BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF POPULATION
STUDIES AND HISTORY OF MINORITIES

SUMMARY

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE ROMA COMMUNITY

Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Evolutions. Comparative Approach: Roma Communities in Florești and Sebeș

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Introduction

Motivation for Research and Pursuing Doctoral Studies

From my years as an undergraduate, I harbored a profound desire to explore the history and way of life of the Roma people. Upon entering university, I chose to join a non-governmental student organization focused on the Roma, the first of its kind at the national level. This involvement exposed me to a new perspective on the Roma community, allowing me to understand the needs, expectations, lifestyle, traditions, and identity of its members in a way that differed from the perspective of my own community of origin.

In my home community, located in Sebeș, Alba County, there persists a set of cultural and social norms that profoundly influence the involvement of Roma women in education and professional fields. Being the first female from this community to complete high school and pursue higher education, I became an emblematic figure, catalyzing a sense of encouragement and aspiration among young Roma in the same community. Through my presence and success in the educational field, I generated a role model, indirectly motivating other community members to pursue their own academic ambitions.

It is remarkable that, following my personal example, a significant number of young Roma from this locality began attending high school. Even if some of these youths did not proceed to higher education, this phenomenon reflects a paradigm shift and a recognition of the importance of education within the community. Thus, it can be deduced that the presence of positive role models, including myself, has a significant impact on promoting and consolidating the value of education among the Roma community members.

My university journey revealed to me that, despite common elements with any other community, there are also distinct aspects among various Roma communities. Language, traditional attire, and even the inclusion mechanisms adopted can vary significantly from one community to another. This realization sparked a surprising question within my own consciousness - that although I am part of the Roma ethnicity, I do not know myself nor the Roma community well enough to speak on its behalf or represent its culture and tradition in society. Therefore, I assert with certainty that my academic journey has helped me understand and know the Roma

community, fueling my curiosity and motivation to deepen my knowledge in this field over the years.

Thus, with the decision to pursue doctoral studies, I also embraced the desire to deepen and understand the Roma ethnicity from historical, cultural, and traditional perspectives that are specifically representative of this ethnic group. I also aimed to explore the unique, underrepresented, or insufficiently promoted elements within Romanian society.

At the beginning of my doctoral studies, I opted to research how the Romani language is representative of Roma communities from a historical and traditional standpoint, evaluating and illustrating the extent to which the Romani language can be considered a cultural heritage specific to the Roma ethnicity. However, after delving into several specialized books on the Roma and having preliminary discussions with the potential research sample, I concluded that this approach lacked novelty. A series of studies and research had already addressed this topic, prompting me to change the focus of my doctoral thesis.

Given these aspects, I found it opportune to change the research topic. The new title and research theme would address the status of Roma women within their communities. I chose this theme for several reasons. Firstly, the concept of Roma women, their status, and their position in the community are scarcely visible in specialized works. Additionally, this field is rarely explored due to the taboo nature with which it is perceived within the Roma community.

Roma women adhere to traditions that typically hinder their evolution and emancipation. Given that I am a Roma woman, and I am motivated to tackle this subject—likely under-discussed and under-promoted—I decided, together with my scientific coordinator, to choose this research theme. I am firmly convinced that it presents interest not only for me but also for society as a whole.

It is important to mention that the chosen research theme is substantially influenced by my personal perspectives and the context of my individual experiences. As a Roma woman from a compact Roma community, I have always been aware of the challenges and difficulties faced by women in this community.

My personal experiences have sensitized me to the issues of discrimination, stereotyping, and marginalization that Roma women face, as well as to the untapped potential and resources they possess. Thus, my objective with this thesis is to bring to the attention of the academic community and the public the complex realities of Roma women's lives in Roma communities. I

aim to highlight their resources and capabilities, as well as the obstacles and barriers they encounter in accessing education, health services, employment, and active participation in decision-making processes. Through this research, I intend to contribute to raising awareness and promoting initiatives that support and improve the status of Roma women, aiming for greater social inclusion and better representation of cultural and gender diversity in society.

Based on the knowledge acquired from my activism in the Roma communities of Florești and Sebeș, I can confidently state that the Roma woman within the traditional community typically adheres to a set of internal customs known to her and accepted to a certain extent, even if this generates numerous sacrifices and responsibilities.

Emancipation of women in Roma communities is generally not embraced; it is often viewed as an insult to the community. Thus, the intention to delve into this issue is based not only on my identity as a Roma woman but also on my motivation to evaluate the effects of Roma women's emancipation from the perspectives of the community, the family, and the women themselves.

In traditional Roma families, gender roles are known before marriage. Men are attributed work and income-generating roles, while women are responsible for the home and children. In modern families, tasks are equally shared, with both men and women assuming common responsibilities. Therefore, the thesis also takes a comparative perspective between traditional and modern Roma women, considering their expectations, relationships, educational levels, occupations, and adherence to traditions.

Main Sources Underpinning the Research

The research is founded on multiple sources, encompassing not only specialized literature but also the experience gained from direct involvement in various community projects and non-governmental organizations. As a community facilitator, health mediator, and educator in the cultural and linguistic field of the Roma, I have had the opportunity to directly experience the complexity and diversity of situations encountered in Roma communities. This diverse and profound experience will allow me to approach the research from a comprehensive perspective and to understand deeply the subtleties and challenges associated with the study's theme.

Active participation in organizations such as the "Association for the Emancipation of Roma Women" and other NGOs dedicated to supporting and promoting Roma women's rights has

strengthened my understanding of the specific problems and needs of this population category. Through these activities, I have acquired relevant knowledge about the social, cultural, and economic dynamics within Roma communities, including gender and women's rights issues.

This multidimensional approach and the practical experience I have accumulated have prepared me adequately for the proposed research, providing me with not only the necessary theoretical framework but also the practical perspectives and tools essential for an in-depth investigation of the status of Roma women in the communities of Sebeș and Florești.

One of the essential aspects of the research is recognizing the Roma women in the community as an invaluable source of information. Through semi-structured interviews, these women provide unique and detailed perspectives on their lives, highlighting relevant aspects of their identity and status within the community. Despite their initial reluctance to express certain sensitive issues, as the trust relationship with the researcher consolidates, they become more willing to share essential information for understanding the social and cultural dynamics specific to the Roma community. Thus, Roma women are not only subjects of the research but also active agents in knowledge production, bringing valuable perspectives and experiences to the discussion for developing a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the realities within their community.

During the projects conducted in the Roma communities, including those selected as the research sample, I observed that despite social and cultural diversity, certain traditional norms and customs persist that influence the role and status of Roma women. Among these are restrictions related to communication and personal expression. Specifically, I noted that Roma women often face limitations in social interactions, being restricted in communicating with people outside the accepted circles of acquaintances within the community. Additionally, they face social pressures that prevent them from exposing aspects of their family or personal life to other community members.

These aspects highlight the complexity of social and cultural dynamics within Roma communities and underscore the importance of a sensitive and interdisciplinary approach in researching and understanding the status of Roma women in these environments. Observing these realities in Roma communities, instead of being discouraged by existing social limitations and norms, I considered it opportune to view them not as absolute barriers.

Rather, I chose to start from the premise that any information obtained, whether limited or not, is extremely essential for my research. The perspectives and experiences of Roma women, even when expressed in a narrow context, can offer profound and valuable insights into the social and cultural dynamics of their communities. Therefore, I decided to approach this aspect with sensitivity and determination, aware that even the smallest pieces of information can make significant contributions to the development of a deeper and richer understanding of the status of Roma women in these environments.

In conclusion, the motivation for this work lies in the need to investigate and understand more deeply the status of Roma women in the communities of Sebeș and Florești. The importance of this research stems from the fact that Roma women often face multiple forms of marginalization and discrimination, and addressing these issues is crucial for promoting their social inclusion and rights.

Regarding the structure of the work, it aims to provide a coherent and rigorous framework for the proposed investigation.

Chapter 1 – Defining Concepts – aims to clarify and establish the key concepts and terms used in the research, such as discrimination, stereotypes, Roma community, Roma woman, Gypsy-Roma terminologies, and community facilitation. This stage is essential to avoid ambiguities and to ensure a common understanding of the subject matter. The chapter will also present defining traditional aspects regarding the role and identity of Roma women, both in terms of traditional dress and behavior, as well as their relationship with various customs within their community. Additionally, it will analyze how Roma women are perceived and treated in society and within their own ethnic group, including aspects related to discrimination and stereotypes. The chapter also examines political, organizational, and social initiatives undertaken to promote the inclusion of Roma women in various aspects of society.

Chapter 2 – Methodological Approach to Research – lays the foundation for the methodologies used through a mixed approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative elements. Quantitative analysis will provide relevant numerical data, while qualitative analysis will offer a deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences of Roma women. The justification for using these methods is based on the need to obtain a comprehensive perspective on the social and cultural realities of the studied communities.

Chapter 3 – Research Objectives and Hypotheses – is grounded in accordance with the general purpose of the study and aims at a deep understanding of the status of Roma women in the analyzed communities. The working hypotheses are developed based on the theoretical framework and existing literature in the field, representing assumptions to be tested in the research.

Chapter 4 – Dimensions of the Status of Roma Women in Communities – offers a brief incursion into the history of the Roma, focusing on their origin, cultural identity, and traditions that characterize them as a distinct people. It also analyzes and classifies different Roma groups based on clans and traditional practices, emphasizing how these aspects influence their contemporary cultural identity.

Chapter 5 – Discrimination and Stereotypes about Roma Women in Sebeş and Floreşti – exposes various aspects related to Roma women in terms of educational level, access to professional development programs, healthcare, and participation in traditional economic activities. It also analyzes public policies and programs aimed at integrating Roma women into the labor market and eliminating gender stereotypes. Addressing these aspects is justified by the need to better understand the social, economic, and cultural context in which Roma women live and to identify the main challenges and opportunities they face.

Chapter 6 – Analysis and Interpretation of Results – focuses on presenting and interpreting the research results, highlighting the main findings and trends identified. The interpretation of the results is supported by data obtained from quantitative and qualitative analysis, and conclusions are drawn in accordance with the previously established objectives and hypotheses. At the end, the chapter will present the main conclusions of the research, highlighting important results and their implications for social practice and public policies. Based on the conclusions, specific recommendations will be formulated to improve the situation of Roma women in the studied communities.

Chapter 7 – Analytical Approach to Roma Communities in Sebeş and Floreşti. Comparative Analysis – will address a comparative analysis of the two Roma communities, from the perspective of community, institutional, and political representation, and how Roma women relate to various traditions. It will also analyze the extent to which these customs can represent barriers in the emancipation process, as well as Roma women's access to education and public health services in the two communities.

The final section of the work will present the general conclusions of the research, synthesizing the content of each chapter and providing directions for future research in the field. Following the conclusions, the work will include the bibliography used throughout the research, followed by a section dedicated to annexes. This will include relevant materials such as applied questionnaires, interview transcriptions, and other supplementary documents that contribute to a deeper understanding of the research approach.

The proposed structure aims to provide a rigorous and solid academic framework for the undertaken research, ensuring coherence and relevance at each stage of the investigation and analysis process.

Since my student years, I have been captivated by the desire to know more deeply the history and way of life of the Roma. My experience in a non-governmental student organization focused on Roma community issues provided me with a new perspective on the needs, expectations, and way of life of the members of this community. This prompted me to explore more deeply the cultural and social diversity of Roma communities.

Initially, I intended to explore the influence of the Romani language on the identity and traditions of the Roma from a historical and cultural perspective. However, after a closer analysis and discussion with potential research participants, I decided to refocus my research on a less explored and more complex topic – the status of Roma women in their community and the impact of traditions and stereotypes on their emancipation.

The choice of this research topic was supported by several factors. Firstly, I observed that the subject of Roma women, especially concerning their emancipation and position in the community, is underrepresented in the specialized literature. As a Roma woman, I felt directly involved in this issue and considered that it was the right time to bring this topic to the forefront of academic research. Secondly, personal and professional experiences in community activism and work with non-governmental organizations focused on supporting Roma women sensitized me to the problems faced by these women within their community. Therefore, I considered that investigating and understanding more deeply the status of Roma women in their community is not only a necessity but also an opportunity to bring essential aspects of these women's lives to the public's and academic community's attention.

Through this research, I aim to bring to light the complex realities of the lives of Roma women in Roma communities, to highlight their resources and capabilities, as well as the obstacles and

barriers they face in their attempt to improve their status and living conditions. I hope to contribute to increasing awareness and promoting initiatives that support and encourage the emancipation of Roma women, leading to better representation of them in contemporary Romanian society.

This multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach, combined with the practical experience gained in my work as a community facilitator and activist in the field of Roma women's rights, adequately prepares me for carrying out this complex and sensitive research.

Studying the status of Roma women in their communities represents a crucial step in deeply understanding the social and cultural realities faced by this population category. Investigating the problems and opportunities of Roma women contributes to promoting social inclusion and combating discrimination and stereotypes against this community. Research on Roma women can provide relevant data and evidence for the development and implementation of effective public policies in the field of social inclusion and gender equality. By bringing the problems and opportunities of Roma women to the forefront, it is possible to contribute to building a more equitable society, including one where cultural and gender diversity is respected and valued.

The obtained results revealed that traditions and cultural norms remain a significant factor in slowing down the emancipation process of Roma women. Practices such as early marriages and social constraints imposed by the community exert a strong influence on their individual trajectory and their role in society.

At the same time, I found a positive trend regarding the involvement of Roma women in family and community decisions. Increased access to education and the implementation of effective educational and social policies have significantly contributed to improving their situation and eliminating the barriers that hinder their emancipation.

Thus, these results not only reflect the reality of Roma women in communities but also underscore the importance of adopting appropriate policies and strategies to promote gender equality and support their emancipation process.

In a world where ancient myths still exert their influence on their identity, Roma women navigate between ancestral traditions and modern opportunities for political emancipation. The research reveals this complex dialogue, offering a detailed view of their struggle and evolution in the current socio-economic context. Each figure and story find their place in this narrative, shaping the portrait of a community in search of success and freedom.

In an academic analysis of the situation of Roma women, it is essential to recognize the complexity of the relationship between emancipation and tradition. Roma women find themselves in a continuous tension between the desire to free themselves from the restrictions imposed by traditional norms and the need to preserve their unique cultural identity.

The emancipation of Roma women involves improving access to education, integrating into the labor market, and actively participating in public life. Research indicates that Roma women who benefit from higher education and economic resources are better prepared to claim their rights and participate in decision-making processes. These advances favor the emergence of a generation of women capable of shaping their own destinies, independent of traditional patriarchal constraints.

However, cultural traditions play an essential role in maintaining social cohesion and ethnic identity. Gender norms in Roma communities are often strongly influenced by ancient traditions, which prescribe clearly defined roles for women and men. These roles usually include domestic and maternal responsibilities, thus limiting women's opportunities to engage in activities outside the community.

The interaction between emancipation and tradition creates a complex context in which the Roma woman must find her path. In this context, recent research highlights the need for public policies that support the education and employment of Roma women while respecting cultural values and traditions. Moreover, promoting successful role models within the community is crucial to demonstrate that emancipation does not necessarily involve abandoning cultural identity but can mean redefining and adapting it to modern realities.

Thus, the academic analysis of the condition of Roma women must adopt a comprehensive perspective, recognizing the complexity of the interaction between tradition and modernity. Only through such a detailed approach can effective solutions be developed to support the genuine emancipation of Roma women in a way that is compatible with preserving their specific cultural identity and values.

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