

# Introduction

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This book is about the relation between Rom Gypsies and peasants in a village in Transylvania. The term *gypsiness* will refer to what I see as the Rom-Gypsy mode of existence that implies their relationship to non-Gypsies and the mutual ideas that govern this relationship. Gypsiness as a social form is a creation of specific social processes in time and space. Gypsiness in this study does not refer to a community, but to the particular social form created by the interdependence of Gypsies and non-Gypsies (*gaze pl.*) – here the hamlet Roma and peasants in a village in Transylvania. I see this form to be one local example of gypsiness that is expressed in different ways in different localities. I opt for a view of Gypsies and gypsiness as a relationship that is flexible, changing and explorative in adaptation to the surrounding populations. This book is an effort to combine an ethnographic description and analysis of one Rom Gypsy community with an analysis of its relations to the peasant community it is part of and dependent on.

Joska, the *bulibaşa* (headman) of the Rom hamlet, is the protagonist of this story. In Part I of this book we follow him and his family through different aspects of everyday life, which will reveal the complex and changing relations between Roma and villagers in present-day Romania. It will also demonstrate the complex strategic situation Joska accommodates to by balancing his loyalties with his ambitions. The second part of the book discusses the exchanges, interdependencies and power relations between Roma and villagers and the place of the Roma in the Romanian figuration.

## Background

### *Gypsies, Roma and Țigani*

*Gypsy* is the English denomination for a vast and diverse category of people consisting of several culturally different ethnic categories and groups. The term *Gypsy* represents a specific European discourse of power

and certain romantic ideas and sentiments of freedom that have been interpreted differently in different times and in different places. Gypsy and 'Gypsy-like' generally refers to categories of people who are considered in some way to oppose the majority's way of life and world view as expressed in names like bohemians, travellers and tinkers (Lucassen and Cottaar, 1998: 1). The majority of these groups and categories speak different languages and do not admit any affinity to each other.

The Roma form one category of Gypsies consisting of groups speaking dialects of *Romanes* (referred to as Romany in English). Roma constitute the largest minority population in Europe. The most numerous and widely dispersed category of Roma is often referred to as Vlach Roma and consists of several groups that occupy slightly different economic niches and constitute what they themselves call *nacie* or *rasa* which in local *Čurara* dialect, is almost synonymous with ethnic group (Voiculescu, 2002). These groups refer to themselves as Roma often with a more specific name for what they see as their *nacie*. *Vlach* is a linguistic term that refers to speakers of vlach *Romanes*. *Vlach Romanes* today refers to the variant of *Romanes* that is significantly influenced by Romanian vocabulary (Matras, 2002). A common language enables Vlach Rom from all parts of the world to communicate.

*Țigani*<sup>1</sup> is the Romanian term for Gypsy, but *țigani* have had a different position and a different history in Romania than in other European countries and the term is not at all synonymous with Gypsy. In feudal times *țigan* was synonymous with craftsman or slave (Achim, 2004), whereas today the term covers a great variety of meanings in colloquial Romanian. It is a derogatory term often referring to dark-skinned people with a bad reputation in general and also to a vaguely alleged ethnic category. *Țigani* are estimated to constitute somewhere between 1.8 percent and 10 percent of the Romanian population of about twenty-three million.<sup>2</sup> As for minority populations in general, the problem of definition is at the core of these discrepancies. Nonetheless, Romania has the largest Gypsy population in Europe and the largest percentage of Gypsies who together with Hungarians (around 7 percent), constitute the two largest minorities in Romania.<sup>3</sup> *Țigani* is an ascription that covers a wide range of categories, groups and individuals with different self-ascriptions. In this book I will be mentioning some of these such as *the Čurara*, *the Kelderara* and *the Kaštale* – who at least from a Rom point of view are different ethnic groups (*nacie*/*rasa*).

Roma/*Țigani* have lived in what is today Romanian territory for about six centuries after emigrating into the area from the late fourteenth century, probably in connection with wars. Although *țigani* have not suffered genocide in the same way as Gypsies in other European countries, they suffered a harsh fate as slaves and service serfs until the abolishment of feudalism in the mid-1880s. In spite of this and because of their

incorporation in the feudal system as slaves and serfs, țigani in Romania have coexisted with other ethnic groups, such as Romanians and Slovaks, at the bottom of the rural society governed by Hungarian, German and Romanian feudal lords. Today țigani, or Roma as they prefer to be called, can be found on all economic levels of Romanian society from the overwhelmingly rich business people in the cities to the nomads who still roam the countryside in horse-drawn wagons crammed full of half-naked children and half-wild dogs. The majority, however, are to be found among the poorest segments of the rural and urban population, most often on the outskirts of villages. This book will use the term Gypsy to refer to Gypsies in general and to the Western European ethnic discourse of Gypsies. The term țigani (pl.) will be used without capital letter to denote its derogatory connotation, to refer to Gypsies from the general Romanian perspective, and the terms Roma and hamlet Roma (pl.) will be used to refer to Roma's own perspective. I am aware that this may seem somewhat confusing, but I find it necessary to highlight different perspectives and different aspects of gypsiness in this way. I apologise for any apparent inconsistencies.

### *Transylvania*

Romania has always been and still is a multi-ethnic area in the sense that people with different languages, religions and cultural practices have lived together and in the sense that ethnicity has played an important political role. Transylvania, "the land beyond the forest", or Ardeal to Romanians and Erdely to Hungarians, has played a special role in the formation of Romanian national lore and identity because it was in this area the national question was experienced as most urgent due to its history and ethnic diversity and the large percentage of Hungarians. Relations between the Hungarian minority and the Romanian state have been a continuous political struggle throughout the two last centuries. Transylvania today has the greatest percentage of minority populations such as Hungarians, Germans and Roma. The relation between Hungarians and Romanians is not the primary concern of this book, but will be discussed in the last chapter.

### *The Village*

The location for this book is a Romanian village in Transylvania. The first written account of the village is from the thirteenth century, when it was mentioned in a crown document because of its salt mines and being the crossing point of the big river.<sup>4</sup> The whole area was part of a Hungarian estate until about 1918 when Transylvania became part of the Romanian nation. Land reforms in the 1870s and 1921 ensured the Romanian population a minimum of land for subsistence, but this period was

remembered by my informants as the poorest and most critical in the history of the people of the Ardeal. A census from 1930 shows that the Romanian and Hungarian population has been remarkably stable since then, while the number of Roma has increased considerably. The Jewish population was either deported during the Second World War or they left, none returning after the war.<sup>5</sup>

The village is typically Transylvanian, consisting mainly of subsistence farmers, some shopkeepers, schoolteachers, factory and railway workers and a few administration clerks. The population in 1996 consisted of about 2,500 inhabitants: about 750 Hungarian and 1,550 Romanian in the main village, and about 250 Roma on the hilltop in a settlement of their own but still considered part of the village. It is a beautiful village, with its gardens and orchards blooming in springtime and full of fruit in the autumn. The villagers say that the air is particularly clean and invigorating here and that it is the prettiest village in Romania. A vital river runs through the village with Romanians and Hungarians settled on either side, connected by a bridge. The village is surrounded by hillsides covered with huge, old beech woods and pastures with grazing cows, horses, sheep and goats. The area is densely populated, and the next village starts about 500 feet from where the first ends. Every house has its courtyard facing onto the street but locked behind tall, iron gates. For the visitor, the village seems at the same time both inviting and beautiful and somewhat barren and forbidding.

On top of the hill live the Roma in their more-or-less shanty town houses. The Roma are relative newcomers to this village, as are most sedentary Rom populations in Transylvanian villages. Before the Second World War, the Roma of this area were mainly nomadic. They travelled through the villages in spring, summer and autumn and used to spend the winter on the outskirts of villages in earth huts dug out of the ground. The ancestors of hamlet Roma thus used the village as their winter quarters. The hamlet Roma call themselves *Čurara* and *Vurdonara* (lit. of wagons). In the 1950s the Communist regime banned nomadism so all travellers were forced to sell their wagons, set up permanent houses and send their children to school, and all men were forced to work as state employees. Although the hamlet is seen as separate from the village, the last house in the Romanian village is only about 100 feet from the first house in the Rom hamlet and the most peripheral house in the hamlet is only about 20 feet from the first house in the next Romanian village.

All ethnic groups are Romanian citizens, but they present themselves as Roma, Hungarians and Romanians. Relations between Romanians and Hungarians are ambiguous, peaceful and friendly in everyday interaction when political matters are avoided as they generally are. In ethnically segregated settings both groups tend to talk of each other in slightly derogatory terms and when the conversation turns towards politics,

controversy and aggression surfaces. It is the political position of the Hungarian minority that is the problematic issue, but many villagers also have bad memories from the Hungarian occupation of Transylvania in the last years of the Second World War. The stories of deportations, imprisonment and violence from the Hungarian soldiers were often told and lamented. Like most Romanian villagers the hamlet Roma are Romanian Orthodox, while Hungarian villagers are Protestants, but several other churches are also present in the village. During the Ceaușescu era most villagers worked on the co-operative farms and in state-owned enterprises, but today most families have land and are dependent on it for their living in addition to other kinds of income.

To make it easier for the reader to distinguish between the Hungarian and Romanian villagers on the one hand and the hamlet Roma on the other, the terms *villagers* and *peasants* will be used to refer to both Hungarians and Romanians in the village and area, if nothing more precise is necessary for the context.

## Fieldwork

My first visit to the village was in 1993 when my husband, Lars Gjerde, was assigned as a Romanes interpreter by a NGO that was involved there. Because of his work we already had contacts among villagers and hamlet Roma, when we came to do fieldwork in August 1996. Lars Gjerde worked with a linguistic project, I on my Ph.D. in anthropology. My husband spoke the Čurara dialect of Vlach Romanes and we had both worked for several years with Rom in Norway before going to Romania. As I was not fluent in the language, I was dependent on my husband as an interpreter, especially in the first months. Our discussions about the interpretations of different events and pieces of information were thus extremely fruitful. The interviews he recorded and transcribed for his own research are part of my material and some are directly referred to in this book. We brought a video camera in order to use video recording as a method for the production of data. It turned out to be successful as all families wanted their pictures taken individually and in groups, thus making it easier to classify the relationships between individuals.

### *Fieldwork as Intervention*

Most traditional monographs open by presenting a landscape where the social life of 'the people' unfolds. The biogeographical landscape is often seen as a natural constant in a shifting social landscape (Hirsh and O'Hanlon, 1995: 2). But field sites are not what they used to be. Most processes that anthropologists study cover several 'places' and the

meaning of place has changed and widened, and has perhaps become more flexible and even more vague than it once was (Appadurai, 1996; Fardon, 1990; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Hann, 1996; Fog Olwig and Hastrup, 1997; Godelier, 1999,) The concept of multisited ethnography (Marcus, 1995) is based on the idea that the world is changing and that global processes have local implications. In this open terrain, multisited fieldwork implies that the researcher moves according to the movements of her subject and objects of study. Multisitedness may, however, imply many forms of movement. Marcus points out that every field covers many sites and that any fieldwork in principle may be multisited. The conventional understanding of the field none the less tends to be guided by theoretical limitations that have reduced it to a more or less one-dimensional 'place' (Marcus, 1995: 100).

### *The Geographical Terrain*

This more or less one-dimensional, innocent understanding of places as naturally bounded guided my first encounter with the village. I caught the first glimpse and then overview of the village from my seat by the train window on my first visit in 1993. When I tried to describe the village later, I discovered that the description was from some imaginary spot about 16 feet above the train window. I had created an imaginary and very clear overview of what appeared to be the natural landscape with its obviously natural boundaries, shaped by rivers, bridges, heights and space between groups of houses. From here the village appeared as a separate, central entity with the Rom hamlet as a natural expansion, while the neighbouring villages came out as 'secondary' compared to the 'primary' village. This first external geographical perspective was, however, later supplemented by the internal perspective of our Romanian host family. When we settled down in the village in 1996 we stayed for the first months in a cramped room inside the family bedroom, inside the closed courtyard, behind the tall gates that protected the houses in the village. Inside these gates the daily life was centred on the kitchen and courtyard – the area of women and children – while the men were in the more dirty back areas, where the animals and the workshop were situated, or out at work. Most conversation in the kitchen and courtyard concerned events and people outside the gates, such as neighbours, Hungarians and țigani at the margins of the Romanian village community. This perspective, that I think of as from the inside and from below, was the Romanian peasant perspective. This perspective covered a geographical area from the outskirts of the village to the Orthodox church and the market and to the administrative centre on the other side of the river. That was the Hungarian part, there was nothing wrong with it from our hostess Florica's perspective; it was just not an area she usually frequented. The

fields outside the village, where the peasants grew their crops, represented, however, the most significant terrain from the peasant's point of view. The open, spacious fields, that Florica loved, represented a contrast to the closed and dense atmosphere in the village. These two terrains, the domestic and closed courtyard and house, and the open, but private fields were the only good places from a Romanian peasant perspective. Outside these terrains was the uncontrollable and natural landscape of the strangers, the țigani and the woods. Whenever we left the house to visit the Roma, our hosts shook their heads and told us to look out and always be back before dark. The Romanian peasant perspective was closed around the family and the farm, from this perspective the rest of the village was dangerous and some parts even inaccessible.

After living for some months with the family, we moved to a rented peasant house situated at the outskirts of the village towards the Rom hamlet. The house was on 'țigani street', the street where the Roma walked every day on their daily business. Now the village changed in several ways: geographically, because the Roma came closer as they now could visit us at home, but also because other parts of the village became accessible to us in new ways. We discovered new paths and roads, and people that we had been cautioned about by Florica revealed new perspectives of the village. The Hungarian families we came to know had other perspectives of the village and of villagers than the Romanians we knew. Our own perspective as foreigners living in our new house may be comparable to the Hungarian view as minority and may be called a view from below and outside. From this perspective the village also expanded socially and mentally and became more open and less threatening than from the Romanian peasant perspective. The Hungarian perspective was however never really accessible to us as we did not speak Hungarian and knew only a few Hungarian families.

The third geographical perspective can be characterised as a view of the village from above and the outside. This was the Rom perspective and was quite different from those of the peasants and the Hungarians. The Rom terrain was unordered compared to the peasant terrain. People, pigs and horses, men, women and children, neighbours and kin all mixed in the space between the houses and in the surrounding pastures. No gates or fences created boundaries between house, people or animals. This apparent disorder made the hamlet seem more open and less threatening than the village and in turn made the village appear even more closed and dense. The Rom hamlet is placed on a hilltop overlooking the village and surrounded by the village communal pastures, a site that made village life look distant and a bit unreal. From the hilltop and from this unbounded perspective the village boundaries came out as social boundaries and not natural ones. In the same way, the physical openness of the Rom hamlet made visible the symbolic boundaries between individuals and families there.

Because the Roma, especially the women, are mobile and spend most of their time outside the hamlet and village and have kin in villages all over the area, this perspective changed the village from a naturally bounded entity to a more heterogeneous place with connections to other villages by mud tracks and paths. From here we also discovered that what we from the train and village perspective had seen as the neighbouring village of B, could just as well be seen as the main village, with 'our' village as the neighbour. I discovered that the Roma used the village B in a different way than they used our village and had other relations to people there. If I had been situated physically in B instead of in our village, my data on gypsiness would probably have been different. So by being situated in different geographical places I had access to different productions of locality in the sense of aspects of social life (Appadurai, 1996). The different life worlds, practices and social positions of Romanian peasants, Hungarian villagers and Roma in the village community represent different types of sociability, use of the physical environment and belonging to the same terrain that I had mistaken for one place: our village.

### *The Moral Terrain*

Our life and movement in the village did, however, not only change our own perspective; to some extent it also changed the perspective of Romanians, Hungarians and Roma. When we crossed boundaries drawn by peasants, their perspective on what was morally and socially possible also changed. When we visited Rom houses in broad daylight and opened our house to Roma, we crossed some tacit boundaries and created confusion by questioning what had not previously been questioned. If educated, well off Europeans such as ourselves could mix with țigani, why not Romanian peasants? Of course most boundaries were crossed also by villagers, but in secrecy or for 'good' reasons. Our explicit border crossings questioned the validity of the boundaries. The Rom hamlet was in these contexts cut loose from the wild forest and approached the civilized village. And every geographical site implied an ethnic and moral position. In village discourse there were no middle positions in this terrain, but the change of focus revealed that crossing boundaries was vital for the village to present itself as one village. By crossing boundaries openly and challenging the social terrain of the village, I also challenged the ideal of the discrete and considerate anthropologist. This was a deliberate choice and a painful experience for us and for villagers and sometimes for Roma. I will characterise this breach as an intervention in the field that turned us into anomalies and put our social position under constant scrutiny. Of course all fieldwork is intervention, but I consciously exploited my position in the field to gain new insight into

hidden domains. By moving between different ethnic groups and by not presenting myself as aligned to any of them, I raised suspicion, but I also opened up opportunities for intimate confidence and for exploitation. The uncertainty that followed from my ambiguous position allowed for different interpretations of my experiences, than if I had identified closely with one group.

Our border crossings also caused pain for villagers and Roma. When we walked through the village with our Rom friends, our Romanian friends were caught in ambivalence; should they greet us and stop for a chat like they usually did or should they walk passed us? The power of language added to the frustration. When we were with Roma we talked Romanes, signalling our belonging to them; but when we were with Romanians we talked Romanian, which they took as a sign that we were 'on their side'. By meeting Romanians in the village when we were with a group of Roma talking Romanes together, we signalled that we were Roma and distanced ourselves from Romanians. In such a situation we all felt ashamed, not knowing how to handle it. Our Romanian friends felt caught between their desire to show us, their friends, politeness and thus to accept our friends, or to follow the village norm and reject the țigani and us altogether. We were torn between the urge to respect our Romanian friends, which would mean rejecting our Roma friends, and the other way around. The Roma felt uncomfortable by seeing the bewilderment of the Romanians. Something similar happened when I was out walking with Rom children and met Romanian friends. Rom children walking alone in the village are used to abuse from villagers and they answer with cursing and dirty language. Thus they appear to be relatively protected from internalising village contempt. When they were with me they presented themselves very differently: they were friendly, open and affective; sweet children. One day I brought a girl of about eleven years down to our car in the village to give her a pair of shoes that she had asked for. As we approached the car we saw five or six village women, whom I knew well, seated on a bench near by. It was too late to turn around. When they saw the girl and understood that I wanted to give her a pair of shoes, they started scolding her and calling her a lousy beggar and a good for nothing, etc. She instantly turned purple and lost her voice. Caught between the wish to defend herself in the Rom manner and present herself as a 'bad' girl in the eyes of non-Roma, and the wish to present her friendly, polite self as a 'nice' girl towards me, her defences were down and she felt shamed. Thus we brought Roma and villagers together in new and unknown ways that were disagreeable to all parties and that highlighted the social and moral boundaries that were challenged.

Our position as an anomaly also opened up a rich source of gossip and confidences, but was also a source of exploitation for Roma and villagers. We had access to scandalous family stories, secret crimes and slander, even about those whom we regarded our close friends. But this position

also rendered us much more vulnerable to people asking for loans, financial support and other services. Our position betwixt and between opened up social fields that would have been difficult to access, had we been tied more closely to one family or one group. We were present in Florica's courtyard when *Romnja* came in to beg or exchange. Because most Romnja knew us they sometimes ran two parallel conversations, one a polite discussion in Romanian with Florica about the transaction they were about to make, and the other a contemptuous conversation with us about Florica and how bad and stingy she was: 'How can you stand living with this hag, come and live with me instead, we cook much better than these stingy Romanians'.

Situations like this one also revealed to us that the village was permeated by a perpetual flow of exchange that engaged all villagers to different degrees. The discrepancy between the village discourse about the bad and uncivilised țigani and the exchange practices helped us understand that the village discourse was primarily about the villagers' moral habitus. Our presence made it necessary to legitimise the exchange by an explicit condemnation of țigani and in that way persuade us, the foreigners, that villagers are different and morally superior to țigani.

This hostile discourse did, however, influence our life and whereabouts, because we only understood the legitimizing aspect towards the end of our stay. Thus even though we challenged village boundaries, we also developed all kinds of discrete ways of handling them. Whenever villagers meet they ask each other series of questions that act as polite interest: 'Where are you going? What are you doing there?' etc. When we walked up the streets towards the Rom hamlet, villagers sitting outside their houses always asked us where we were going, and knowing we were crossing boundaries we answered rather vaguely. They immediately helped us out of our embarrassment by stating: 'Oh yes, you are going up to get some fresh air'. We consented thankfully to this euphemism and this became the way we talked about visiting the hamlet. When we later decided to move up and live in the hamlet, we were nervous and postponed it several times partly because we anticipated that it would mean total rejection from the villagers. When we eventually did move in and lived in our van, the reaction proved to be a surprise like everything else. The first morning we walked down to the village after our first night in the hamlet and met some villagers, we answered a bit stupidly that we had taken fresh air. As it was seven o'clock in the morning, we realised we had to put an end to this nonsense. Going back to the hamlet that day we stopped and chatted with some villagers and told them that we had moved in with the țigani. They all laughed with gusto, clasped their hands and said: that was really amusing and how did we like it? After this confrontation encounters were easier for us and for them, as all parties let go of our masks and the

pantomime we had been performing to each other for months. I suggest that the fact that we actually lived with the *çigani* showed the villagers that we accepted what they regarded as the most shameful aspect of the village as a social place. By accepting and even liking *çigani*, we demonstrated that we accepted and even liked the village as it is, with its shameful aspects. After that we could all let our hair down and call a spade a spade without being ashamed.

### *The Anthropological Terrain*

My theoretical interest and understanding also changed by changing sites. I became more interested in the relations between groups and entities and the transgression of boundaries, than in the substance of the boundaries and categories themselves. I became more and more aware of how individuals and groups create each other by mirroring each other. But this pushed other perspectives in the background. As long as I saw everything as exchange, power structures tended to vanish while complementarity in all relations became very significant. All that did not circulate and that was not complementary became my blind spot during parts of my fieldwork, for good and for worse. This changed the political perspective of rather rigid minority/majority relations and structures of domination that I had had on the outset. Instead I discovered patterns and interpreted relations that were much less absolute and one-dimensional than anticipated. Thus my oscillation between sites and minority and majority positions hindered any uncritical identification with the 'subaltern' (Marcus, 1995: 101) and allowed for a much more dynamic interpretation of relations of domination.

## **Theoretical Considerations**

### *Marginality and Modernity*

Much literature on Gypsies takes for granted their marginal position in society both politically, economically and socially (Lucassen, Willems and Cottaar, 1998; Okely, 1994; Willems, 1995). The idea that one may identify one 'centre' – be it political, economical or social – of a society contains the idea of a 'periphery', and almost naturally implies that the powerful are in the centre and the powerless at the margins. Of course, it is possible to analyse categories of people and even groups that are the most active decision-makers concerning economic or political issues with relevance far outside their own 'group' at a given time in a given society. Of course, one can identify institutions that control vital resources (material and/or symbolic) for all citizens, for instance in a state, but does the analysis of 'economic/political centres' necessarily imply margins, and marginality

and powerlessness in face-to-face relations? One might ask how to identify margins in an economic and political landscape that is only to a certain degree national and bounded, where there are several centres with overlapping interests.

Gypsies are often described as marginal because they are generally poor and illiterate, often nomadic and perceived as traditional and 'uncivilized'. The semi-nomadic Norwegian Roma are portrayed that way in official accounts, as are Gypsies in most European countries. In spite of being illiterate, Roma in Norway have economic and social connections all over Europe and religious co-operation with Roma on other continents.<sup>6</sup> They do not participate in competition for political positions in Norwegian society, but they do compete for economic resources and this competition is based on and creates networks of alliances both in Norwegian society, abroad and in the diverse European Rom societies. In Romania, rural Roma obtain their living in close relations with villagers and are dependent on this exchange. Many participate in the general competition for resources in rural Romania, but in addition their lack of land makes them able to exploit more distant and changing resources not available to land-bound peasants. The social structure of the Roma ensures that most individuals and communities have networks of connections outside their own area. In addition, as many Roma are migratory, these connections expand even to the rest of Europe and America. The Romanians complain that the only people who migrate from Romania to Western Europe are țigani, thus ruining the reputation of decent Romanians. The 'poor beggars' in my study have, precisely because they are Roma, access to international relief organisations that supply them with goods that are exchanged in wide circles in their own society.

In this book I argue that țigani in Romania play an integral part in the economy, politics and consciousness of ordinary Romanians, and that the discourse on marginality should be discussed as an ongoing process of differentiation and of 'otherness' that creates the national and cosmological order (Tsing, 1993: 26). In the political discourse about țigani as marginal, we find implied series of dichotomies about marginality, illiteracy, tradition and powerlessness versus centrality, literacy, modernity and power (Achim, 2004; Chelcea, 1944; Crowe and Kolsti, 1991). Illiteracy among many Gypsy populations is seen as an example of the 'lack' of modernity resulting from marginality and causing that marginality. I argue that illiteracy also is a conscious strategy that Roma use in their struggle for cultural and political autonomy. The idea that the țigani as a social category will soon disappear, together with all other reminiscences of the premodern era, is thus misconceived. Modernity may be seen to contain several partial, overlapping and interconnected discourses that are enacted differently in different contexts (Ewing, 1997:4). Discourses of modernity as well as modern technologies are incorporated into Gypsy

modes of existence without rendering them less 'different' than before and thus less marginal in the eyes of many Western analysts.

### *Authenticity and Figurations*

Marginality is related to ideas of isolation but also of 'otherness'. This inherent otherness of Gypsies is linked to the idea of the Roma as a 'foreign people' who emigrated from India and who never quite integrated into majority society. The idea is often paired with one of an 'original Indian culture' that is more or less 'lost' in contact with host societies in Europe and elsewhere (Hübschmannová, 1998). This idea also often expresses a view of continuing degradation, something like: *the Gypsies, although stigmatised, were once proud and valuable contributors to their host societies economically and culturally, but industrialisation has pressed them to the margins of modern society where their culture is slowly degrading* (see Williams, 1983). The idea of original, authentic societies is no longer an issue in anthropology, but it is to political activists and intellectuals who try to restore 'Gypsy identity and culture' for political purposes. These processes are important and necessary, but such interpretation of Gypsy culture should be understood as an expression of contemporary relations and not as historical 'truth'. I see the Roma as a fundamentally European people (Okely, 1994). Without questioning their Indian origin,<sup>7</sup> it is in Europe they are constituted as *Gypsies, țigani, Sigøynere, Gitanos, Zigeuner, Tsiganes etc.* (Lucassen, Willems and Cottaar, 1998; Okely, 1983; Willems, 1995; Williams, 1993). As the past is not made socially relevant for identity formation among the Roma I have studied, there is no collective memory of any Indian origin (Stewart, 1997). I suggest it to be essential to see both aspects: the Roma as an integral part of European societies and as exotic strangers (Williams, 1993: 52). It is this double position that constitutes their identity and culture in the Romanian figuration.

### *De-centred Society – De-centred Subjects*

By seeing social practices and discourses from different points of view: that of Roma, those of villagers, and my own interpretations, I wish to convey a notion of society as plural, multicentred and if not unbounded, then contextually bounded. This does not imply an idea of free-floating relations that are not structured in any particular way, but a notion of society that is multicentred and where boundaries overlap. I suggest that everyone experiences their own network of relations as somehow circling around themselves as centres, and their community as central in their own practices. The notion of society, community and culture as bounded, whole entities is not only an academic illusion; it is an integral part of people's conceptualisation of wholeness and completeness. The

experience of wholeness, says Katherine Ewing, should be understood as a necessary reification of the flux of experience that people imagine in order to make them objects of reflection (Ewing, 1990: 263).

Studying Rom communities has very forcefully challenged my somewhat unconscious expectation that the classification people apply to their social world is directly reflected in their actions. I was constantly looking for a consistency between what I experienced as people saying something in one context and the opposite in another. I was constantly frustrated by trying to make sense of the discrepancies between people's discourse and their actions. What confused me was not only the seeming contradictions, but the apparent lack of preoccupation with them. It did not seem that people were bothered by what I experienced as lack of consistency. For instance, when the conversation touched upon the Jews who used to live in the village, our Romanian host would always claim that they were nasty people who never worked. In another context he would tell a nice story about one of them who had been a colleague of his at work. The villagers always said that they never had anything to do with the țigani and at the same time we could observe a țigan family working on their fields. When I confronted people I knew well with my observations they looked surprised and did not see the problem. The point here is not that this incongruity existed, but that it was not perceived as such by people themselves. What I interpreted as inconsistency between action and discourse and in discourse itself, led me to see ambivalence and uncertainty at the base of people's interaction. However, ambivalence does not seem to be the right term as I seemed to be the only one to be confused. The notion of ambivalence then has as its precondition that people expect 'to agree with themselves', and that internal disagreement is seen as dysfunctional. The idea of the integrated self is one of the founding ideas for self-consciousness among modern, urban academics like myself. A modern self is balanced, so that one's ideas, values and feelings are consistent with the way one acts and speaks. In line with this assumption, different and opposing feelings lead to a conflict that may block action (Giddens, 1991: 75). Of course, most people know that handling practical reality implies choices that do not always harmonise with one's feelings or moral values; the point is that such harmony is an ideal. Katherine Ewing (1990) and Henrietta Moore (1994) have, among others, challenged this Western concept of self as an analytical tool in anthropology. Based on ideas of 'the heterogeneous selves' (Kristeva, 1982; Lacan, 1977), they developed notions of a self that is '*experienced contextually and relationally*' (Ewing, 1990: 253). Moore argues for the notion of embodied, multiple and competing subjectivity:

Thus, gendered subjectivity does not have to be conceived of as a fixed and singular identity, but can be seen instead as one based on a series of subject positions, some conflicting or mutually contradictory, that are offered by various discourses (Moore, 1994: 4).

She further argues that this view of identity, as expressed by subject positions, presupposes some degree of strategic, conscious and self-reflexive agents that are able to identify positions available to them, reject some and chooses others dependent on context and interest. It also implies the existence of multiple competing discourses, and the role of desire and fantasy, for the formation of a sense of self that makes agents comply or resist different discourses. Ewing presents much the same argument about people's multiple, inconsistent and context-bound self-representations, which she refers to as shifting selves (Ewing, 1990), but stresses that people everywhere none the less strive to experience themselves as whole and consistent. She maintains that even if the experience of wholeness is illusionary it is not to be dismissed, but should be understood as an important trait of selfhood:

An experience of wholeness and coherence is encapsulated in a self-representation, in a semiotic process that highlights and organizes certain fragments of experience. I argue that, although such wholes are actually fleeting, they are experienced as timeless (Ewing, 1990: 263).

Ewing further argues that processes whereby people experience whole cohesive selves derive from a symbolic constitution of the self and 'may be' universal (Ewing, 1990).

### *Unpredictability and the Experience of Wholeness*

A theory of self that implies multiplicity, partiality and contradictions is suited to analysing agents coping with the multi-ethnic, unpredictable and constantly changing social world of rural Romania. Multi-ethnicity means that every individual is involved in relationships of some sort with people of another religion, with another language and with other moral values. One even has to relate closely to people one despises and fears in order to survive. Unpredictability means that one's livelihood is dependent on a variety of people and factors that one cannot trust. Due to political and economic chaos, Romanian factory workers may not know when they will receive their next wage and what regulations will be decided upon. Peasants received private land in the 1930s, lost it to collectivisation in the 1950s and got some of it back again in the 1990s. Although they own their land now, for how long will that last? And most of the other things they rely on for their material and social life are provided by very fragile exchange systems. The constantly changing social world does not mean that people move but that their opinions do. Changing political leadership requires the peasants to change their (public) viewpoints and statements to accord with the ever-changing political rhetoric. This is a situation of multiple, contrasting and

competing discourses, hegemonies, languages and sign systems which demands shifting self-representations that would be very difficult to handle with the idea of a consistent, whole self that is the same in all contexts. Villagers and Roma also see 'self' as an entity one can consciously work on to develop; but they none the less handle life's challenges as best they can and by different representations of self in different contexts in accordance with their interests, their desires and the expectations of others. In such a cultural environment, being "the same", in the sense of saying and acting according to some well defined principles, does not create continuity and wholeness. On the contrary it may create conflict, anxiety and feelings of inadequacy.

This does not mean that people do not experience themselves as whole and coherent, but that religion, among other symbolic systems, plays an important role in constituting this wholeness that contribute to consistency. In Orthodox Christianity man is an image of God, and although 'the gift of rationality' is an aspect of human existence, the self and soul are elements of the struggle between God and the devil (Yannaras, 1991, 57, 58). It is in prayer, by fasting and by attending religious rituals that these themes are reflected upon, not about how to act in concordance with oneself, but with the wish of God. The different ethnic cosmologies, with their different power structures, ethnic hierarchies and sign systems, are other examples of the struggle to form coherent wholes, and the discourse of modernity is yet another. These and many more symbolic orders are domains in relation to which people position themselves, and by shifting allegiance with shifting contexts (or rather by positioning themselves in accordance with their interests, desires and the requirements of others), there are many possibilities for shifting selves.

What I perceived as ambivalence was probably not experienced by my informants as a dysfunction of an integrated whole self, nor as a categorical indeterminacy, but as the ability to act in the world in situations where two contradictory options are perceived as equally important and necessary. Such contradictory situations may or may not be experienced as ambivalent. When Joska's (the headman's) eldest son is supposed to obey his father according to the norms of kinship and seniority and to oppose him according to the norms of manhood and equality, this is handled very well when in contexts where only his father, mother and sisters are present. But sometimes the values are mutually exclusive; in the presence of his wife the two demands become ambivalent, and he may have to choose to be a man in eyes of his wife or a son in the eyes of his parents. One solution is to avoid the presence of both together, and that is what young couples generally do. Little by little I came to see ambiguity combined with uncertainty and certainty simultaneously structuring social life and cultural conceptions, and how people coped with this through shifting self-presentations.

My own idea of identity and selfhood did not cope very well with the social diversity and antagonism of the village, partly because I expected my solutions to moral dilemmas to be congruent and to overcome ambivalence in that way. I always opted for 'either/or' solutions where most people opted for 'both/and' solutions. An example was the social use of our car. People always asked us to drive all over the region for minor and major tasks. We often agreed and saw it as a way of paying back people's hospitality. Refusing to go was, however, always a problem because we never really thought we had a good reason. The only way of coping with this dilemma and keeping our self-respect was to tell people the truth: we did not want to go. This was, however, a direct rejection that we feared would be interpreted as very rude by villagers. So very often we just tried to avoid giving an answer at all, which was a bad solution as some people never gave in. The Roma did not understand our problem. 'Just say that your car has broken down, say you have no petrol, just lie' was their advice. When we answered that everybody knew we always had money for petrol and that people saw we were using the car and would know we were lying, the Roma laughed and said that of course everybody knew it was a lie, but then they would know that we did not want to go. This made us reflect upon how impossible it was for us to tell a lie that everybody knew was a lie; it was contradictory to our self-perception as honest and integrated persons. When we told the Roma that we could not lie in that way, they laughed their heads off and wondered how one could get on in this world by sticking to the truth. The point here is again not that Romanians tell more lies than Norwegians, but the way our culturally defined self-perception is suited to cope differently with different social environments.

### *The Concept of Figuration and Civilization*

Norbert Elias's ideas of the social human, and of social formations and the process of civilization have been important for my understanding of the relations I studied in Romania (Elias, 2000; Elias, 2001). Elias uses the concept of figuration to denote certain social, political and psychological formations of interdependent individuals and groups. Inspired by these ideas, I see the Romanian figuration as multilevelled, one level being the specific village figuration, another, what we could call the Transylvanian figuration and yet another, the national figuration in a specific time; all interdependent. The strength of these ideas for my material is that they enable me to discuss the present structural relationship between social classes as an instant in a dynamic pattern of relationships that have evolved for centuries. Thus it may shed light over the relationship between individual motivations and behaviour at the village level and the structural relations on a national level. I will discuss the interdependence

of ethnic categories in the Romanian society in terms of a social figuration resulting from a specific civilizing process whereby different social groups defined by ethnic, economic and political criteria have been involved in constant power struggles. The Romanian discourse of civilization, *civilizație*, is meaningful to all classes when referring to the relationship between groups in the Romanian ethnic hierarchy and about the ratio of power between them. This locally constituted discourse on civilization is thus to be understood as an expression of the civilizing process that constitutes both the village and the national figuration. These concepts will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter and later in this book.

### *The Nomadic Metaphor – Transition and Duality*

This leads to the last theoretical point of this introduction: relations of power between the Rom hamlet and the peasant village as interdependent communities modelled by different but interdependent ideologies. I will argue for the metaphor of ‘nomadism’ to understand the relations between Roma and the state, represented by villagers and local power holders. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have developed what they call a ‘nomadology’ to understand the relations between ‘stasis’, represented by state formation, and ‘movement’, represented by a ‘nomadic mode of existence’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1985). These ideas are based on relations between what are seen as the difference and interdependence of systems of power – the centralised, normative and standardised system of state power and modes of existence on the one hand and the ‘un-rooted’, flexible and decentralised power they see as inherent in what they term ‘nomadism’ on the other. They discuss the relation between these systems or principles, and claim that nomadism challenges the power of the state by its mere existence as it is not controlled or incorporated by state power and resists such incorporation. First, they claim nomadism to be based on a very different relation to space from sedentarism and state power. Nomads relate to places in terms of points or resting places on their paths; their mode is mobility. While the State territorialises space by dividing it into portions, distributes it and sets up lines of communication between territories thereby creating ‘striated space’, nomadic modes use the land as open, unstriated and infinite space. This represents the spatial uncontrollability of nomads. Second, in contrast to state power, the power structure of nomadism is not centralised or fixed but flexible, contested every time it tries to establish itself, always only a potential. The French sociologist Pierre Clastres’s ideas about ‘society against the state’ (Clastres, 1977) are central to this argument. Third, they claim nomadism to be organised in a numerical way. This I take to denote an organisation that is based on solidarity groups that are linked together by kinship or other kin-like relations, that have no centre and no periphery, but that may be fused

when necessary. In short, the argument is that nomadism as a mode of existence resists and even negates, ideologically and in practice, the standardisation, fixation and control of state power as a system while coexisting with it. The nomadic mode is exterior to the state mode and is not appropriated by it. It is in the exteriority to state power, say Deleuze and Guattari, that the nomadic mode is termed 'a war machine against the state'. Not by waging war, but because it is not appropriated and because it is in itself the opposition and thus inherent destruction of the state mode. Nomadic existence is thus a metaphor for different modes of social life 'outside' the state:

The outside appears simultaneously in two directions: huge world wide machines branched out over the entire ecumenon at any given moment, which enjoy a large measure of autonomy in relation to the state (for example commercial organisations of the 'multinational' type, or industrial complexes, or even religious formations like Christianity, Islam, certain prophetic or messianic movements, etc.) but also the local mechanisms of bands, margins, minorities, that continue to affirm the rights of segmentary societies in opposition to the organs of State power (Deleuze and Guattari, 1985: 16).

Still they see 'nomadism' and 'state' as systems of power that are interdependent and coexisting and that transform into each other. The nomadic is transformed into state and vice versa, thus forming a continuous field of interaction and interdependence.

Deleuze and Guattari's perspective is highly suggestive, but also slippery and may be misinterpreted in terms of nomadism as representing ideologies of freedom, resistance and revolution, as a 'liberating' and thus good power. The state may thus be equated with repression, domination and enslavement, with 'law and order' in a bad sense only (Jameson, 2000). I do not wish to convey this rather normative stand, but emphasise what I see as the core of this philosophy: different systems of power as the condition for creative and dynamic interdependence, represented by the dualism of nomadism and the state (Østerberg, 2000).

### *Agency, Duality and Figuration*

The notions of shifting selves and subject positions are basic to the understanding of agency in this book. I see agency as the outcome of people that self-reflexively and consciously strive to follow their interests and desires in compliance with and/or opposition to their social environment by taking up different subject positions offered them by different social practices and discourses (Ewing, 1997; Moore, 1994). I thus imply a strategic view of people, but this should not be misinterpreted as seeing humans as rational beings calculating risk and opportunity in an

economic manner. Self-reflexivity and consciousness imply interest and desire, desire implying both the conscious and the subconscious, and 'shifting selves' implies the social as an inherent trait of self. Interest and desires are often contradictory, and even if I insist that people are reflexive and conscious and make choices, they cannot always foresee the outcome of their actions. Agency, strategy and consciousness are also structured by the inherent interdependence of social actors – what Elias calls social figurations (Elias, 2000). Forming societies together implies negotiating values, norms, rules and ideas to guide and evaluate social practice, which is 'part of the game'. Thus experiences of ambiguity, uncertainty and ambivalence are all aspects of agency, self-reflexivity and strategy that influence it and contribute to make the outcome of actions different from that anticipated. This perspective of agency implies what I have termed duality as the mutuality of seemingly opposed values. The theory of subject positioning and multiple selves supports, in my understanding, the idea of people relating to values and value systems that may appear contradictory in one context, but that in other contexts may be experienced and expressed as axes of a continuum. The idea expressed in Elias's term '*homines aperti*', is of the person as 'open' in the sense that self and other are not clearly bounded and that the interdependence between social actors is a precondition for individuality and personhood (Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998b: 33; Elias 2001). The figurational approach to society thus denies in my view the construction of absolute boundaries and dichotomies between individuals and groups as between systems of knowledge, and opts for a view of persons as relations in process. The perspective of figuration based on ideas of interdependence and of the unbounded traits of social persons that stress process and flexibility as central to the formation of society is also, in my view, consistent with my basic idea of duality as the interdependence of bipolar, but not contradictory values, emotions and ideas. Duality in this sense is parallel to my understanding of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of difference, co-existence and interdependence as metaphorically represented by 'the nomad' and 'the state'.

## Notes

1. See Romanes vocabulary.
2. More precisely 22,455,500 in 1999.
3. The lowest figures are from the official census in 1992 and rely on self-ascription as țigani, while the highest are estimates made by the Gypsy Research Centre at the René Descartes University in Paris in 1994.
4. This information is from a historical overview made for me by a Romanian high school teacher and neighbour with knowledge of and interest in local history.

5. There were 3,017 people living in the village, about 2,200 being of Romanian nationality (this is the term used for the different categories), 730 Hungarian, 4 German, 20 Slovak, 55 Hebrew and no țigani. The language census shows, however, 5 țigani speaking villagers at that time (Recensământul din 1930).

6 Several men are priests: *pasteuri* in the Rom Pentecostal church and travel abroad for religious meetings.

7 I see no scientific reason to contest the theory of the Gypsies' Indian origin. Romanes itself strongly supports this theory. The Indian origin is, however, socially relevant primarily to Gypsy scholars and ethnopoliticians. The emigration from India probably took place from the ninth century and onwards and any Indian cultural roots have undergone such transformations as to be quite uninteresting as such. The Roma I know see the alleged Indian origin as something quite exotic, amusing and/or disgusting. It is their actual social relations and their economic involvement in different nations in the world that constitute Gypsy identity and culture.

8. The book referred to is a discussion of Orthodoxy by Christos Yannaras, a Greek professor of Theology and Philosophy at la Faculté des Lettres de Paris (Sorbonne) and the Faculty of Théology de Thessalonique. Personal communication with the village Orthodox priest, and villagers' own theological interpretations revealed that the devil plays a more important role for development of the soul and the idea of personal choice than is discussed by Yannaras.