gypsies themselves build up their unity.

#### 4.3 What do they share?

A regular search on YouTube returns 51,800 videos containing the word 'T. (name of the locality)' and 29,100 containing 'V. (name of the artist)'. Out of the total number of videos containing 'T. (name of the locality)', about 40,000 have a duration of 4

minutes or less, and only 2,000 have a duration of more than 20 minutes. The figures for 'V. (name of the artist)' are 10,200 and 2,070, respectively. There are also 1,070 playlists containing the word 'T. (name of the locality)' and 910 containing the word 'V. (name of the artist)'. Most of them contain self-made videos, produced by the channel owners themselves.

In general, Gypsies from T. (name of the locality) upload and watch their own 'products' (containing Christian music, 'manele', dance, weddings and funerals, money, cars and houses) and share videos filmed by 'outsiders', especially news related to them or other Gypsies.

#### 4.3.1 Video content

Based on their content, I classify videos into two main categories: with religious content and with non-religious content. The main corpus of videos consists of Pentecostal/Christian music, either live or processed after the performance. The category 'Religious videos' includes films from both 'portable' or 'established' churches, sermons, baptisms, religious gatherings, vigil nights and religious confessions. Since this community is a Pentecostal community, encouraged to watch Christian music and follow Christian channels, I focused my analysis on videos with religious content.

In the category of 'non-religious' videos, I include videos about their mundane life, such as dancing, compilations of family photos, descriptions of their cars, their houses or virtual messages to their 'brothers'. Some of them, mostly uploaded by 'outsiders', are videos about them begging or playing in public spaces, being arrested, being portrayed in discriminatory ways.

The highest number of 'self-vloggers' videos are with them dancing. They film themselves dancing in all sorts of places: on the street, at home, in car parks, in front of their houses, next to their cars, in restaurants. In some videos, they have a live audience while in others they dance only for an online audience. Most of them are young men dancing to 'manele' music. Very rarely, women are performing belly dance, or families (husband, wife and children) dancing in their living room. The dance could be dedicated to a 'brother' and is accompanied by a short message for him, conveying the deep respect and recognition of his social value. Also, there are hundreds of videos with children dancing, filmed by their parents, who supervise, encourage and guide them.

#### 4.3.2 Which are the most popular videos?

Gypsy music ('manele') has the highest number of views. Since this type of music is prevalent in Romania among both Gypsies and non-Gypsies and the number of videos with 'manele' music is minimal in my dataset, I do not consider it relevant for

describing the community (since it seems likely that most of the viewers were not from the Gypsy minority). Although some of the members of the community upload or share videos with Florin Salam (the most popular 'manele' singer), Christian music is the most popular among them. Since Salam's videos have more than 5 million views though, I consider them as outliers, and I ignore them in further analysis.

The most famous religious videos are those containing sermons, confessions and Christian music:

*'We watched all the videos about repentance and faith. We watch the videos of our brothers from Germany and from everywhere. We only had the Internet for two years, ... I wanted to keep it ... However, because I couldn't control what our kids were searching on the Internet, I cut it. The Internet was excellent. There were good sermons which would open your mind, so you could better understand the world.'* (interview, man, Romania).

By watching Christian music and sermons of a particular leader or artists, the consumers legitimate them and increase their position within the internal hierarchy of the group.

The most popular videos, with the highest number of 'likes', 'dislikes' and 'comments' are those where Gypsies (in general, not only from T. (name of the locality)) get arrested. The 'outsider' uploaders who produce them are mainly local TV stations and public institutions with a very high number of subscribers.

As an intermediary conclusion, while exposing their self-made videos on YouTube, I consider that Gypsies are trapped in their ethnic identity, which defines and follows them from the moment they are born. There are very few paths to escape, and the price to pay is very high, either way: to stay away from their families or to deny their ethnic community. In the Internet era, things are more or less the same. The question is whether a Gypsy's personal self-identities would co-exist with their group-identity if they remain faithful members of their community, while also adhering to a virtual identity.

## Chapter 5- Mapping geographical mobilities

In this chapter, I address Gypsies' real geographical itineraries around Europe and the world, as they move across various borders. Using both ethnographic data and geocoded online data, I describe the flows of the people and their cultural objects (videos). Using videos, I could recreate their social use of space and, to some extent, disclose the motivations and social emotions that guide their social actions. The YouTube video data is complemented with participant observation, ethnographic notes and interviews from fieldwork in the UK, Spain and Romania. In these three research sites, I took part in various religious events and family rituals within the community.

In my analysis, I followed Mike Savage and Roger Burrows' advice not to remain stuck on the details of the data, but rather stand back and find the best technique to summarise them (Savage & Burrows, 2007). This approach allows me to link my research questions to visual YouTube data. I interrogate the Gypsies' mobilities using two types of flows: the flow of people and the flow of their digital objects, and I display them on two levels: physical mobilities and online mobilities. Therefore, my methodology follows the current demand for a fundamental restructuring of the paradigms of mobility and networks in sociology and geography. Fundamentally, the chapter argues that mobile ministers and artists are the social glue that holds the community together and have largely replaced traditional rulers and judges who are

less mobile. By carrying the same messages, songs and sermons from one place to another, the ministers and artists hold this dispersed community together. They promote unity, obedience and mutual support and give people a sense of belonging.

## 5.1 Physical mobilities of Gypsies from T. (name of the locality)

In this section, I describe the physical mobilities of the Gypsies from T. (name of the locality), showing 1) who is the most mobile, 2) where they travel and 3) what the motivation is for their extensive mobilities. In this respect, this is a new form and scale of physical mobility for this community. It is dated to the post-communist period and particularly reflects regulations around mobility within the EU. As such, this chapter speaks directly to the central question of the thesis by analysing the recent dispersal of the community and the pressures it places on maintaining unity.

As I argued in the literature review, Gypsies are generally characterised in opposition to the settled local population, and very often considered as 'outsiders', 'tramps and vagabonds', rather than 'simple nomads' (O'Boyle, 1990). While Levinson and Sparkes stated that 'nomadism is central to Gypsy identity and it is defined as superior to sedentarism' (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004), others argue that nomadism is not necessarily a fixed way of life among Gypsy groups (Liegeois, 1983). Valeriu Nicolae suggests that the social construction of Roma migration as nomadism is not 'politically innocent' (Nicolae, 2013). Sibley highlighted the fact that nomad Gypsies are caught up between laws and institutions (local councils, schools, hospitals, non-

governmental organisations) and are struggling to control their own life, time and space (Sibley, 1995).

In my research, I avoid the theoretical debate about sedentarism versus nomadism, and I describe Gypsies' physical mobilities by investigating their types of dwellings and places of attachment and identity. I focused on exploring hidden and subtle aspects of their mobility, such as their social, emotional and imaginative motivation to travel. I also argue that their geographical proximity in the recent past was replaced by a high rate of spatial mobilities and physical travel that now has social value and meanings. Travelling is not only about moving from one geographical point to another. It has an important social role, and it reveals a lot about the internal social logic of the community.

On the one hand, their constant spatial movement combined with their flexibility and adaptability seems to be, paradoxically, the essential base of their ethnic unity. On the other hand, crossing geographical spaces means coming across new cultural and social spaces. The chapter argues that unexpectedly, their constant exposure to multi-cultural societies is one of the primary roots of their intrinsic traditionalism. So it is argued that they defend their social values and their cultural norms as a reaction to the constant changes and challenges they encounter.

## 5.2 A short history of the internal mobility of the Gypsies

Historically, in Romania, there were two main categories of Gypsies. The first group the so-called 'romanised' Gypsies are the settled ones ('Rudari', 'Silk Gypsies', 'Laesi'), and they used to 'belong' to landowners (in the sense of being slaves or vassals) with a low rate of mobility. The second group, the Gypsy 'travellers', or 'craft makers', are the ones who travel to sell their products or services, bearing names that derive from the traditional occupation of their forefathers (Ursari, Gabori, Caldarari, Lingurari, Pieptanari). Historically, the Gypsies from T. (name of the locality) belonged to a group referred to in the Romani language as Kangliari, or in Romanian, as Pieptenari, both meaning 'comb-makers'. They would travel to sell their products. Like all the other Gypsies though, by the Communist authorities.

During the communist regime between 1947 and 1989, Gypsy Travellers were forced by law to settle down. In 1958, the group who is the subject of this thesis were forced to settle near T.. Despite all the constraints on travel, the Pentecostal Gypsies still had high rates of spatial mobilities, higher than the majority of the population and indeed any other ethnic minority. They frequently travelled among villages or towns to find economic niches to earn more money or to congregate with their ethnic or religious brothers.

The minister of the Pentecostal church from Edmonton, London, explained that during the communist regime, back in Romania, any type of physical movement was

very much restricted. For instance, to cross county borders, local people may have been asked by the local authorities to present a special permit and the reason for their journey. Despite the regulations, he always managed to travel extensively compared with the Gadge. While telling me the story of his conversion, he mentioned his journeys to C. (approximately 600 km away from T. and to O. (750 km), or to M. (200 km).

*'In 1987 I was in another county, in H. ... I was out there with the goods ... I did not know the Bible at the time; I hadn't been to any school, I was not educated, I couldn't even write my name ... Later, I came to an elder brother, Marian, who is currently in T. (name of the locality). He also knew the word of God, but I hadn't spoken with him before ... and he took me the first time to Oradea, to a Pentecostal church, to the brother I. Then, I went to my brothers in M. and so on... '* (Minister, interview, UK)

My study is only slightly touching on their internal mobilities from one Romanian county to another; it is instead focused on the overall rise of their new transnational mobilities.

After 1989, after the Romanian Revolution, Gypsies were the first ones to start to emigrate abroad. According to the minister's story, their international migration was initially driven by a mentality of 'running away from something', rather than 'going

towards something'. Most of them were desperate to escape poverty and exclusion. They geographically 'ran away' from the country of origin as a temporary strategy to find new sources of income, to discover economic niches and earn their living.

*'After the Revolution, I went to Germany and met some religious brothers – Germans, who helped us build the church ... it happened 20 years ago... I met these Germans brothers. I went to the Religious Assembly in Germany. The first time I didn't want to go because I was so ashamed... I was thinking "I am a Gypsy" ... and in front of their church were "our people" (Gypsies, N/A) from Romania ...who were begging for money ... they stretched out their hand ... and when the Germans come out from the church, they asked them for money. Then I said: "I cannot go inside the church, because the Germans would think that I am like them ... a beggar!" ... But after about a month, I went to their church because it was hard to stay without God and prayers. So, I dressed up in a suit and tie; I looked all right ... I went inside the church ... They saw me, and they accepted me. The pastor said: "What's up with you?" and I said, "Look, you know, I came to Germany to earn some money and to build a place to do the religious gathering, at my home, back in Romania". He said he did not believe me. So, later, they came here to our house to see if what I said was true ... and he came and saw that yes, everything was as I said... So here they came to our house and then ... they even went to a funeral that lasted several days, like*

*a proper Gypsy funeral... and for two years, that's how long it took, and they sent us money to build this little church.'* (Minister P., Romania)

In the next section, I list who travels, where and why.

### 5.3 Who travels?

A superficial answer to the question 'who travels?' would be: *'the entire community'*. I often heard complaints about Gypsies being everywhere, all the time and lots of them. Having a distinctive style of travelling, they are visible and are perceived by anxious 'outsiders' as disturbing and trouble makers. Therefore part of the YouTube data consists of videos filmed by a 'Gadje', which emphasise this point of view, followed by discriminatory and racist comments:

*'From what I see, that bus is full of Gypsies!... There's one in the back with a Guitar or cello. So if it's full with "smoked chocolate", we should have hijacked it. However, I would take the driver off; he is undoubtedly Romanian... since there is no Gypsy with a D category driving licence'.* (YouTube video comment)

Although from the outside, their mobilities seem to be chaotic and hectic, Gypsies' journeys are structured based on specific criteria and led by explicit internal norms

that are hidden from the superficial view of an outsider. These norms play an essential role in maintaining their cohesion and determine who can travel, when, where and why.

Extensive travelling involves social practices that are very much status and gender-biased. Within the community, being a woman and having low status is correlated with exclusion from transnational mobilities, and is deeply rooted in the Gypsies' social actions and repeatedly reinforced by their traditional rules. Being a man with high internal status and a stable social position is a premise and a guarantee for becoming a 'recognised traveller'. Within the broad set of 'travellers' however, I argue that a specific sub-group is of particular importance when it comes to strengthening the community's unity. These key individuals, who are often religious leaders and artists travel almost constantly.

### **5.3.1 Traditional and religious leaders and artists**

Traditional and religious leaders are invited and welcomed to most of the community rituals and events in different locations. Among them, '*Bulibasa*' and '*judges*' have a special rank.

#### **The traditional leaders**

Some communities of Gypsies have traditional leaders ('Bulibasa'), who have a reputation for fairness, and play a significant role in mediating the relationships between the community and the local authorities. Due to their transnational mobilities, traditional leaders are often overwhelmed by these demands and are no longer able to fulfil their role mediating between the members of the same neighbourhood and protecting the vulnerable. They have often lost their authority among the members of the community. '*Bulibasa*' as a social institution was replaced by a 'multi-headed brotherhood', a group of powerful 'brothers' that act together. The traditional 'bulibasa' became an 'adviser' that now mediates the internal conflicts among clans, and bribes the local authorities to gain immediate advantages for 'his' Gypsies. Nowadays, they have little control over the 'brothers' and less power to impose and command. The new leaders, the 'brothers', may consult them, but do not necessarily obey them.

### **Traditional judges**

The traditional judges, called 'Krisinitori', are expected to intervene and solve any family matter that appears among the members of the community. Since most of the families are not legally married, the relationships between the spouses are not regulated by courts. Therefore any problem that appears within a nuclear family and among extended families are “solved” by the traditional judges.

Usually, they mediate the relationships between the husband and wife, deciding who is going to take care of the children if the couple splits or under what conditions a husband and a wife are considered divorced. Also, they deal with the share the dowry (calculated in thousands of Euros), and the split of the wealth (cars, houses). They intervene with the parents-in-law and the couple that want to separate. Also, they decide the future of women if an arranged marriage would not be consummated, mostly deciding what sums of money must be paid as compensation. Although the traditional rules were transmitted unchanged from generation to generation, nowadays they are twisted and adapted to their new lifestyle.

Since they can not follow their clients geographically, sometimes the process of the decision can be moved entirely online. The sociologist Olivier Peyroux shows how their new lifestyle has distorted the codes around marriage customs. If in the past a suitable 'bride' was supposed to be healthy and capable of bearing children, nowadays, the 'profitability of the young girl is a preponderant criterion in the choice of the bride' (Peyroux, 2013). The family-in-law converts the symbolic 'price of the bride', paid at the marriage ceremony, into a debt that must be paid back through 'stealing' or 'begging' activities. (Peyroux, 2013).

The judges are appointed from different communities. The 'traditional court' only gets involved in disputes where both sides are Gypsies (not Gadge). They make efforts to visit both parts involved in the conflict, establish the cause of the dispute and the responsibility of the parties. When they manage to participate physically in a meeting, their costs and accommodation are supported by those who ask for their help in administering justice.

## **Ministers and charismatic artists**

Pentecostal ministers and religious artists travel from one country to another, from one town to another and from one church to another. Their geographical itineraries are shaped by the extent of their network of co-members, relatives and 'brothers'. They are invited by their peers to perform in the churches, to participate at 'vigil nights', 'healing gatherings', weddings, funerals, 'baptism shows'. They are legitimated by the traditional leaders of the community to travel extensively and are welcomed by the whole community. Most of them gained their high status after years of preaching and active involvement as members of a Pentecostal church. 'A 'good' minister should have some personal qualities:

*'He's someone who never gets angry, has a positive attitude, is good looking, has courage, good taste, charisma, has values: love, kindness, patience, joy; restraint should be his guide, his GPS; he has feelings, is alive, authentic, he's not fake, does not gossip'. (sermon, Edmonton Church, London)*

*'If the bankers of the world are investing in Switzerland, good humans are the ones who invest values in people'. (sermon in Edmonton Church, London)*

The minister, assisted by other brothers, is in charge of the ceremonial ritual in the church: he determines the order of the songs and sermons, decides who is going to preach and sing, and introduces the new performers. The church service lasts for three hours, twice a week, and is followed by an extended informal gathering.

## Case study - minister M.

M. is the minister of a Pentecostal church from London and one of the most respected leaders of the community. *'I am invited to all the churches. Last week I went to Birmingham last month to Paris. I was at Brother S.'s in Brussels as well. Since 1997, when I founded this church, I have been invited to all my other brothers from our neighbourhood. Wherever they settled, I invited them here as well.'* (minister M., UK)

The shared common history, hardships and poverty keep the Ministers allied to their congregations. Therefore, their brotherhood with the wider community is based on their personal values and experience.

*"Somebody has to "have a high value" to become a leader. Let's take my example. I have lived in this situation ... I come from there, I lived and I was born in the "slum", surrounded by "problems" ... We could only do what we would see our parents doing ... in our neighbourhood. We were neither educated nor cultured, and there was no one else to teach us ... Our Gypsies in T. (name of the locality) were fighting with knives, many of them had "white weapons" made by ourselves ... including me. At the age of 15-16, I made a white gun because I was an imaginative boy. I made it ... completely. The "white weapon" is like a hunting weapon that works with bullets like a firearm ... I was very open-minded at the time, I made it from two pipes, to*

*run two bullets at once ... The bullets had needles ... we used the tube of a bicycle pump. We put a spring at the back, and when we hit the spring, it went straight to the bullet, and the bullet automatically jumped. Many people were shot in our neighbourhood, cut, killed ... and not so long ago, two brothers and sisters quarrelled and one of the brothers was shot with a gun and died. Then his brother-in-law took his axe and cut the foot of the other guy and walked with it on the street ...*

*Neither society nor Ceausescu could change the image of the Gypsies. It took a long time until the day when something happened. Neither authorities nor Ceausescu could do what Jesus, the son of God, did to us. Jesus changed our Gypsies.*

*After the Revolution, I went to Italy, France and Spain for a while ... then, in 1997, with my whole family hidden in a truck, I paid the driver to smuggle us into the UK. Since then, I live here with my wife, eleven children and 47 grandchildren' (minister M., UK)*

## **Charismatic artists**

The artists and leaders do not travel on their own. They are accompanied by a whole team (all men): artists, musicians, relatives, other leaders. To be part of a '*mission*' and to walk in the shadow of artists or leaders would enhance somebody's status.

They are financially supported by the whole community. At every Sunday service, most of the members of the community donate money for this purpose. The donation is made in public. Therefore everybody can see exactly how much money each person donates. They are provided with free accommodation and food by local brothers. In return, they are expected to perform for them and their families at the 'healing gatherings' at their homes. Accommodating an artist is meant to reinforce your status within the community. Their opinion is valued and considered to bring benefits to the entire community. Local leaders expect them to get involved in and solve social frictions arising among the members of the church.

After performing at a public event, the local leaders and religious artists hold private meetings, where they take decisions concerning the future of the community. During these meetings, they negotiate in local conflicts among brothers, discuss family matters (marriages, illnesses), find solutions for supporting brothers in need, solve particular money issues that would appear among members, and plan the next meetings and journeys.

The missions are carefully planned, announced in the churches or by word of mouth and primarily advertised. They are acknowledged by the members of the community and promoted via social media through pictures and videos. A mission implies extensive travelling from a few days to several weeks. As an artist, I interviewed explains: *'I came back one night from a mission of 12 days ...'* (artist V., UK)

They also visit and try to convert other groups of Gypsies. For instance, M. and S., ministers from London, preached 21 years ago in several towns, and since then

hundreds of people from those places (mainly Gypsies) become Pentecostals. 'The Bible arrived in our town only because 21 years ago, the men from T. (name of the locality) preached to us' (artist O., UK). Currently, Gypsies from T. could be seen as a role-model community, able to generate ways of living and practices followed by other Gypsy communities.

In conclusion, the evidence suggests that it is mobile ministers and artists play a key role in maintaining community homogeneity. Carrying the same messages, songs and sermons from one place to another, they homogenise this dispersed community. They promote unity, obedience and mutual support and give people a sense of belonging.

### **5.3.2 Members of the community**

I define as ordinary members those people from this community who still travel extensively, despite not being influential leaders or artists. They are members of extended families, which comprise the nuclear families of parents with two or three married or unmarried children. Occasionally, an extended family may include only brothers, without the parents, sometimes with brothers-in-law as well. They live in rented 3-4 bedroom houses, on the same street or adjoining streets and share their resources to ensure the survival of all. Parents and parents-in-law control and decide the financial expenditures of the young couples.

Those who grew up after the abolition of the communist regime have a low level of formal education. The oldest ones are illiterate (especially women) or have only basic

reading and writing skills. They have minimal work experience, only as agricultural or manual labourers. Those who grew up abroad (young persons between 17-25) can read, write and are computer literate. Following the role model of their parents, they have little trust in the outside world and a lack of professional ambition. Their age of marriage is significantly low, and sometimes individuals in their 40s are already grandparents.

Ordinary members travel transnationally for various purposes: to visit their relatives, to meet prominent traditional or religious leaders, to find partners for their children, to solve matters related to money and family. Also, spatial mobilities are part of a complex social system of mutual obligations and exchanges about other members of the community (weddings, baptisms, funerals) and to religious brothers (sermons, religious gatherings, praying nights).

Travelling is also a source of personal development and spiritual growth. Crossing borders is a constant source of increasing personal self-esteem and a strategy to raise and maintain a high internal status. By travelling, they rediscover their 'self' in relation to the family, to new places they visit and new people they meet on the way.

Through these journeys, they maintain and revitalise essential family connections. An extensive and active network of relationships is a source for gaining respectability and improving your social status. Their everyday mobilities create a unique communion between moving bodies, which impact the individual but cement the bond as well. Performing certain rituals, like enjoying music together, dancing in car parks, transmitting live or filmed messages to their families and brothers are social practices which reinforce their relationships and affiliation to the group.

Travelling is not an individual journey; it is instead a collective experience. While travelling, the travellers feel "watched" and nourished by the extended family. They are often reminded about the role they play among their relatives and "brothers". By belonging to the group and gathering with 'similars', they legitimise their status, reinforce their social role, and at the same time internalise the difference among them and outsiders. *'When we go to the other brothers' sermons ... to pray, sing and preach together... we learn how to behave "outside" among the others, the Gadge'* (Minister, Romania). The entire community becomes involved and participates in various ways in somebody's journey. They monitor the journey, bless the travellers, encourage them to stay safe. They are kept actively involved by posting, speaking-live, uploading filmed messages, commenting or making online dedications. Sharing memories about the journey, describing it live or posting details of the journey on Facebook or YouTube, witnessing and praying while travelling, are practices that reinforce the sense of belonging to their community.

Some of their physical mobilities are meaningful and life-shaping, while others are only regular routines. It is noticeable that the individual paths become in time extended families' itineraries. The places where their relatives live temporarily would be visited on any occasion (baptism, healing gathering, vigil nights):

*'I am 22 years old. We are four brothers and one sister. Last night my brothers went to Charleroi. Last week, I was in England with my brothers. We go there several times a month because there are some churches where it's good to go. It's good to meet your brothers!'* (interview, man, Romania)

*'We go everywhere. This Sunday afternoon we go to T. There's going to be a "vigil night" out there. There are prayers, sermons, singing. We'll start at 7 o'clock until about 10 o'clock, for about three hours. We are singing both in Romani and Romanian language.'* (interview, man, Romania)

Crossing national borders, they have to face many risks and unknown rules, regulations and laws. They are also caught up in various social institutions, structures and social organisations. To confront the new challenges, they developed additional skills, innovative forms of adaptation and avoidance strategies. Adults who spent time in Spain, France, Germany or the UK have some knowledge of Spanish and English, and a few individuals have basic knowledge of French or German. On their Facebook and YouTube profiles, they declare that they were trained at the '*school of life*' and are appreciated as being valuable, respectable, '*tough and strong*'. Some have '*the advantage*' of being or having been imprisoned, and this would confer them a special 'rank'. Although their time spent travelling across countries may be short, they can be defined as trans-migrants, since they all have temporary "home" abroad, separated from their place of origins. They learned how to take advantage of various societal contexts (like begging in Sweden) and to exploit immediate circumstances in a very unconventional way (expatriation from France). These survival strategies are at the border between informal and illegal, and this is why sometimes they are vulnerable and easy victims.

### 5.3.3 'The mobilities of vulnerable ones

Alongside the adult men, who initiate and perform various mobilities, I identified the mobilities of the vulnerable ones. They are mainly women, children, adults with disabilities or inexperienced teenagers, who are not yet allowed to travel alone.

Almost invariably, families spoke of fathers as being the ones to make the decisions about moving. In the absence of fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and older brothers were often mentioned as the ones who decided. Women have an inferior status and little power to decide about their life. The older men of the extended family determine whether women should attend a school or not, when she should get married, where she would live, how many children she should have, what job to pursue. Young women are still used to establish strategic alliances among 'clans' through arranged marriages. *'We women, we are tired of children, of running after wealth, of sorrows and disappointments!'* (Interview, woman, UK). The young married women have the lowest status among the women of the family. They are exploited by the family members, especially by their mother-in-law:

*'My parents never beat me, but my father-in-law did. I would like to die. This is not life. I stand here in the cold, selling The Big Issue all day, and when I go home, my mother-in-law shouts at me that I didn't earn enough. I cannot eat. The last three days I didn't eat, I just drunk three Red Bulls. I heard that you could die if you drink a lot of it. I smoked, and I drank Red Bull. My husband left two months ago with a Romanian girl. He went to Spain and spent all the money. He left us, the children and me... for her. I*

*pray for him to be sent to prison. Then, I'll have peace...'*

(interview, woman, UK)

Those who guide and guard women and children are usually adult men who should be part of their immediate family or somebody trusted and appointed by them. *'My parents brought me here to beg. They said that here in Sweden it is easier. The shopping centre is the best. But the bridge is also acceptable. This bridge is my place...'*(woman, Youtube).

Older children typically speak Romani, Romanian, Spanish and basic English (some also know some French or German), while the younger children speak Romani and English. Very few adults have more than a basic knowledge of English. Travelling, for many of these vulnerable people, is not an option or a choice. Their mobilities are decided by the men in the family or by community leaders. For instance, in one comment to a video with a man with a disability singing in a public space in Greece, one leader is asking the community how to get in touch with the disabled man: *'If you know where I could find the man from this video, send me an email to \*\*\*. I want him in Sweden'*. (comment from a Youtube video about a man with one leg, begging in Greece)

The 'mobilities' of children and people with disabilities are negotiated among the leaders of the community. *'Most of the exploited children were recruited from X, a district on the outskirts of T. (name of the locality). Some parents borrowed money from traffickers, and because they had no way to pay them back, they entrusted their children to them. Traffickers not only deleted their debts, but they also paid for the children. Those born with disabilities were preferred. They would pay up to £20,000 for one.'* (Local newspaper) There is plenty of evidence on YouTube (filmed by private

persons or TV channels) about vulnerable members of the community being 'travelled' and exploited by more powerful ones (BBC films). As I was aware of the accusations that they were child traffickers, I never asked them about these stories directly. Since it was not the aim of my study, I accepted their explanations for how the children were mobile as they were given to me.

In this chapter, I described who travelled, how and why they travel. I list religious leaders and artists, all men, as being the ones who travel extensively among various churches and I show that some members of the extensive families (women and children) are not free to decide when and where to travel. The physical travelling of the celebrities strengthened the unity of the community and homogenised the internal rules. But for travel is not always the positive experience that that implies as the example of vulnerable people shows.

## Chapter 6- Where do they go? The pattern of mobilities and socialities

### 6.1 The pattern of mobilities and socialities

In this chapter, I describe the physical mobilities of the Gypsies from T., establishing who are the most mobile, where they travel and what the motivation is for their travels. The chapter also explores the relationship with home (T.) and goes back to the ideas of 'performance' that were introduced in the literature review. The argument is not just that mobile members of the community, such as V. hold the community together by preaching about unity and mutual support, but they also do so by actively performing their Gypsiness.

The socio-demographic profile of the most mobile members of the group is clear: adult men, with an elite position within the intra-group hierarchy or popularity among religious brothers. They travel extensively to gain personal and social capital and reiterate the unity and the connectivity among brothers. Their extensive travelling is a source of self-esteem, but equally the root of envy, competition and inequalities within the group (some travel more than others). Although there is considerable variability within this group of men in relation to how their mobilities are initiated and

organised, most of them are highly mobile and co-participate through travelling in the most important events of the community (Woodcock, 2010)

Although other scholars have written about the transnational migration of Gypsies, the novelty of my method consists in revealing their geographical routes and itineraries using online data. Therefore, I describe the flows and characteristics of their geographical mobilities, as they are revealed in the videos captured from YouTube. Analysing both the content and the metadata of the videos, I visualise their geographical routes and itineraries, and I describe the transnational dynamic of this geographically dispersed community. Mainly, I argue that their mobilities are flexible, adaptable and form a unique body, where the members of the community can group and regroup themselves.

Although their routes seem to be chaotic, the geometry of their mobilities is a result of a social system of opportunities and constraints. This system is built around a fixed geographical point and several, changeable and unstable destinations that can be traced via video network analysis . Therefore, most of their mobilities begin or end in one fixed point which is T. (name of the locality), perceived as the point of origin, and pass through or avoid a multitude of other locations.

Previous studies on the migration of Romanian Gypsies focused on the migration factors (push-pull) in the communities of origin (Pantea, 2013;

Vlase & Preoteasa, 2012), explaining their migration using economic reasons, type of networks and religion, rather than describing their transnational lifestyle. Pantea classifies Romanian Gypsies' migration as being clustered around two types of communities: 'migration-rich' and 'migration-poor'. She suggests that the duality of rich and poor reflects the degree to which Roma communities have dense or sporadic social networks, and an 'open' or a 'closed network' that facilitate or constrain their migration (Pantea, 2013). According to Pantea's classification, the Gypsies from T. (name of the locality) could be defined as a '*migration-rich community*' with strong ties 'here and there' and a relatively close but dense social network.

Religion is often seen as a significant aspect of how migration networks are held together in transnational space (Cace & et al, 2012). Vlase and Voicu argue that the Romanian Gypsies' affiliation to different churches shapes their networks. Therefore, certain groups of Gypsies (such as Căldărari and Zavrăgii) are more likely to choose Italy as destination countries, while others (like Ursari, Rudari) would opt for France or Greece (Vlase & Voicu, 2014).

In describing the transnational space of their mobilities, I avoid using the concept of transnational '*space of in-betweenness*', between the country of origin and destination. I opt for a geometry that imagines their mobilities like a mobile floating around their home town, which remains as the central point. Therefore I describe Gypsies' mobilities as being a structure formed by a central point - the place of their

identity and origin, and various other places of temporary attachment and dependency, spread all over the world but mainly in Europe.

## 6.2 T. is the physical and symbolic anchor of their transnational community

*'Where is our "Gypsiness"?'*

(Rhetorical question performed by a minister at the beginning of a sermon, YouTube video)

In general, Gypsies are seen as communities without roots or a spatially rooted identity. Gay y Blasco argues that 'Gypsies' *radical otherness stems from their perceived lack of roots, from the deeply entrenched assumption that they do not belong here but neither do they belong anywhere else*' (Blasco, 2002). Also, Arjun Appadurai argued that the global flows of migrants led to the re-definition of the local within identities. He stated that identities have a *'non-localised quality'* and are not entirely pre-constituted and unproblematic at the beginning of the process of migration (Appadurai, 2006). I consider his observation as crucial in grasping their transnational identity, which is re-defined nowadays in relation to their locality of origin.

Despite their extensive travelling, I argue that they have a central and immobile hub of their network – their locality of origin, their 'home', their 'slum'. This is a fixed geographical location, which represents both the start and the finish of their journeys influencing the flows, shape, and velocity of their transnational migration. Therefore, their transnational physical itineraries are circuits that begin and end there.

Famous religious artists and ministers travel extensively. By travelling they become more popular and influential. In their pilgrimage around Europe, they open new pathways but also reinforce the symbolic signification of their place of origin as their stable root. They are important actors who reiterate the social order that existed in the past among the 'brothers' from T. (name of the locality). Year by year, church after church, with unstoppable energy, V. preaches about unity, mutual support and cohesiveness. But even when he articulates the vision about their future, it is related to T. (name of the locality): *'we are wandering around where we can ... but soon we go back to our 'Gypsiness', back in T. (name of the locality)'* (artist V, UK). Mobile artists also encourage the reproduction of the same internal social rules and model of socialisation that existed in T. (name of the locality), twenty years ago: *'We should love each other like in the past; we should help each other like then, when none of us had anything'* (artist V., UK).

By tracking the geographical location of their videos, it can be shown how their emotions govern their physical mobilities. While the locations disclose their destinations, analysis of the content of the video reveals the purpose of their mobilities. They filmed themselves, or they have been filmed by others while attending a *'healing gathering'*, a baptism ceremony, a sermon in a church, a vigil

night, a wedding or a funeral. This map discloses their effort to travel and to meet others with whom they spend time and share emotions.

The place of their origin is not only a secure geographical location, but it also represents a place of stability, a symbolic hub of their identity. Although initially they were forced by the communist state to settle and live a sedentary life, over the years, this place became strongly attached to their identity and used as an online label for their community. Regardless of how far they travel geographically, they are never completely disconnected from their 'Gypsiness'. Although they may spend most of their life in another geographical location, their social actions become meaningful only when they are reported back to the community of origin. T. (name of the locality). The hometown is a 'recall' to an essential constituent of their identity; it is a label, a part of their offline 'nickname' and their virtual identity. 'Gypsies from T' are well-known among other Gypsies, and they are recognised as being separate and different.

### 6.3 The “homeness” of their slum

*'You can get a Gypsy out of his community,  
but never the spirit of the community  
out of the Gypsy.'* (Romanian old saying)

When travelling, the Gypsies nurture and care about each other, respect and hold onto the traditions. Through their online posts, they share social emotions and exchange energy. Travelling is a way of performing their belonging to their 'brotherhood' to their 'Gypsiness'. With every journey, they built and cemented their imaginary community, which is overlapping with the place of their origin. T. (name of the locality) is the emblem of their collective past, projected future and negotiable present. *'What I miss the most is our "Gypsiness"'* (Minister, UK).

During the communist period in Romania, almost every village had a 'Gypsy', an area where Gypsies lived separately from the local population. 'Gypsiness' kept the Gypsies apart from the Gadge and was strictly delimited geographically and symbolically. Its borders and limits were respected and accepted by both communities, and they were rarely questioned and negotiated. They were considered 'slums', poorly equipped with electricity and running water, ignored by local authorities, located either at the edge of or wholly separated from the villages: *"In this neighbourhood, in the past, there were many more Gypsies, but now many from the neighbourhood moved out because of the miseries, the pressures, because they could not live together (in the same place)."* (Minister, interview, London)

In fact, 'Gypsiness' - as a location, was a sociocultural model that involved connotations deeper than the demarcation of a segregated habitat. It was practically a place where Gypsiness' was performed, maintained and developed. It was a social paradigm of how the dominant population lived with other nationalities - according to a well-known communist slogan. Based on this model, various ethnic groups lived close to each other but with minimal social interference and exchange. 'Gypsiness' was perceived as temporary accommodation by both ethnic groups; therefore, the

houses were somewhat improvised shelters, and its people tolerated instead of being integrated.

Since Gypsies from T. were forced by communist law to settle down, they have lived in an insular and marginalised district, a 'vicinity' named 'The Citadel' or 'The Bowl' :

*'We used to live separately, in our "Slum". Our ethnic Roma was banned from travelling by the Romanian authorities. We were not allowed to go to cinemas, shops, all amid a state of aggression ... Life of the Gypsies in T. (name of the locality) was very tough ... If anyone, 'a gadjo', dared to enter the community... we would undress him and rob him ... even kill him ... We had no education; we used to fight a lot among us; we were marginalised people...'*

(Minister, UK)

Since they started their transnational migration, the symbolism of the name of their "vicinity" changed significantly.

In the past, their vicinity used to symbolise a place of violence and marginalisation:

*'The Gypsies from T. became aggressive because they were marginalised and despised and persecuted; often when families with children went to town to buy food, or to go to a disco, or a movie ... they were so much scorned, that they were bound to become aggressive ... Maybe you were not doing anything bad, but they would look at you like evil, they would call you names, like "Gypsy" or "stinky", so you instinctively became aggressive, because you felt despised, abused ... Maybe they were*

*marginalised because they were not educated, they were not cultured. Gypsies are not what many people think of them ... aggressive, dangerous, outsiders from society ... The Roma do not like to be condemned by anybody, and they have a good heart, they are taught and bred in this madness not to accept to be scorned or aggressed'. (Minister, UK)*

By leaving T. they started to belong to this place and consider it as a central part of their identity. Forced by the communist regime to settle there, for years they considered it just a compulsory, temporary accommodation, a space of oppression and marginalisation.

When it turned out that they were free to move, and they started to emigrate this place gained a new symbolic significance. It becomes the place of their roots, the origin and a source of their identity and cohesion. The new identity is rooted in their shared past, characterised by deep-rooted discrimination and collective suffering. From abroad, T. is perceived as being a place of personal transformation and spiritual development.

*'In our churches, instead of preaching the Gospel, we hold lessons about the history of our families. Everything is a lesson about how beautiful we lived in T. . 25 years ago, or how strong and united we were ten years ago. We feed on our past. We are proud of our past, but we are ashamed of our present. We praise*

*our past ... how good we were in the past and how we don't care about how we are today.'* (Minister, UK)

Their neighbourhood is a symbol of their shared history and shared experiences. Their joint marginalisation and discrimination glued them socially and offered them a collective identity, distinct from the Romanians and even from other Gypsies from Romania. Their common past is valued nowadays as a source of collective cohesion, tradition and identity.

T. is perceived as being their 'home' for now and for the future. It is a place of a permanent return and the final point in time and space. From this perspective, their transnational migration is seen as being a temporary, transitory and therefore bearable experience. *'Abroad we can be rejected, but here we are accepted.'* (interview, man). Their district concentrates and preserves their history, their link with the past and their ancestors, but is also relevant to their future. Therefore, the dead members of their community should be buried here, their new houses should be built here, the new cars should be displayed here, and their charitable gestures should be aimed at those who are less fortunate than them.

Their neighbourhood is considered an essential source for belonging, attachment and identity. The fact that most of the dead are *'taken home'*, back to Romania, discloses their deep attachment to this particular place. A cemetery is also a place of connection with their parents, brothers, members of the community. Each local cemetery is an essential place of pilgrimage for families, leaders and artists;

therefore, they travel for thousands of kilometres to participate in the funerals or collective memorial rituals. Singing, playing music and dancing at a grave is an integral part of the grieving process. The emotional, artistic events that take place in the cemetery enable cohesion and support at individual and group level.

These community-based healing ceremonies are traditional rituals with definite instructions and symbols:

- The graves should be big, comfortable, made from cement or marble
- The grave should be visited regularly by relatives and friends, and they have to spend time there together
- It is crucial to bring well-known artists to sing traditional songs or to improvise
- The artists should be paid publicly, and the amount of money is shouted out, filmed and posted
- The emotions should be freely expressed by shouting and calling the dead person
- From the grave, dedications are to be made for relatives, brothers and leaders that are not physically present.

To pay respect to the dead is a way of proving to belong to the community and of reinforcing the internal hierarchies and social status. Every journey back to Romania includes a visit to the local cemetery, visiting graves, remembering and paying tribute

to the dead. This ritual should be performed in public, accompanied by other brothers and should be broadcast via YouTube or watched in real-time on Facebook.

T. is also the source of their emotional resilience. It is like an imaginary stage, where intense emotions like sorrow, anger, love, compassion for the poor and empathy for the sick are performed and watched. It is the accessible 'going back' and 'possible ending' that helps Gypsies who are dispersed to deal with the challenging present. As long as 'at home' is good, they can tolerate abroad being harmful. The emotional and affective struggles of life are recorded and solved at home.

### 6.3 The neighbourhood - the source of brotherhood and hierarchy

The structural social isolation of the Gypsies, both at home and in the diaspora, increases their dependency on the extended families, kinship network and 'brotherhood'. Abroad, being a Gypsy from T. could be an essential criterion for trusting or welcoming a 'brother', for speaking on a crucial day, in a particular church or for washing the feet of other religious brothers after the sermon.

Gypsies from other communities and Romanians are allowed to attend their public sermons, but only Gypsies from T. are allowed to participate at the intimate religious gatherings in their houses. Other Gypsies from Romania or Romanians are accepted only as '*guests*'. While attending the religious services, the non-Gypsy guests are allowed to sing their songs, but the duration of their performance needs to be

approved by the 'brothers' from T. The congregation is listening but rarely gets involved beyond that. The guests are rarely permitted to sit in the front row (facing the whole gathering), where only respectable men are allowed to sit and are guests are never admitted to the mutual foot washing.

One of the last significant disputes between two influential traditional leaders in the Pentecostal church from Edmonton (London) was whether to welcome strangers (other Gypsies from Romania and Romanians) to the Sunday service. One minister was more open than the others, who were more passionate and fundamentalist. They preached against tolerance and openness, claiming that Gypsies 'live' the faith differently than Gadge. They argued that Gypsies have more emotional energy and feel the need to express it loudly and theatrically, while non-Gypsies behave like 'dead people' during the service.

*'I didn't like it any more ... We didn't sing our old religious songs anymore ... everybody could come and speak on a Sunday morning ... There was also a problem with the money ... Romanians didn't offer as much as Gypsies donate... There was no life and soul in the church anymore ... It was boring... It is better if we are among ourselves, only us Gypsies from T. (name of the locality). We are joyful, we sing in our language, our old songs ... We love to shout and cry loudly ... This is why we got separated from M's church...'* (Minister S., UK)

The institutions of their transnational brotherhood are challenged and changed during religious rituals, sermons and local gatherings. Since the internal authority is spread among brothers, there are frequent disagreements and conflicts. They do not readily obey one another, and therefore sometimes the solution is to '*split*' the church and find a temporary place for the sermons and prayers. Usually, the conflict won't last long, and a funeral or a wedding is an excellent opportunity to become reunited.

## 6.4 Places of dwelling and temporary attachment

Gypsies from T. (name of the locality) are spread all over Europe, including Spain, UK, France and Germany as well as in the Scandinavian Countries, in Canada and the US.<sup>2</sup> Since they are a community in motion, I analysed their social life in constant movement from one country to another, back and forth, between Romania and the destination country, from one town to another, from one church to another, from one welfare and legal system to another, from one event to another, from one culture to another. '*Our Gypsies are now in all European countries and everywhere ...*' (Minister, UK). At first sight, their temporary destinations seem to be randomly chosen, but there are elaborate reasons beyond their travelling. Gypsies' mobilities are governed by a complex of economic and symbolic factors.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on the geolocation of the videos, I have identified around 500 different localities, mainly in Europe and North America, where Romanian Gypsies (filmed themselves or were filmed by non-Gypsies).

Gypsies' physical mobilities could be clustered either as (1) exploratory, random, or unsystematic mobilities or 2) deliberate or systematic ones. I define random mobilities as any circumstantial travelling targeted at discovering new economic strategies, new sources of income and at scrutinising legislative niches (like begging in Sweden). The aim is to find comfortable and immediate benefits from economic or legislative differences among countries.

Over time, if the new place would offer any possibility to obtain immediate advantages, exploratory travelling could be transformed into a systematic one. Systematic mobilities represent any forms of planned travelling targeted at bringing material or symbolic, personal or communal benefit.

Deliberate mobilities involve an organised '*human infrastructure*' and '*material logistics*'. The '*human infrastructure*' or the '*brothers*' consists of experienced and trustworthy men located in different places, who have a good understanding of the local environment. They have specific tasks: to investigate new sources of income, to protect the women and the children, to face the new challenges and spread the knowledge within the network, to stay in touch and inform the others. They also should have local connections and know-how to deal with local institutions. They are '*key pawns*', honourable men, with established positions within their extended family and community. The material logistics consists of money, cars, buses, tents, accommodation (improvised or secure), secure public spaces (for performing their music or begging).

Private transport from T. towards various destinations is very well structured. There are buses three days a week from the local bus station for France, Hungary, Austria, Czech Republic, England, Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark and Germany.

The diversity and the regularity of the buses implies that the migration is a circulatory process, formed by regular and short term visits. As I mentioned previously, most of the members of the community are in a state of permanent motion across borders, back and forth between other countries and their place of origin. In the process of migration, Romanian Gypsies alternate periods of settlement/sedentarism with phases of intensive travelling /nomadism. *'Our children were in London. Two sons and one grandson. They go and come back all the time. Now I'm going to go, and maybe we'll go through London again. One of the guys who are at our church in London is my brother-in-law. My brother and son started a company in Belgium. And they work in several other countries.'* (interview, man, Romania). I define places of temporary dwelling as places where Romanian Gypsies decide to settle temporarily or to initiate an activity as a source of income.

#### **6.4.1 Temporary accommodation**

The analysis of video metadata shows that Romanian Gypsies settled temporarily all over Europe, as well as in America, Canada and Australia.

The data demonstrates that they lived in transitory settlements such as 1) illegal camps around Rome or Paris, 2) private accommodation in particular districts (in London, Slough, Birmingham, Manchester, Barcelona, Malaga, Sacramento, Toronto, Riverside), 3 ) improvised accommodation (in Rome, Madrid, Marseille) and 4 ) car parks or camping sites (in Norway and Sweden). While travelling, they choose various strategies to settle temporarily, they rent proper accommodation or improvise

settlements in legal or illegal places. Their strategy to find temporary accommodation is adapted to local regulations and to the way local populations administer public places. If public places are controlled, and the local institutions are active and restrictive, they are forced into private accommodation (UK, Sweden). If the public spaces are less controlled by authorities or the local administration which is permissive or prone to corruption, they improvise accommodation along the rivers (Spain), under the bridges (Rome), in abandoned houses, in parks (Madrid), car parks (Norway), or woods (Italy and Spain). In France, they lived outside the towns, in illegal and squalid camps. In Sweden and Denmark, they lived in tents, always moving them from one place to another: *'after 24 hours we move our tent a couple of meters away. You are allowed to camp only for 24 hours. If the police come we show them that we moved ... and they cannot do anything.'* (man, YouTube).

#### **6.4.2 Temporary “portable” churches**

Nowadays, the 'Gypsy churches' are spread all over Europe, especially in Romania, France, Italy, UK, Germany and Spain, as well as the US and Canada. In Romania, as in Spain, Pentecostalism has become one of the most distinctive organisational features developed by Gypsies (Foszto, 2005). The Gypsy Pentecostal movement consists of small “*get – togetherness*”, assemblies, and churches, which are independent or linked with others, subordinated or not, to a church-mother. They are '*ad hoc*', '*fluid*' or '*mobile*', very flexible in terms of membership, leadership, location for praying, types of worship and religious songs or rhythms. The physical location,

where the actual rituals take place, does not count. The religious services (sermons, night prayers, foot washing) could be performed anywhere: in a rented church, in a private house, in a rented room, in a public park, in the forest, and can be conducted by any member of the faith, either Romanian or Gypsy.

For Gypsies, these '*portable*' churches became an institution similar to an 'extended family' that give them a sense of belonging and identity. They are key centres of cohesion and support. According to Palmer and Stanley, the local Pentecostal communities are a source of secure networks of trust, and the 'local church' provides an institutional framework that mainstream society refuses especially to those who are socially excluded (Palmer & Stanley, 2012).

The dominant type of mobilities among these churches consists of exchanging ideas, songs, practices and rituals and artists, and in strengthening the informal relationships within the communities. Within this 'togetherness' or so-called '*portable churches*', traditional kinship and status are highly valued, being an essential resource for reducing social anomie (Blasco, 2011). They also strengthen the process of ethnogenesis, reinforce the mobilisation of ethnicity and the cultural reinvention (Delgado, 2010). Some of the key players, (ministers and religious artists), legitimate these portable churches by travelling extensively, "transporting" religious songs, rituals and mentalities. They maintain the churches as part of an extended network of reciprocal socialisation. The leaders could be members of the traditional Pentecostal denominations (like Philadelphia, Elim, Maranata, Bethel, Bethesda, Emmanuel, Betenia) or not. Their formal institutional connections with the traditional denominations are fragile.

These temporary churches offered them new symbolical strategies, encouraging them to endure discrimination and strengthening old and new networks. Within the sermons or in 'separate meetings', the brothers reinforce their brotherhood' (through 'foot washing', for instance), mediate local conflicts, discuss and initiate new geographical routes, and circulate new recipes for facing their economic and social struggle.

Ordinary community members who are visiting the religious services are less attracted by the religious dogma and more by the '*social energy*' produced through their collective cries and prayers. The religious conversions and sermons are perceived as strategies to 'upgrade' their low social and ethnic status and to de-marginalise it (Palmer & Stanley, 2012). On the other hand, in a complementary interpretation, their marginality, exclusion and poverty are perceived as the source of resilience and spiritual growth.

In this chapter, I described the flows and characteristics of Gypsies' transnational spatial mobilities, based on the information gained from YouTube. Analysing both the content and the metadata of the videos, I recreated their geographical routes and itineraries, and I described their motivations and aimed to travel. Travelling among countries to perform certain rituals together, collective events where "brothers" have to be present are social practices which reinforce their relationships and affiliation to the group. I conclude that their mobilities are influenced by a range of transnational opportunities and constraints. Their physical home in Romania represents a fixed

geographical point, which is perceived as the origin of their identity. From these fixed points, they start a multitude of geographical routes towards temporary places of attachment such as dwellings, portable churches and places that offer them provisional economic advantages.

## Chapter 7- Discussions and conclusions

*'Through music, mobile phones, cars, ... and Jesus,  
we keep our Gypsiness alive!' (interview, man, UK)*

In this thesis, I have analysed the online practices and the transnational mobilities of a community of Pentecostal Gypsies from Romania. Using YouTube videos and ethnographic methods, I followed their online networks and geographical trajectories, in order to understand what keeps them united, and how their *'togetherness'* is so strongly preserved, despite their geographical dispersion. My conclusion is that, through online connectivity and intense mobilities, they mimic their former traditional, face-to-face community, and continue to extend their socialities to the online space and across borders.

The thesis aimed to contribute to the existing literature on transnational communities of migrants, filling in a gap about how digital practices facilitate a new type of socialisation and sociality and addressing a methodological solution for making sense of digital data. In addition to presenting a new empirical case study, it contributes to migration studies from two different points of view: 1) methodological and 2) theoretical.

First of all, the thesis tried to respond to the methodological challenges signalled by various scholars like Mike Savage, Roger Burrows, Les Back, Nirmal Puwar or Howard Becker (Savage & Burrows, 2007; Back & Puwar, 2013). It is addressing a novel methodological solution for making sense of raw digital data. It shows how, by mining and extracting digital data, and by using innovative techniques to analyse and visualise it, a novel social reality could be revealed. It illustrates how the skill of creating and posting videos or commenting on them on YouTube constitute a suitable foundation for a new type of community cohesiveness. Therefore, it contributes to the existing literature on how to approach a transnational community by following its mundane digital practices.

The digital traces of the circulation of various cultural objects (mainly videos) become important data which could recreate the geographical mobilities of the community and reveal its sociality. The geolocation of the videos, comments and channels, discloses the geographical network of the places and spaces relevant for the transnational life of the Gypsies. This method also explains how their digital practices facilitate a new type of collective socialisation and sociality. Therefore, by describing how the new technologies changed the transnational life of the Gypsy migrants, the thesis adds to digital migration studies and explains how a marginalised ethnic group maintains its cohesion through the circulation of its cultural objects.

The thesis offers a practical solution for an empirical crisis suggested by sociologists, and it could be considered an example of '*how to do the craft of research differently*' (Back & Puwar, 2013, p. 29) by using an innovative research design and combining data from real and virtual spaces. It could be read as a practical example of how to deal with digital traces, which hide social "substance" and how, by analysing digital codes and algorithms, new social realities could be revealed. By extracting and modelling data on the Pentecostal Gypsies' digital behaviour, the thesis shows that through creating and posting videos or commenting on YouTube, the Pentecostal Gypsies continue to live as a homogeneous religious community, despite their geographical dispersion. Therefore, the thesis verified Delanty's hypothesis that the Internet is a '*supplement to face-to-face communities*' (Delanty, 2003).

Secondly, the thesis expands the theoretical debate about the de-territorialisation of transnational migrants, exploring how, for this particular community of Pentecostal Gypsies, their locality of origin became the label of their digital and ethnic identity and the hub of their geographical mobilities. Far from becoming deterritorialized, this community has been "territorialized" by migration. In this respect, the community has been spatially fixed to its 'home' town more firmly now than it ever was in the past. Since it redefines the role of the space and place in the analysis of transnational migration and recreates geographical mobilities from digital data, the thesis can be added as an innovative conceptual contribution to the research on physical mobilities.

The thesis concludes that though historical forms of mobility have changed, the idea of mobility remains key to Gypsy identity. Although travelling still has an important social role, the place of origin has become a major attribute of their identity. The home town T. becomes a key part of the Gypsy transnational practice – and is central to their ability to maintain unity. For a long time, they perceived themselves as temporary '*guests*' in T., because they had been forced to settle there by the communist apparatus. But after they started to emigrate, this place became the primary source of their identity, the centre of their mobilities and a hub of their cohesion. The local cemetery, the old houses of their grandparents and their new empty homes have metamorphosed into places of pilgrimage, where their roots are symbolically located. They are nowadays the prototypes of more typical 'territorialised' transmigrants, caught in a general idea of de-territorialised people. In this respect, my findings suggest that the difference between Gypsy and non-Gypsy migration may be exaggerated. The idea of Gypsies as stateless, homeless, placeless, starts to look less convincing, given this strong relationship between migrants and their homeplace.

I argue that in a world where ties between place and identity are conceptualized as increasingly weak and many migrants are imagined as becoming de-territorialised, Gypsies have reacted in the opposite way. They have transformed their place of origin into the primary source of belonging and the strength of their identity in a way that it wasn't in the past. Stewart (Stewart, 1997), Okely (Okely, 1983), and other scholars argued that, over the years, Gypsies' identity was cemented around their language, traditions and lifestyle, rather than as belonging to a specific place. The

analysis of digital data showed that their locality of origin became the main label in identifying, defining and differentiating themselves as a community in the digital environment. Territory has become more important in defining their identity and not less.

The thesis argues that the Gypsies live with two kinds of territoriality. The transnational Gypsy migrants live in a 'new territoriality', being involved in the process of conquering new places, and changing their practices in relation to the regulations of the places they are living in. However, their ongoing internal symbolic hierarchies and social status are defined by the logic of a 'primitive territoriality', with a tight focus on the home town. Nowadays, numerous buses are taking them far away from their home, across many borders, in an attempt to find new sources of income. However, their life still revolves around their extended family and their emotional support is rooted in their network of 'brotherhood'.

Last but not least, the thesis identifies a change in the classical debate about Gypsy' identity. Throughout history, for this community of travellers, place and space have not been intrinsic elements of their identity. The thesis shows that, when reconsidered in digital and transnational space, the location of their origin, the home town T, becomes core to their identity, their brand and a well-advertised symbol of unity and belonging. Therefore, the thesis contributes to the existing theories about ethnic communities in transnational and virtual spaces, and it may influence policies regarding the Gypsy issue at national and European level.

From the empirical point of view, I conclude that Gypsies from T. (name of the locality) use two main strategies to keep their '*togetherness*'. One is to report reciprocally and regularly on their everyday life and on religious events by using online platforms, and the second is to travel continuously wherever it is needed. Their transnational lifestyle is perceived as a successful migration recipe, and it has become a role-model praised and followed by other Gypsy communities. This is despite the fact that they meet discrimination wherever they travel to.

By travelling extensively and displaying themselves online, Gypsies maintain and nurture their transnational network and expand their practices of '*being together*' (Shichor, 2003). Although the core of my analysis consists mainly of YouTube videos, I also used classical ethnographic methods (interviews, ethnographic notes), continuously overlapping online with offline data, and intentionally produced data with unintentionally-produced machine-code metadata.

To depict the 'social glue' that unites them, I described their mobilities, analysing how they spend a lot of energy and resources in order to meet face-to-face and participate in collective events (sermons, funerals, weddings, baptisms, traditional courts). At the same time, I showed that although they are using YouTube features rather roughly, they manage to communicate with their 'brothers', and what is more, to maintain a strong sense of belonging. I also illustrated how YouTube users, both video producers and consumers, get involved in a '*network of conversations*' which

support their transnational life and help them to perform their Gypsiness (Burgess & Green, 2009). Their online practices reveal active engagement and emotionally authentic participation. By putting funerals, weddings, sermons and family conflicts into a publicly accessible social media space, they mutually accept and obey the internal social logic of their community. By recording sermons, gatherings and confessions, they legitimate internal leaders, shift internal hierarchies, create intra-group '*celebrities*', restore collective justice for victims and spread communal empathy for those in need. By practising '*online dedications*', they improve both their offline and online popularity and cement their networks of '*brothers*'.

I described the tensions between the online individual expression and the constraints and limitations of community life. Their traditional and communitarian values put a significant strain on their transnational lives and personal options. I showed how, by promoting their individual "*selves*" online (with videos posted on YouTube about their material or spiritual prosperity), those who have travelled also maintain and strengthen their solidarity and connectivity as a community.

YouTube empowers each Gypsy user to present himself as a person, as an individual. Although the videos focus very much on those individuals, by sharing their self-made videos and reciprocally watching and commenting on them, they create a strong feeling of co-participation and homogeneity. Among '*brothers*', there is a mutual pressure to act similarly and to mimic each other (for example wearing the same clothes, dancing to the same music). The online and offline '*way of doing things*'

is contagious, and becomes over time part of their social image as a '*clique*'. The cultural products made by members of the Gypsy community (picture compilations, edited videos) are marks of their ethnic identity, disclosing their social values, choices, intentions, socialities and practices of socialisation (Christakis, 2013).

Although there is a considerable gender and age bias in the online space in terms of active participation, both women (after they become mothers) and elders are mostly portrayed positively and valued by their relatives. For Gypsies, the nuclear family is significant, but far more critical is the extended family and the community. Being socially and ethnically excluded by the wider society, their primary source of social capital is within their own ethnic community. Wherever they emigrate, however geographically dispersed they are, they have a constant need for being and living together.

The research revealed that antagonistic attitudes towards Gypsies are common wherever they travel to and that online abuse is common. The dichotomy of 'we, Gypsies' and 'they', the outsiders, is not challenged, nor disputed as a result of migration and dispersal. Among Gypsies, there is a sort of apathy when they have to protect themselves against offline or online insults. They are used to be abused; for example, when they are filmed on the street against their will, their reply is minimal. In the online space, when their images are circulated and ridiculed or when people attack them by commenting to their videos, they avoid replying.

In quantitative terms, the most widely viewed Gypsy videos are rarely the ones produced by the Gypsies themselves. Although there are thousands of self-made videos with them in churches, singing or dancing, the ones that are viewed most often are the videos uploaded by powerful '*outsiders*' (TV stations, public institutions). These have higher visibility and are often critical, insulting or mocking, so they have negative impact on the public's image of the Gypsies.

In the past (when Gypsy mobility in Romania was far more limited), they managed to protect their privacy and carefully control what to show and what to hide from the '*gadje*'. With migration and the use of social media, they become far more exposed and vulnerable to abuse. Yet they seem somehow not aware of facing new forms of abuse (having their filmed image used without their permission) and new forms of discrimination (being attacked through comments to their videos). They make little or no effort to ensure that the privacy settings of the videos restrict who can view them (Nakamura, 2007).

I argued that though their geographical proximity was replaced by extensive dispersal, nevertheless spatial mobilities still have social value and meaning. Travelling is not only about moving from one geographical point to another. It has an important social role, and it reveals a lot about the internal social logic of the community. On the one hand, their constant spatial movement combined with their flexibility and adaptability seems to be, paradoxically, the essential basis of their ethnic unity.

Central to successful travelling is the ability to adapt to regulations in different places. Living in constant motion, they have to face contradictory rules about everyday life: it is allowed to pick up food from the garbage in Italy but not in the UK; it is accepted to beg in Norway, but not in the UK; it is allowed to camp for 24 hours anywhere in Denmark but not in Germany; in Spain, children can beg on the street while in Norway they are taken by the state if they are found begging. This group of Gypsies tries to use the same life strategies, but, not being aware of the local social order that rules in each place, they are sometimes rewarded and supported, other times punished and rejected. The cultural and social differences they encounter while crossing national borders, lead to a state of permanent uncertainty and social anxiety. The process of learning the rules of the places comes with very high human costs, in terms of health, family welfare and personal freedom. In contrast, their hometown T. is a place they know well and where they can socially rest and regenerate their energy in order to continue their explorations.

I also investigated how the Gypsies' solidarity, based originally on tradition and religion, and lately supplemented by their place-based commitment to T. (name of the locality), also generates social insularity. This then exposes them to new forms of discrimination and prejudice. By showing off in real and digital space, they become more visible and vulnerable. In fact, by adopting and internalising their "T. (name of the locality) identity", they confirm and even extend their social marginality and exclusion. But this social marginality created through collective identity, is experienced as a space of social comfort and protection.

In the thesis, I argued that Pentecostal associational forms such as 'togetherness' and 'portable churches' act as key agencies in promoting gender and ethnic socialisation and in sustaining their intimate socialities. Presenting themselves as the children of God, and as part of the Christian genealogy, the Gypsies try to renegotiate their low status and search for social respect and self-esteem. Unfortunately, they only negotiate within the limits of their ethnic group, without challenging the 'outsiders' who discriminate against them. Oriented towards themselves, they consume their social energy in dealing with their internal affairs, jealousies and competitions, on the one hand, and with accepting and carrying their stigma with resilience, on the other hand.

At the start of the thesis, I claimed that there were relatively few studies that linked transnationalism and the internet and focused on minorities in general and Gypsies in particular. What this study has revealed, is a European Union that underneath the cover of a homogeneous set of standard regulations, in fact, treats different people in very different ways. The only uniform experience for Gypsies is hostility wherever they go. European citizens, although presented as an 'ideal cosmopolitan unity' operating in a technologically modern, transnational space, are still unprepared to share their wealth with Gypsies and are unwilling to accommodate this persistent 'cultural other'.

## Annexes:

### Annexe 1 List of interviewees

C o d e	Gend er	A g e	Pla ce of the inte rvie w	Geogr aphic al locati on	Observation	Recorded
1	Man	45	home	London	Senior Minister of the Edmonton church	Recorded/ Transcribed
2	Man	28	park	London	Junior Minister at Edmonton church	Recorded/ Transcribed
3	Woman	25	home	London	Housekeeper, mother of two children	Recorded/ Transcribed

4	Woman	26	coffee shop	London	'Big Issue' seller, mother of 6 children, Facebook user	Notes
5	Woman	45	church	London	Housekeeper, mother of 11 children and grandmother of 47 grandchildren	Notes
6	Man	30	church	London	Religious artist, YouTube celebrity	Notes
7	Man	53	church	London	Father of 3 children, whose oldest son died	Notes
8	Man	35	home	London	Builder, two children	Recorded/ Transcribed
9	Man	55	home	Romania	Minister of a Pentecostal church	Recorded/ Transcribed
10	Man	45	church	Romania	Minister of an Adventist church	Notes
11	Man	22	car	London	Cleaner/Youtube active user	Notes
12	Man	39	coffee shop	London	Religious poet/ active Facebook user	Notes
13	Women	40	church	London	Housekeeper, mother of five children,	Notes

<b>14</b>	Man	29	charity office	Barcelona/ Spain	Roma activist	Recorded/Notes
<b>15</b>	Man	35	church	Malaga/ Spain	Minister of a Pentecostal church, eight children	Notes
<b>16</b>	Man	45	church	Cinque Terre- Camp	Minister of an Adventist Church	Recorded
<b>17</b>	Women	35	church	Cinque Terre - Camp	Agricultural worker	Recorded

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