



THE ETHNICAL OTHERNESS AND THE INTERETHNIC IMAGINARY AMONG THE CONTACT AREAS BETWEEN THE ROMA AND ROMANIANS¹

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Abstract: *The social dialogue between the majority and an ethnical minority depends on how a thinking pattern or a map of collective representations crystallized in the „we and the others” relationship. The personality of an ethnic group isn’t as simple as thought. Pride, fear of being labeled, uncertainty, depression, fear of the other, self-esteem, self-image, sense of justice, of belonging and other individual manifestations are reproducing on a group level through the up taking of mutual perceptions. In this article I noticed that the individual tendency is adhering to beliefs and experiences which do not belong to them, quietly inheriting a group doctrine without filtering the area of specific values. The research of group thinking from the cultural contact zone compelled me to shed light upon an imaginary theory as a both knowledge and interpretation instrument for interethnic psyche. The methodological contribution belongs to several disciplines: psycho-sociology, social anthropology, social care and cultural anthropology, followed by the uses of specific terms from image science with specific methods: symbolic interaction, analogy and the convergence method applied on the obtained answers from an interview guide. The deepening of collective imaginary can substantially improve the knowledge and objectifying of a real civic and political culture.*

Keywords: *Interethnic imaginary; collective imaginary; otherness/ alterity; political culture.*

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A short introduction

In some of the sociological studies on Roma, from the late 20 years, several aspects have been revealed, regarding the case of an inter-ethnic collective imaginary. (Zamfir, C.&Preda, M., 2002: 13) Other specialists also recorded these aspects, which would require a specific research on problems regarding alterity and the political universe.

For example, a less known fact is that from a perspective of civic culture, Roma show in their way, a strong attraction and interest in politics. These lead to an increased proportion of concerns, attitudes and orientations, these being part of the political representations. Interestingly, in these representations, as we observed in this research, Roma from Bucharest are increasingly more drawn to politics, than Romanians. Analyzing the world of ethnic and interethnic imaginary through the method of interview identified by the given answers, opinions, attitudes and orientations we get to the anthropological question of the political dimension. I can state that the imaginary of a minority is the common floor of group beliefs by which we can decipher the world of perceptions formed at the confluence of the normative dimension, the evaluative and also affective. The regulatory and affective dimension form in the opinion of Crothers (2000: 51), is a kind of participatory-parochial culture, which requires the emergence of two political interests: national and local.

This work was focused on the level of consistency and sustainability of the interview results obtained within the relationship between the Roma community and Romanian ethnic majority. I sought to analyze issues related to perceptions, symbols and images that can be highlighted as value-promoted attitudes in the intercultural relationship between the two communities. Another factor that was taken into consideration is the high Roma and Romanian heterogeneity from Bucharest. Therefore, I resorted to a qualitative analysis represented by the interview method applied in two representative districts: Rahova and Ferentari.

1. The current knowledge stage in the field of research

In this study, I set a goal for developing a model for assessing the socio-political environment from the interethnic imaginary perspective. The usefulness of this research is to yield significant improvements to the knowledge and objectifying of an interethnic European culture on a member country level. The importance of such research in Romania is all the more relevant as the economic and moral crisis dominates the most part, the top structures of the political system. "Social justice", "redistribution" and "social protection" have always hit the barrier of the national implementation level, remaining rather metaphors in general political discourse than political realities (Popescu, 2014: 100). The transition from collective perceptions to group beliefs and ultimately, to an imaginary interethnic configuration through the power relations is the most striking stage of the present research. The need for a multidisciplinary approach is vital in studying the imaginary and the approach results in justifying being a significant target objective in itself, in the complexity of the included domains of both community and integration politics.

In analyzing the specialized literature there are many sociological and anthropological currents of thought that were bent on the subject of collective imaginary. In the latest studies, the term “imaginary” is deepened in the psychology of education, namely in training and education of children as future adults and citizens with civic responsibilities (Fleer & Peers, 2012: 414). For Angela Becerra Vidergarr (2013:5), the collective imaginary is a oscillating combination resulting from individual experience and cultural background of the person in relation to his own community. The relationship of the individual with his own community, minorities’ case, can become even stronger than the relationship with his own family, unlike members of a majority records a somewhat lower interest. In those circumstances, the collective imaginary may be stronger and more influential for the ethnic minorities than for the majority, a verified observation including the current study.

In the Romanian literature there are very few studies, most of the existing being due to the Imaginary Research Center from Cluj, which addresses this issue from a historical perspective, such as the work "The violent imaginary of Romanians" written by Ruxandra Cesereanu. In the African literature there is an interesting approach to ethnic collective imaginary, as a research tool for civic and political culture. Ebenezer Obadare (2010:60) believes that in the current democracy in Senegal, any ethnic community must be politically represented, otherwise ignoring this principle inevitably leads to interethnic conflicts.

The history of the 20th and 21st century Africa is full of such examples where the consequences were tragic and the politics could never offer peaceful and lasting solutions. The racial approach of the interethnic collective imaginary is another dimension of concern nowadays, for EU policies, as well as for Romania, when a community such as the Roma, is regarded as belonging to a different race from the majority. The issue of racial differences generally occurs in the case of indigenous immigrants, who disturb the economical interests of the autochthons. The interethnic contacts become aggressive and perceptions of neighborhood become truly combat camps where the parties repel each other. The adopting of collective stereotypes, the autochthons are passively consumed and the frustrations and personal prejudices are considered to be the fault of immigrants (Taguieff, 2001: 174). Behind these economic reasons lies again the territory problem as historical belonging versus the rights for the freedom of movement, treatment, salary, etc. Unfortunately, since the European crisis which began in 2008 is also a crisis of intensive demographic changes occurring in the past decade. This year, 2015, Germany officially received over 800.000 immigrants. These are some of the issues that the nowadays ethnic imaginary theme may raise and there are unfortunately few solutions when many of the sensitive issues of living together are ignored by the political class, or are at least unknown to many politicians.

2. The theoretical frame and definition of concepts

For Culas, C. & Robinne, F., (2010:9) the term interethnic imaginary is required in the research and understanding of ethnic communities in the act of building space and community territory in its dealings with a space or domestic territory. Each geographic area is determined by a community spirit and historical timeline which manifests and

ritual maintains around a collective imaginary. This principle of continuity is representative towards the relations with the others. "We and the other" requires the separation and differentiation from others by legitimizing a local distinction for group identity. The community's diversity operates on the principle of diversity and uniqueness of the individuals that compose any society. For Culas and Robinne the territory isn't just a physical space limited by certain rights and borders, but also a repository of collective memory in the relationship of the individual with his own community.

The collective imaginary of a community is formed by the ensemble of psychological nature containing national symbols, personalities (public, media, culture, politics, music and sports), beliefs, customs, rules, norms and traditions inherited or created by a certain structure of thought referred to a historical role and to an identity project. Resorting to a simpler definition, the collective imaginary is a veritable collection of mental images, a world full of symbols, fantasies, myths, historical representations and historical perceptions which define the collective memory of a community. Usually, any nation makes sure that the amount of the most important historical memories to always be updated through rituals of a public nature. This semantics enter into comprehensive imaginary universe, representing its matrix of the developing concurrently compositional a mythical world and accompanied thinking by a vast semiological cortege (Durand, G., 1992: 438).

The psychoanalytical approach of the imaginary begins with the philosophy of the mental image. For Jung (1997: 476), the image is "not a mental copy of the external object, but rather a representation coming from the poetic terminology, namely the imaginary representation, which refers only indirectly to the external perception of the object. It is based rather on the activity of the unconscious imaginary; consciousness manifests as unconsciously produced, ie more or less suddenly, somewhat like a vision or a hallucination, but without its pathological character, ie without ever part of the clinical picture of the disease". It is rather based on the activity of the unconscious imaginary; it manifests in the consciousness as unconsciously produced, more or less suddenly, somewhat like a vision or a hallucination, but without its pathological character, meaning without ever being part of the clinical picture of a disease."

The otherness is seen as a distinction made whenever someone meets a foreigner, classifying him among "the good" or "the bad", and then questions arise, as: "I love him or love him not, or [...] It is my equal or inferior to me (for it is understood that most of the times I think highly of myself ...)" (Todorov, 1994: 173). When otherness becomes an issue of interethnic nature, multiculturalism and pluralism are treated as two separate solutions that respect contrary, without taking into account the possibility of combining them.

The political culture is defined by Almond and Verba (1996: 42) as a set of individual attitudes and orientations towards politics, manifested among the members of a political system. In the Roma we take into account other variables of the political culture as characteristic features of this ethnic group, such as the relation with tradition, identity values, or indigenous rules, customs, symbols and less religious beliefs. All these key elements justify the existence of a system of representing social, cultural and

political. I excluded the religious dimension, considering it less relevant for the research purposes. This is why I limited to qualitative research, applied in the urban areas.

3. The Plan and the research methodology¹

The general question and substantive research is to what extent the intercultural problem between Roma and the majoritary ethnicity can be addressed through its political dimension, namely through its political culture? The objective of the research is exploratory and seeks to identify a forming pattern of the interethnic imaginary.

Regarding the employed scientific methods it's been used the qualitative research of the interview (as method), along with other specific methods in the study of the imaginary. The structured interview is designed to capture a generally accepted pattern of thought, which helps to better understand the formation of interethnic imaginary. The method is limited by the intellectual application parameters, because it doesn't represent the whole segment of representativeness of a complex environment, but has the advantage of speculating the cognitive thinking of the respondents. This way, qualitative results can be obtained, which would describe the world of collective perceptions or the forming and thinking way of common directions of civic and political orientations. Beside the urban environment of proximity, the university intellectual environment was also included, being selected as the research sample of the interview, for diminishing the potential confusion or terminological ambiguity. The university environment has the advantage that a respondent can pay a closer attention to speciality details and to theme hues. The cognitive and psychological condition of a respondent can be an advantage but also a communication barrier, when the pretentious terms phenomenon occurs.

In the Bucharest urban environment, 20 individuals were interviewed, respectively 10 Roma ethnics and 10 Romanian ethnics. Their selection was made through the "snowball method", due to the proximity relations. Therefore, there were selected two samples, each having two target audience subcategories, which would represent the intellectual environment and the usual one. In the first stage of research, I carried out a socio-demographical survey attached to the interview guide (background information) where I requested data regarding the level of education, income and occupation. I obtained a first respondents group, with five Roma students from different Universities – University of Bucharest and N.S.P.S.A. (National School of Political Studies and Administration) and a second group with five Roma ethnics randomly selected through the "snowball method", aged between 30 and 50 years old and with an education average between 4 and 8 grades, from Rahova and Ferentari. In the second sample I obtained a group of five Romanian students from the same Universities and another group with five Romanian ethnics (neighbours with the five Roma ethnic citizens, aged between 30 and 50 years old and with an education average between 8 and 12 grades).

¹ This research was applied by substantially modifying the interview guidelines presented in an earlier study entitled "Psychosocial and Identity Aspects, inter - ethnic Dialogue and alterity issues Between the Romanian People and Roma People" published in *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, EJSER, 2014 no. 3, Vol. 1.

In this sampling I haven't disregarded gender criterion or religion, considering that these variables questions have relevance for the present research. The reason there were chosen five students from both ethnic groups was to pinpoint the position of young people from both groups regarding perceptions, otherness and some political aspects, but also to address certain topics or terms that imply a necessary academic preparation. The intellectual environment facilitates a wider knowledge of certain psychosocial aspects, including a thorough analysis of specialized details of semiotized words. The cognitive as psychological requirement of a respondent could be either a communication barrier, or an advantage. Regardless of these difficulties, the interview has the privilege of capturing the emotions as subtle aspects of symbolic communication, improving the means of knowledge of reality that a survey would not be able to observe. Another motivating advantage to this method is given by the operator's ability to note the important details of nonverbal language, gestures and proxemics that occurred through direct observation data. Each interview was recorded in writing, to be read as evidence or testimony at any time.

There are listed below 10 questions from the interview guide, with different indicators which, in the view of specialist as Vidergarr, A. B. (2013); Fleer & Peers (2012); Culas&Robinne (2010); Gerhard, E. L. (2002); Agamben, G. (1998); Sartori, G., (1997); Girardet, R. (1997); Roger, C. (1997); Kymlicka, W. (1995); Lips, H. (1995); Tzvetan, T. (1994); Durand, G. (1992); Taguieff, P. (1987); Zamfir, E. (1975); can theoretically help in the current research to substantiating and identifying of a specific interethnic imaginary pattern. The questions were randomly set for not purposely inducing the answers, discarding the respondent from his own belief parameters, judgment and perception. The questions were displayed here in order to explain all the desired objectives in research, motivations, and especially for analyzing the results. The purpose of this interview was to follow the structure, the logic and causality of interethnic imaginary formation, among the group of respondents through differentiation and similarity of perceptions on certain precise themes. The symbolic convergence, the antagonistic differences and similarities of perception and opinion form the guidance milestones and identification of a thinking pattern of a collective imaginary Roma mind set, respectively of Romanian ethnics. The dissemination of these results determines the occurring of structures for collective thinking. The sum of these combinatorial structures of both main groups forms all preferences, attitudes and guidelines as a pattern of interethnic collective imaginary.

Guide to interview questions:

1. What is your image and confidence in EU institutions and policies?
2. Do you consider that the involvement and active co-participation the Roma in Romanian political life could improve relations with the ethnic majority?
3. To what extent do you feel discriminated against as Roma ethnic (i.e. or Romanian whether the respondent is ethnic Romanian) in the plan of interethnic interaction at the workplace?
4. What are the first words, impressions or images that come to mind when you meet a Roma ethnic (Romanian respectively if ethnic Roma respondent).

5. Would you mind having a Roma neighbour (i.e. ethnic Romanian if Roma respondent)?
6. Assuming hypothetically that you fall in love with someone and you find out later that it is of Roma ethnicity (i.e. Romanian if the respondent is Roma) do you continue the relationship for marriage?
7. If you are during the presidential elections, to what extent would you be willing to vote for a Roma president? (question asked only to Romanian ethnic)
8. What are the three most important political figures in Romania today?
9. Did you ever suffer in your personal or professional life because of a Roma ethnic? (question asked only to Romanian ethnic)

4. Analysis and interpretation of data

The analysis of answers from the interview was done in an unitary order, selecting key data that can help complete the central objective of the research. For this approach was used the analytical method, the analogy and the symbols convergence. The analytical method established the series of details and arguments related to the guidelines and common attitudes that have been extracted from the logic of the given answers on various topics or themes. Through the convergence method the perceptions were analyzed, regarding the ethnic otherness present in the signifier of words that had been used in the answers. And, by the analogy method, was sought to identify the frequency, similarity and repetition of common terms that are found in many respondents' answers.

To the first question, the respondents' position (Roma and Romanian) was unanimously positive regarding the role and confidence in European institutions and policies. From the sum of all answers I deduced that the EU is a solid institution that enjoys a high confidence and at the level of general opinion there is a favourable current among both ethnicities. Analytically by the semantic inversion of excessive appreciation, this indicates a passive attitude of citizens to the confidence in the national political system. In the collective imaginary of respondents, the European Union is like a mother who is trying to grow and to help her children. This image demonstrates that the expectations come from outside and not from inside, conclusion met to the other answers, also.

On the second question, Roma respondents believe that their involvement in the Romanian political life is beneficial to all. Mostly among students of Roma origin, they have strengthened and underlined the need of joint participation in politics to fight against inequality, discrimination and the right for education, health or employment. Of the group Roma ethnics who are not students, there were manifested certain deductions related to the positive effect of interethnic integration by the joint participation to the political life, justifying that the Romanian politics isn't built on fairness and fair play. The political life from Romania is considered by both ethnicities to be negative and the analogy of this image is similar to a "bottomless precipice" (imaginary analogy encountered to several Roma respondents). Equal pay on merit and

not on ethnic criteria is not working on regular basis. Within the group of Romanian ethnicity respondents the views were somewhat mixed. Thus, three out of five ethnic Romanian students expressed their pessimism regarding the improvement of interethnic relations in the joint participation in political life. The restraint was motivated by the incompatibility of both ethnicities for the same beliefs and values. In conclusion, it was noted that on the political dimension there is an emphasized threshold of detentions and concerns over the mutual cooperation. On the level of interethnic collective imaginary, it seems that the first signs of otherness are being marked, by the presence of mistrust of each other.

On the third question, the Roma students have reported that there is a degree of ethnic discrimination more present at the bottom of the social pyramid, especially in the area with low income people. Through the analytical method of the responses I observed that the respondents support the following idea: since the standard of living is lower in Roma communities, the interethnic discrimination phenomenon becomes stronger and the higher the living standard gets, more diffuse this phenomenon becomes. In this category are the poorest Roma, without jobs, some of them uneducated, with no health insurance, etc. The marginalization and discrimination coexist depending on the level of acute poverty, part of the blame belonging to the political system that has a very late response to the urgent problems of the Roma. One of the major shifts brought by the new status of Romania of EU country was the emergence of the discourse centered on the concept of social inclusion rather than poverty (Briciu, 2014: 5). I quote from an answer given by a student of Roma origin: "The current situation is a continuation of mutual negligence; certainly it is also the fault of the Roma (...) Nevertheless, when discrimination at the workplace makes its presence felt, then the problem becomes one of politics nature, and the Romanian state must prevent such social phenomena through public policy".

Two of the Roma students said they were active militants fighting for improvement and solving of social inequalities following the political path. In the case of Roma respondents who are not students, they expressed their pessimism towards the employment situation. I quote: "they do not care, we tried to get a job, but no one employs us. From the beginning they consider us culprits, thieves and beggars, but they forget that many of us have make no living and those who want to work tell us they don't need us [...] ". In another response was reported the case of a Roma employed to a Romanian patron. He received from the very beginning a significantly lower salary than the Romanians on the grounds that he is "Gypsy" and "Gypsies" should be paid less. In the case of Romanian ethnic respondents, they felt no discrimination on salary criterion. Nevertheless, I mention that two students felt disadvantaged, by the fact that the Ministry of Education finances special places in the budget only for the Roma who want to pursue higher education (by the educational policies that use the kind of positive discrimination).

In the context of responses to the fourth question only the major differences and similarities between keywords with symbolic role have been taken into consideration. As a first step, on a general view all Roma respondents associated the image of

Romanian ethnics with the one of "rich but very stingy brothers"¹. Here are some words and suggestive images that deserve to be listed and analyzed: "Romanians are generally hardworking but also very cunning", "there are some hearted Romanians, but others are so evil and they hate us because we are poor," "Romanians are workers but others steal beyond imagination, more than all our Gypsies thieves with whom we are ashamed; the real thieves are some Romanian politicians who keep people in poverty ", "Romanians are always perceived as strangers and we always feel rejected by their community ", " there are Romanian patrons who have often infringed our rights and we have put us all in the same pot, holding ourselves unworthy, but I find myself as a gypsy, to always have been honest and I did not judge crookedly on anybody from the start without first seeing the facts", "some Romanians don't tolerate us at all and do us much injustice, accusing us that evil comes only from us". Roma people perceive their relationship with the Romanians in a disadvantaged position. Here are some examples from across the Romanian ethnics group: "[...] Gypsies do not work, they steal!" Or "outside the country, Gypsies beg and embarrass all Romanians abroad. Here we see how in level of perceptions, the Romanians are placed on a position of imaginary, inquisitors and judges of Roma ethnics. At this lopsided balance Roma perceive themselves as victims of otherness, which results in a vicious circle.

To the fifth question, the Roma respondents have generally displayed a positive and tolerant attitude regarding the idea of inter-ethnic neighbourhood. "Our homes may be in the vicinity of the ethnic Romanians. We don't mind as long as we are left alone, and it's even an honour to be close so we can communicate as humans and not as different ethnic groups." I note from the answers that it shows again the same fear of being judged or rejected by Romanian ethnics. In the other group, the responses were not as homogeneous. Of the ten ethnic Romanian respondents, only three replies were favourable- pro-neighbourly and seven showed against.

On the sixth question, we dive into the most profound area of the interethnic imaginary perceptions by reaching some interpersonal problems. I designed this interview question for several reasons, as the interethnic relations often involve such circumstances, especially when there are cases of successful interethnic marriages that bring new light into the area of different social stereotypes. Here are six interesting answers that were expressed by respondents from both ethnic groups:

1. Roma respondent "I would have nothing against it if we had true love";
2. Another Roma respondent: "if my wife would be ethnic Romanian, I love her as much as a gypsy of mine";
3. Another Roma respondent: "our law doesn't normally allow interethnic marriages, but if there is the one and only, true love, not even our emperor would stand against it."

Here are some answers came from the Romanian ethnic group:

¹Sentence from interview.

1. Romanian respondent: “It would be really a romantic story. Why not? As long she’s not deceiving me and will not steal from me, she would make the perfect wife”;
2. Another Romanian respondent: „I would have nothing against it; love conquers everything”.
3. Another Romanian respondent: “I would love her from the bottom of my heart; you don’t find a gipsy heart everywhere”.

On the eighth question was only ethnic Romanian respondents answered, three of which were „for”, one has abstained and the remaining six „against”. We quote a few words from each of the two positions „for” and „against”:

1. “I would have nothing against voting a Roma President if he would prove he is a good President, through his character and professionalism, so yeah!”
2. “[...] under no circumstance I would ever vote such thing, as I strongly believe that a Roma President couldn’t actually represent us in EU or on Earth”;
3. “Personally, I do not trust Roma, therefore, I would never vote for a Roma President.”

On the seventh question, I noticed a manifested reluctance of the ethnic Romanian respondents when it comes to voting a Roma President. The refusal is justified by the presence of the same type of association of the word Roma with various negative features. One question that is required to ask on this dimension of politics would be: can social stereotypes influence a collective thinking which doesn’t start from personal experience? As we shall see on the last question, some of the Romanian ethnic respondents justify their positions and attitudes blaming the influence and presence of collective stereotypes. In these situations the transmission of their prejudices among groups of individuals has no proper filter of selection and occurs through mental contagion.

On the eighth question, we have three groups of ranked answers, according to the number of nominations. In the first group, where we have only Roma respondents, on the first three places were selected as follows:

1. Ion Iliescu;
2. Marian Vanghelie;
3. Klaus Johannis.

In the second group, where we have only Romanian respondents, on the first three places were selected:

1. Klaus Johannis;
2. Ion Iliescu;
3. Traian Băsescu.

In the third group, where we have all respondents, the first three places were selected as follows:

1. Ion Iliescu;
2. Klaus Johannis;
3. Marian Vanghelie.

Ion Iliescu recorded the most nominations in both groups, followed by Johannis (nominated predominantly among Romanian respondents) and Marian Vanghelie due to the large number of nominations only among the Roma respondents came on third place per-total. The mentioned political figures play an important role in the interethnic collective imaginary, and they represent an important milestone for orientation and political attitude of the people towards the political system. The culture level and the political dimension of both groups of respondents find their common denominator around these three characters. Why was it important to know through this question about the three political figures? Thus we can find out the most popular politicians in the political imaginary space.

The ninth question was asked only to the Romanian ethnic respondents, as key question. All respondents said they had never personally or directly suffered from a Romanian citizen of Roma ethnicity. In this question I tried to decipher the attachment of images during the formation of the collective stereotypes. The seventh question is a good reminder: six ethnic Romanian respondents rejected the idea of voting a Roma president, associating it to Gypsy Roma. Interesting to note is that although this ethnic Romanian respondents have not suffered any direct personal detriment from a Roma person, however, some of them reject this ethnic cohabitation or interaction without any empirical argument. If we agree upon this conclusion, then we can provide the first viable explanations related to the twilight zone where the interethnic social stereotypes are formed.

5. Conclusion

From the first results a higher confidence of respondents in the European Institutions is reflected, in detriment of the trust in the autochthon institutions of the Romanian state. It is true that the Institution of European Commission showed in the past 10 years a continuous concern towards minority integration strategies in Eastern Europe. Most of the European funds were allocated to the following four pillars: access to education, jobs, housing and medical care. The links between the expectations of citizens, regardless of ethnicity and the role of the European Union appear to be in full compliance. It explains why in the collective imaginary, all respondents, regardless of ethnicity, consider the European Union a "caring mother" who engages authority in the social problems of citizens.

With regard to the interethnic relations, the problem occurs in the case of confidence in the other. The source of conflict occurs on the patronizing attitude of Romanian ethnics towards the Roma ethnics. The analogy to the "unfair executioner" - "gang of beggars and thieves" is represents therefore the two key images of the imaginary arche types that underlie the interethnic neighbourhood conflict.

Concerning the interpersonal relations, I guessed some networking structures identified as problems of ancestral nature of the Romanians towards Roma. The Roma seem to be more open, conditioning only the presence of nothing but a candid love, while some Romanian ethnic respondents showed a high dose of reticence. In the meta-language of the Romanian ethnic respondents it is obvious that such relations can only be adventures or accidents, whilst the Roma respondents showed themselves open about this hypothesis. It is interesting to note that the discussed topic was treated in a positive manner, and respondents had not reacted conflictingly in the area of perceptions, but fear is still there. Roma ethnics don't start from an associative premise putting the evil ahead of facts. In this case, the otherness phenomenon has a greater presence among the Romanian ethnics.

The interethnic imaginary between the Roma ethnics and Romanian ethnics displays several divergent and convergent points in the same time. The rejection tendency of "the other" manifests especially on economical grounds. This proves that a major cause for otherness is due to poverty, reason which leads to altering the social interethnic relations. Therefore, there is an interethnic imaginary between neighbourhood relations. This space is the product of a collective pattern being configured rather more on the economic welfare of ethnic groups and less on the criterion of historical or ideological visions. For this reason, the Roma are perceived by the majority ethnicity as poor and unemployed people. The solution might be an intensification of integration the Roma into the labour market, and this result would inevitably lead to changing the interethnic imaginary as convergent space with a constructive role in facilitating the good relations between Romanian and Roma ethnics.

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