

The Text beyond Itself: Romani Social Construction in Romanian Secret Police Files

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Abstract

Romanian State Secret Police (*Securitate*) files produced before 1989 can be accessed today through a lengthy process that requires official research authorization through a government office, the National Council for the Study of the *Securitate* Archives (Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității – CNSAS). The CNSAS General Document Fund includes large issue-related files under the umbrella of “*The Gypsy Problem*,” with thousands of pages of both national and county-level reports and recommendations. This paper teases out the granular documentary clues (*spie*, as Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg describes them) in some of the *Securitate* files to explore the way in which a pattern of documentary communication is built to frame Romani identity as idiosyncratically marginal, oriental, and parasitic. A particularly interesting aspect of the knowledge production imposed through these files is reflected by anecdotes that purportedly illustrate the character of the Roma. This study analyzes the relations of power built through hermeneutic devices and language choices which build “truth formulae” (Weir) that reify a particular view of Romani ethnicity, class, and gender. This archival (de)construction has implications for a long view of policy, political memory, and exclusionary societal attitudes today and in the future.

Keywords

- Roma
- Romani
- Archive
- Marginalization
- State police
- Romania

Romanian State Secret Police (*Securitate*) files produced before 1989 can be accessed today through a lengthy process that requires official research authorization through a government office, the National Council for the Study of the *Securitate* Archives (*Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității* – CNSAS). The CNSAS General Document Fund includes large issue-related files under the umbrella of “The Gypsy Problem,” with thousands of pages of both national and county-level reports and recommendations.^[1] This paper teases out the granular documentary clues (*spie*, as Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg describes them, 1990) in some of the *Securitate* files to explore the way in which a pattern of documentary communication is built to frame Romani identity as idiosyncratically marginal, oriental, and parasitic. The Roma community in Romania, and in Europe generally, occupies a specific and long-standing outgroup position that can be categorized as the quintessential “other.” The history of Roma othering is well-documented (Hancock 1987; Fraser 1992; Liegeois 1994; Acton 2016; Sigona 2009; Rostaș 2019; Kóczé 2018, 2021; Lipphardt et al. 2020; Matache and Bhahba 2020; Selling 2022; Bhahba et al 2017, 2021; Turda and Furtună 2021; Baar and Kóczé 2022; Rostaș and Moisă 2023; Simonovitz, Kurdi, and Simonovitz 2023; for Romania see Crowe 1991; Achim 2004, 2019, 2021; Gheorghe 1983, 1997; Beck 1989; Marushiakova and Popov 2009, 2017; Achim and Tomi 2010; Boțan et al. 2020; Coman and Andronechescu 2020; Vasilescu and Militaru 2020), and significant patterns of socio-political discrimination persist.^[2] Previous research shows that state discourses reflect and reinforce societal narratives of threat and discrimination (Popescu 2014, 2016), and indicates that there are patterns of continuity between the biopolitical message of the communist regime and the successor post-communist policies toward the Roma. In this study, I add a more detailed, archival dimension to the discussion of hegemonic framing of racialized minorities.

Historian Carlo Ginzburg coined the phrase “the inquisitor as anthropologist” to consider how “the proceedings of lay and ecclesiastical courts” during the Spanish Inquisition were recorded as a type of “fieldwork” of the courts (1990, 141). This “fieldwork,” similarly to the recordings of anthropologists, reflects not only the subject matter of the proceedings, but also practices and concepts employed to document and report the results of inquisitorial interviews. These documents can be mined for patterns of expressive power which construct socio-political frames (Goffman, 1961) of inclusion and exclusion. Frames are propped by markers and claims to truth that combine scientific with social and political narratives. Although Ginzburg applies this method to studying the Spanish Inquisition, it can be analytically adapted to studying other types of modern inquisitors, from Police interrogators to CIA agents.

In this study, the inquisitors and their reports are found in the *Securitate* Archives produced during the last two decades of the Romanian communist regime (1970s and ‘80s). Depending on document type, these reports were written by state functionaries and institutional “experts,” mid to high-level police officers, or *Securitate* agents charged with gathering information about social and political issues purportedly threatening national security. I purposefully select *Securitate* files that engage

1 Files were obtained through CNSAS accreditation and by making specific document requests with the CNSAS Archives, referenced here as ACNSAS. Files are only given to the requesting researchers and are generally not public (except for permitted document collection publications; see Marin, 2017).

2 See Sigona, “The Latest Public Enemy” OSCE/ODHIR Report 2008 and European Parliament Roman Strategies Report 2020.

one specific set of issues: the so-called “Gypsy problem.”^[3] This study analyzes the way in which the “Gypsy” was framed in important internal, secret political and legal documents of the Romanian communist regime, and particularly in a selection of files from the so-called General Documentary Fund (*Fond Documentar General*) of the Department of State Security (*Departamentul Securității Statului/Securitate*).^[4] By contributing to recent work on discourse framing and practices of socio-political construction (Sigona 2009; Kóczé 2009, 2017; Surdu 2016; Kovats and Surdu 2015), this study aims to identify the constellation of markers constructing a narrative of exclusion that created and reinforced structural patterns of Romani marginalization. Fundamentally, the study highlights and analyzes hermeneutic devices of power construction (Ginzburg 1993; Goffman 1961, 1963; Foucault, 1972, 1977; Weir 2008) for the purpose of better understanding how groups and identities are (re) cast and othered in a state’s political mythology. Using Goffman’s understanding of the social framing of stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (1963, 3), recent research has considered layers of structural power processes related to both society and the state (Phelan et al, 2008; Lamont et al. 2016). Tracing similar processes, this study folds in considerations of power and discourse in the (re) production of stigmatization and socio-political marginalization in the archival work of the state.

In *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*, Ginzburg argues that historical and documentary “clues” (Italian: “*spie*”) allow a careful interpreter to find a constellation of word choices and slippages that betray a layer of deeper information that was previously unobserved (Ginzburg 1993). This depth of meaning allows for reinterpretation, and offers an insight into different registers of political, social, or cultural significance. The written reports can be mined for details, nuances, and “clues.” As Glajar et al. point out “the files are for the most part text-based artifacts and must be read with particular care” because they are a “textually mediated reality” which is “often encrypted in impenetrable textual formats and encoded arcane language” (2016, 1).

Securitate files have their own economy of meaning: they are created in form and function to serve the ideological goals of an already ordered system, in this case Romanian nationalist communist ideology in the late socialist state, and the place of ethnicity within this ideology (on ethnicity as construction see Bourdieu 1991, Barth 1969, Brubaker 2004; for Roma identity construction see Stewart 1997 and 2012; for the political uses and abuses of Roma identity see Klimova-Alexander 2005; Simhandl 2006; Vermeesch 2006). It is beyond the scope of this paper to canvas the complicated contours of the Romanian nationalism styled by a communist-totalitarian state, but it is of note that its main expression, Romanian *protochronism* (Verdery 1991; Boatcă 2003), privileged an imagined Roman-extraction ethnicity, and traditional values and customs putatively traced back for millennia in the “Carpatho-Danubian space” (Verdery 1991; Boia 2001; Tismăneanu 2003). The exclusionary dynamic of this ideological profile plays out in state attitudes toward Roma and the way in which they are represented in its documents. Interpretively, we can explicitly focus on the hegemonic mechanism that regulates language and message

3 “The Gypsy problem” is the official name given to the series of files and reports in the Securitate archives.

4 *Securitatea Statului* or *Securitate* was the state secret police agency of the Romanian Socialist Republic (RSR); it was one of the most pervasive and ruthless surveillance mechanisms in the Eastern bloc. See Tismăneanu (2003).

in order to create new meaning that serves the purpose of the state.^[5] Close reading can unpack the substrata of meaning creation, through both intentional or unintentional markers like words, expressions, turns of phrase, contextual presentations, or deviations from logic or fact. The job of an interpretative critique that pulls at the edges of power narratives is to trace those markers (*spie*) that testify to a new way of understanding the text and the power relations within it.

Securitate Files: Form and Function

The National Council for the Study of Securitate Archives (thereafter CNSAS) was established by the Romanian Parliament as an autonomous body in 1999 through a series of law and government ordinances regarding the rights to access personal files in the Securitate archives.^[6] CNSAS has its own juridical personality and budget, and functions under the direct supervision of the Romanian Parliament. Despite a history of setbacks and battles over both content and access, CNSAS has become the repository of a vast amount of electronically stored documents related to the Romanian Securitate (the CNSAS Archive, thereafter ACNSAS), both nationally and at the county level (Petrescu 2020; Şerban 2021). Procedurally, research access to files is hindered by the lack of thematic focus or cross referencing. Once accredited, researchers must ask for specific files that are generally classified either individually/nominally or under the General Fund created by the Romanian Socialist Republic (RSR) before 1989. The General Documentary Fund contains topic areas that reflect perceived social-political challenges to RSR before 1989.^[7] Researchers must rely heavily on archivists to understand how files are classified, and then decide which additional individual files they may request.

Under the umbrella of files catalogued under the “Gypsy problem,” the ACNSAS General Documentary Fund includes multiple issue-related files like “Gypsies: Relations 1985-1986” (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 11, 488 pages), “Gypsies: Connections 1983-1984” (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 12, 448 pages), “Gypsies: Facts and Events” (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 13, 378 pages), “Gypsies: Documentary Material 1976–1982” (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, 439 pages), which contain both national and county-level reports. The files also contain studies about the life and living conditions of Romanian Roma, copies of individual correspondence, and county reports on specific issues like Romani Congresses.^[8] The architecture of the reports relies on a blend of quantitative and qualitative observations produced for internal state consumption, often at the request of government officials. The reports include statistical estimates regarding health, education, employment, and other demographic factors, as well as assessments of living conditions and measures to redress perceived shortcomings. The files also include a slew of “information notes” (note informative)

5 For the idea of epistemic communities related to expert knowledge see Haas (1992).

6 For details see http://www.cnsas.ro/cadrul_legal.html.

7 For instance, there is a file titled “Sects and Cults” and another “The Nationalists Problem.”

8 The large files contain hundreds of pages of handwritten, typed, or photocopied materials (correspondence mixed in with state and county reports etc) which are not meaningfully organized by either date or type; some material appears in several copies. I followed Marin’s (2017) general notation style and included page numbers in each file even though the pagination reflects scanning order.

about Romani individuals of interest to Securitate for various “subversive” activities. These “subversive” actions are under the umbrella of a “state security” category, and come to the attention of the *Securitate* because they are understood to be above and beyond local Police concerns. In sum, the *Securitate* identifies an additional layer of discipline and surveillance, which it defines and enforces according to perceived “threat” to national security.

Since Foucault, archives have represented a particular focus in the study of knowledge creation. Foucault thought of archives as a particular representation of “the law of what can be said”:

The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. ... far from being only that which ensures that we exist in the midst of preserved discourse, it is that which differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration. ... It is the general system of the formation and transformation of statements. (Foucault 1972, 129)

Securitate files can be read to reflect language choices, interpretations, and ideological turns of phrase that amount to “truth formulae” (Weir 2008). Expanding on Foucault’s idea of “regimes of truth,”⁹ Lorna Weir argues that it is possible to identify a multiplicity of “truth formulae” coexisting within a truth regime. Truth formulae may either work simultaneously to reinforce social and political justifications, or they may subtract from each other. As Weir argues:

Truth formulae stabilize a relation across a set of elements: between representation and presentation – words and things as Foucault put it in *The Order of Things*, truth and non-truth, and the place of the subject – both the enunciatory (s/he who mayspeak truth) and the enunciated (the subject within the text). Power is not an intrinsic criterion of truth formulae; rather, truth formulae acquire effects of power through their attachment to specific *dispositifs* (power apparatuses such as discipline and sexuality) in a truth regime (2008, 368).

Archives structure and create meaning, and “archival truth” is one of many possible “truths” (Andresen 2019, 84–86). Hegemonic selectivity and creativity in “the making of archives is frequently where knowledge production begins” (Eichhorn 2013, 3) and archival records can be understood as “an extraordinary creation of remembering, forgetting, and imagining.; at once expression and instrument of power” (Harris, 2002, 63–86). In *Securitate* files, descriptions, data, and claims are tailored to articulate the “Gypsy problem,” and offer alleged solutions guided by ideological, civilizational, scientific, or pragmatic considerations.¹⁰ The tension between “representation and presentation (words and things)” (Weir 2008, 368) and the place of the subject in discourse reflects multiple relations of power: between state agents and the higher ups of the

9 In a 1976 interview Foucault briefly referred to a truth regime as “a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and functioning of statements” that are connected through “a circular relation to systems of power which produce it and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which redirect it” (pp. 113–114).

10 For criticism related to classifying Roma from anthropological, sociological or other perspectives see Ladányi and Szelényi 2001, 2006; Klimova-Alexander 2005; Vermeersch 2006; Okely, 1983, Hayes and Acton 2006, Marsh 2007; Gay y Blasco 1999.

state (the intended audience), between ideology (“multilaterally developed socialism”) and its object (in this case a minority), and between the language of policing and the purportedly scientific sociology of late socialism.^[11] The point of the study is to use the medium (*Securitate* files) and its clues (“spie”) to inquire into the way in which the communication code is built to frame Roma identity from the perspective of Ginzburg’s inquisitor anthropologist. “Though reality may seem to be opaque,” Ginzburg argues, “there are privileged zones – signs, clues – which allow us to penetrate it.”

Previous studies have mainly captured broad patterns across *Securitate* documents. In the *Introduction* to a two-volume collection of *Securitate* Files, Manuela Marin (2017) discusses the *covert* or everyday acts of resistance presented in files. Romani women refused to remove traditional gold coins from their hair, and continued to wear the colorful, many-layered traditional skirts; other Roma privately spoke and wrote letters in the Romani language refusing to join the “Romanianization” efforts; others did not register their children with state authorities, and pushed back against promises to “improve their behaviour.” In a study based on the documents in the Marin volumes, László Fosztó (2018) captures another socio-political trend and categorizes it as *overt* resistance: the call for national recognition as ethnic minority or “cohabiting national group”,^[12] including a call for religious emancipation and for the protection of ancestral values. Fosztó highlights the fact that Romani intellectuals and cultural leaders become a target of the *Securitate*, including the Romani sociologist Nicolae who features prominently in *Securitate* files for his pro-Roma advocacy and research, which ran contrary to the officially sanctioned political stances and approved research agendas.

Link and Phelan (2001) point out that stigma is co-created by four processes: labeling human differences; stereotyping these differences; separating “us” from “others” through these labels; and creating a mechanism of status loss and discrimination against the labeled subjects. Starting from these elements, the approach in this research attempts to reconcile the “telescopic with the microscopic” in order to trace the commonalities and “logical affinities” that create the connective tissue of the hegemonic narratives present in these files. The focus is on how the state chooses to represent the Romani community and plot the course of othering. Following this dynamic, several frames can be identified: repetitive descriptions, tropes, and imagery engaged to build assumptions and conclusions. These frames are layered and may include overlapping markers, and can point to both relations of authority and ethnic relations, or to both gender and race.

The Descriptive Frame: Roma as ‘Fixable’ Recalcitrants

Secret police files are a work of imposition. They are a collection of discourses, administrative forms, laws, regulations, administrative statements and formulaic language - in sum, they are an expression of the *dispositif* that regulates and orders the institutional meaning of life (Foucault 1977, 194–228). From

11 For a discussion of how the scientific and political practices of state “experts” reify Roma ethnicity, see Surdu 2016; also Lucassen et al. 1998.

12 “Cohabiting nationality” would be a closer (but more awkward) translation of the Romanian term employed in the law: *națiune conlocuitoare*.

this perspective, the files are difficult to read. Much is obscured by the legal-administrative style that truncates lives and stultifies experience.

At the broadest level, the Securitate files that make up the General Fund represent the basic ideological tenets of the Romanian state in relation to the Romani minority. Reports and statements of “Facts and Events” methodically articulate economic, social, and political issues that are presented as endogenous to the Romani population. A first metanarrative frame of socio-political progress sets the state against “Gypsy backwardness” and parasitism. The ideological discourse of Romanian “late socialism” pushes the framing of the “Gypsy problem” in opposition to the advancements of the “multilaterally developed socialist society.” The civilizational formula of “late socialism” is a totality: it covers economic, social, cultural, and political aspects. From this perspective, there is only one prescribed path to the “enlightenment of the gypsies” (*illuminarea țiganilor*), a phrase used to preface government recommendations.

A second metanarrative frame articulates the cultural and social “otherness” of Roma, anchored in a mythology of beliefs, cultural practices, and life-choices that are alien to “typical” Romanians. A large swathe of the files is dedicated to the issue of religion among Roma, specifically to the Romani bid to be allowed to practice a religion – in most cases, Pentecostalism or Seventh Day Adventism (see, for instance, ACNSAS 11216, Vol. 14, p. 130–131; ACNSAS 11215, Vol. 12; ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 13, p. 32; ACNSAS D016710, Vol. 4, p. 620). Other Roma are described as “fanatical Baptists” for starting worship groups or conducting worship in the Romani language (ACNSAS 11216, Vol. 14, p. 130). The summative language points to “religious-mystical materials” (like pamphlets and videotapes) spread by Roma accused of proselytizing Pentecostalism despite state interdictions (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 13, p. 58–60). This commentary, which frequently refers to the activity of a single individual, is presented as a collective effort large enough to threaten state security and national unity. Some of the files point to a larger “Cults/ Sects Problem” in Romania to which Roma contribute by fomenting religious unrest (ACNSAS 11215, Vol. 12). Requests for the free practice of religion and cultural norms are categorized as “anti-Romanian” (ACNSAS D016710, Vol. 4, p. 622–23) and “nationalist-irredentist” calls that threaten socialist solidarity and Romanian nationhood (ACNSAS 11215, Vol. 12, p. 55).

Within these two metanarrative frames, other nested frames overlap to support the ideological claims of imputed backwardness and otherness. Nested frames can be categorized as descriptive and prescriptive. The descriptive frame is supported by a number of markers that point to Roma as “internal strangers” and “social parasites” and includes the Roma lack of work ethic, parasitic lifestyle, family promiscuity, disease, cheating, and laziness. The descriptive frame is anchored in a discourse of immorality that highlight dubious lifestyle choices which validate policies of Roma control and social segregation.

A “useful work” frame depicts state employment as the sole means of socio-economic contribution. In a 1977 Study conceived by the Ministry of the Interior together with the National Demography Commission,^[13] Roma are chided for their inability to “change their attitudes toward structured work” and the “norms of social coexistence” linked to such, since, the report claims, a vast majority of them

13 Language from this report is repeated verbatim across several other reports throughout the late 70s and 80s.

exert “no activity useful to society” (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 3; see also ACNSAS D016710, Vol. 4, p. 631). They “refuse to be hired” in state enterprises or abandon their work shortly afterwards because of a “hostile attitude” toward “useful” employment (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 3–6, 11). Repetitive language describes Roma as refusing to work despite being able-bodied, thereby abusing the state allocation for child support and “depriving the state budget of that amount which is now given to persons who lead a parasitic life and contribute nothing to the efforts of the active population of our country.” The report notes that instead of working or practicing their trades, the Roma prefer to live from “burglary, theft, begging, fraud, and fortune telling” (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 6).

Contradictions run deep within these reports. Roma are blamed for not practicing “useful work,” yet traditional trades are either criminalized or heavily regulated. The same report points out that being employed by the state requires Roma to give up traditional trades, surrender their tools to the state, and go wherever they are allocated, yet the conclusion is that Roma have an anti-social attitude towards work and higher material and *moral* standards. The coupling of a material and moral dimensions constructs the inputted “hostility” of Roma who allegedly adopt a recalcitrant attitude and persist in living their “specific way of life.” This way of life is portrayed as either fundamentally itinerant or primarily based on the use of “tents, hovels, and earth dwellings” with no sources of ventilation or light. The report notes that Roma resettlement into modern apartments is countered with the same “hostile” attitude rooted in inadequate cultural and social norms. Roma bring animals in apartments “provided” by the state and make open fires in some rooms thereby vandalizing state property (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 4).

The language of this 1977 report is reproduced across many other state documents and later reports.^[14] The narrative is replicated and reinforced with general observations regarding “lifestyle” and combined with selective use of data. Both unemployment and criminality for instance is reported in absolute numbers and not compared with the rest of the population. An isolated mention of a single percentage claims that across two years, Roma were allegedly responsible for 13% of crimes in the country (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 24). The number is misleading and lacking in context. It is not clear to what degree the number was a direct result of a state policy of criminalizing so-called “parasitic existence” (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 11, 23, 29).^[15] The criminalization of unemployment is justified in “moral” and “cultural” terms that construct the idea of endogenous Romani criminality. Numbers are used as self-evident representations of criminal proclivities.^[16]

To connect the dots of Romani “immorality,” state documents describe “backward conceptions of living” (see 1977 Study, ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 2–12; and ACNSAS D0016710, Vol. 4, p. 631). Romani

14 See for instance the ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 38–47 report which reproduces much of the same language but this time in the context of the work of the Commission for Social Integration and Recovery, 1977. See also the Timisoara report ACNSAS p. 32–43, 1985; Bacau County “Study on the Issue of Gypsies,” ACNSAS, D 016710, Vol. 4, p. 630–635.

15 See also ACNSAS “Propaganda” File nr. 36, Vol.1, D0013636-21 which contains police guidelines intended for the general population, and which frequently references the problem “parasitism” that the population must educate itself about and help combat; also ACNSAS D 016710, Vol. 4, p. 632.

16 For an in-depth discussion of the statistical practices of the Romanian state regarding the Roma see especially Chapter 4, Mihai Surdu, 2016.

lifestyle is presented as a secular version of sin: common law marriage/concubinage (unmarried individuals living together). Contrary to the norms of late socialism, “concubinage” pushes back against the regulated institution of marriage, undermining state law and “norms of social coexistence” by favoring a “disorganized” family unit that is not based on legality and marriage. To reinforce the moral deviance of this choice, state documents mention that the Roma choose to sleep all in one bed, regardless of age or gender, in what is repeatedly described as “promiscuity.” Early marriages and the immorality of home life produces numerous children for which “Gypsies exhibit no responsibility.” Reports also mention the practice of teenage marriages and “selling wives,” which results in frequent disagreements among Roma and then, by way of a slippery slope argument, lead to bodily harm, murder, or other physical violence (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 4). The overall language drips with moral judgment about “attitudes” exhibited by Roma.

A particular slant of the reports focuses on Romani women and their alleged inability to educate children to embrace proper moral values. The 1977 Study indicates that “the lack of concern toward integrating the Gypsies in useful activities is especially felt among women, which negatively influences raising and educating children” (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 7). The attitude of Romani women is described as “refractory” (*atitudine refractară*), supported by “backward customs” supporting a “parasitic life” (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 1–13; 24). The accounts are consistently anchored in language related to “cultural-educational” and “moral-civic” values which Romani communities consistently fail to embrace and support (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 27–28). That failure is then tied to the fundamental moral shortcoming of Romani women. A telling passage in one of the state reports refers to the failure of other women’s organizations to get Romani women to maintain and clean their neighborhoods. Romani women, as a group, are depicted as generally failing a moral benchmark of the feminized cleaning labor rendered by “other” women.

A particularly revealing description of Romani women is captured in a singular report from Mures county in central Romania (ACNSAS 6931, Vol. 1, p. 16). The three authors are police agents charged with Securitate issues: two of them have the rank of lieutenant colonel. In an otherwise dry set of “matter of fact” observations, a type of sudden code-switching provides important clues that reflect both popular discriminatory sentiment and the presumed moral impulse that undergirds state ideology. It is worth citing the report at length:

Wandering women, dressed in long and dirty flowery dresses have showed up at Targu Mures. Offering enameled vases or wedding rings, they go into a house and then another. And not a few times, opening the door with a smile on her face, the kind and polite host closes her eyes shut.

‘My dear lady, on your kind soul, give us a pickle for our craving baby in the belly of our mother to be’ says the one of them, after stepping through the doorway of a Targu Mures house. The kind woman, the welcoming host goes into her pantry to retrieve the pickle and satisfy the cravings of her visitors.

‘May you be blessed by God above future grandmother! But you should know that great harm awaits you, a great unhappiness. Let me tell you...’

And telling whatever nonsense (*verzi si uscate*), the wandering woman, like an experienced scammer, fills her bag, after the host gives her, unforced and out of her own free will (*de bună voie și nesilită de nimeni*), goods of great value: the gold earrings out her ears, the ring and wedding ring on her hand, clothes, money and food.

....

‘There we go dear lady, the evil is all gone,’ said the one making the incantations (*descantecele*), after she had shaken a shirt full of valuables out the window. And it’s true it was indeed gone! Not the evil, but rather the gold and money placed in the hand of the so-called fortuneteller.

This report fragment, written in a tone that is markedly different and borders on creative writing, is meant to appeal to a register of moral emotions. In this context, the authors feel entitled to plead the case of “ordinary Romanian women” who represent moral virtue, in open conflict with the predatory habits of Roma who exploit the elevated moral sentiments of motherhood and female solidarity. The innocent Romanian women embody the proper upbringing suitable to social unity and communal trust. Romani women take advantage of precisely the normalization of good behavior and familial feeling, thereby shattering the social innocence of good people and subverting state security. Their act is not just a scam, but an injury to state norms and aspirations of social cohesion. This morality tale highlights the civilizational norms of socialist comportment that are supposed to stand in stark contrast with Romani deviance. The report is a cautionary note to the central office which must deploy the appropriate policy tools to address the purported socio-moral imbalances with the “other.”

Fundamentally, the portrait of Romani women trades in Orientalist tropes: brightly dressed Romani women don’t recognize or embrace moral boundaries; they violate social norms that unite women, and use “backward practices” (like incantations) to steal inside a woman’s home, a transgression against both individuals and state order. They are identified as subversive by virtue of their extraordinary transgression: women appealing to other women in the name of female vulnerability. The moral outrage elicited by the tone of the report is meant to distance Romani women from “normal” maternal sentiments and dehumanize them by exemplifying a willingness to exploit maternity for mere material rewards.

Other reports also gender their frame of approach and target young Romani women specifically. In a 1981 “addendum” (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 240–242) to the 1977 study, Romani women are demographically separated by “childbearing age.” The report notes that the “essential problem” with the Gypsy population is “their multiplying” (*inmulțirea acestora*). Starting from an estimate of the Romani population, the report goes on to speculate that Roma are likely to become 30–40 percent of births in the “new decade,” and proposes that Roma numbers will reach seven to eight million by the end of the century (p. 241). The commentary indicates that while “the population of Romanian nationality practices abortion on a large scale,” Romani women do not do the same, thereby creating a situation in which “Romanian natality” (meant as “non-Roma”) decreases by comparison (p. 242). The report recommendations are laid out in terms of abortion and contraception policy to particularly affect Romani women, commenting on the fact that current policies allow for the “exaggerated proliferation of Gypsies” (p. 241).

Connected to the natality politics, a “politics of hygiene” frame emphasizes rampant disease within the Romani community. The last paragraphs of the 1981 report switches suddenly from measures to curb

nality to a discussion of tuberculosis among Roma (p. 241). This connection points to an inescapable conclusion: less Roma, less disease. The report notes that Roma are vectors of widespread illnesses and create “foci of chronic parasitism” that requires the state to use thousands of kilograms of soap and insecticide. Remarkably, the report moves from mentioning literal parasites that need to be treated with insecticide, to then equating Roma with parasites and pointing to their parasitic behavior: “one can appreciate the fact that the hypothesis of the increase in the number and preponderance of the Gypsy population in a more accentuated rhythm than the Romanian population will also lead to an increase in negative consequences of socially parasitic behaviour among the Gypsies” (p. 242). The notion of parasitism is therefore doubly connected to supposed unwillingness to work and literal diseases.

A “hostility frame” dominates the state discourse in these documents. The word “hostile” and the phrase “hostile attitude” are consistently employed to characterize Romani attitudes toward work, education, child rearing, and general social norms. Romani hostility is described as a package of social, economic, cultural, and political attitudes. The cultural and political hostility is highlighted in an intense surveillance campaign that tracks all linguistic, ethnographic or historical research activities on the part of Romani intellectuals. The files delineate a dual hostility: Roma are accused of rejecting the “new educational dimensions of patriotic socialism” (ACNSAS 11216, Vol 14, p. 141), and at the same time of seeking to educate themselves in “other” cultural ways that undermine the state. A substantial number of documents in the General Fund track correspondence between scholars (Romani sociologists, linguists, historians) or other Roma interested in developing ethnographic work related to Romani culture.^[17]

The moralizing discourse of this dual “cultural hostility frame” permeates the conclusions and judgements of the reports (see ACNSAS D01670, Vol. 4). In the Securitate narrative, both “the vast majority” of illiterate Roma and those with advanced degrees are united in their recalcitrant attitude toward Romanianness. The reports spill much ink depicting Roma as dysfunctional, disengaged, and uneducated, yet at the same time they reserve a significant amount of space to monitoring Romani cultural and scholarly activity and outreach, both at home and abroad (see D016710, Vol. 4, p. 619–655; ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 13). The files contain personal and official correspondence between Romani individuals on a variety of topics, from international Romani Congresses to discussions about the Romani language, publications, radio reports, and research on Roma ethnography, folklore, and history. The concern with Romani linguistics and culture is consistently filtered through an “anti-Romanian frame.” As an example, a 1988 order for the county of Bacau solicits information about various type of activities undertaken by Romani “elements” that could generate “hostile attitudes of a nationalist, anti-Romanian nature” (D 016710, Vol. 4). Efforts of Romani cultural outreach are classed as the result of an “anti-Romanian attitude” and perceived as a threat to state security (ACNSAS D016710, Vol. 4, p. 620).

One document cautions against the dissemination of scholarly work such as Ian Hancock’s book “The Pariah Syndrome” (1987) and comments that “the author tackles the Gypsy problem in an inappropriate

17 Intercepted correspondence includes items such as lists of Romani proverbs in three languages (Romani, English and French) ACNSAS File 11201, Vol. 13, p. 142-145; or copies of magazine articles and Radio Free Europe reports about Roma (see ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 11).

way” (*in mod necorespunzător*) (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 13, p. 243). The report also notes that the book delivery was successfully intercepted, and it never reached its destination. Another document captures the correspondence of a Romani retiree who intends to put together a work of “Romalogy” and is gathering material to that end. A handwritten note on the corner of the report urges further action: “it should be analyzed with extreme care. Come, so we can decide what to do! Where are they? The original material? Don’t let them get to destination” (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 13, p. 132).

Two separate sets of reports from dozens of Romanian counties respond to a state appeal to put the Roma community under surveillance and identify any “elements” interested in attending Romani Congresses abroad (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 13, p. 170–188). In each set, only a handful of counties identify any individual aware of the Congress, yet virtually all reports are concluded with the typical Securitate directive of “intensifying surveillance work” in order to “prevent and curtail” any possibility of developing interest in these gatherings. Individual reports of surveilled Roma are awkwardly filed under the category “Persons without political or criminal priors,” yet they continue to be intensely monitored by the state for possible “hostile” intent. Tellingly, the county reports also feature a slew of handwritten notes jotted down in the margins by the investigative officer at the central Securitate office.^[18] The brief notes consistently urge for more action and ask further questions that direct the investigation: “We must know what the present situation is;” “Start a folder to monitor the phenomenon” (about a Romani Congress); “Analyse in all seriousness; this news has reached our Gypsies;” “Everything you have on the Gypsy, bring to me!” (see ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 13, 170–188).

Other handwritten notes request pre-emptive measures that require reaching out to Secret Police services abroad to make them aware of Roma attending conferences and Congresses. Further notes request “rigorous control” and ascertaining the “loyalty of the information network,” followed by sending up the chain the appropriate requests for action. Consistently, investigative notes increase urgency and Securitate activity on typical issues of public and civic life, like Romani fairs and international Romani congresses. The notion of cultural support and possible transnational unity of Roma is analyzed for its potential to fuel Roma claims for a special ethnic minority status (see Matei 2021). The idea of protective rights for the Romani minority registers as a threat and it is covered by the Securitate as evidence of hostility and an anti-Romanian attitude.

The Prescriptive Frame: The Internment-Societal Complex

The descriptive metanarrative is a palimpsest of overlapping frames that identify the “problems” of the Romani community: hostility, resistance to work and education, promiscuity, and parasitism. The corresponding prescriptive frame advances “solutions” anchored in two main discourses: the need for the state to be proactive and forestall the “Gypsy problem,” and an emphasis on far reaching bureaucratic-

18 The notes (written by the higher rank officers overseeing investigations) are generally scribbled in cursives on margins and sometimes over the typewritten text of the report. Regrettably, the modern CNSAS electronic stamp sometimes obscures text at the top of the documents. Overall, the handwritten text is difficult to decipher, and parts are illegible.

institutional and societal measures to address this “complex problem.” An anticipatory frame is present across the plethora of reports, which prescribe consistent surveillance measures, even in the absence of specific individuals with so-called “hostile intentions.” The prospect of international Romani Congresses or even domestic Romani festivals triggers intense Securitate activity that generally yields no suspects or so few that their names and “antecedents” can be comprised on one page. General acts of surveillance are linked with an additional layer of inquisitorial stringency focused on Romani “intellectuals”. Roma are categorized by educational level and the names of prominent, highly educated Roma are systematically reported to the central office by county authorities despite the lack of any “criminal or political priors.” Their correspondence is xeroxed or stopped, and their contacts are recruited as informers.

Time and again, the dozens of county reports sent to the central Securitate office use forceful language urging state organs to pursue institutional measures that “prevent and neutralize possible hostile activities.” The editorial verbiage is heavily punctuated with directives to “intensify the informative-operative work” and “engage in measures of response and counter-propaganda” against those with “suspicious concerns.”^[19] When the state does not identify the “objects” of surveillance, the conclusion is that state tools have not been “firmly implemented” enough to allow for finding the culprits (see ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 13, p. 45–74). Lack of “informative results” is presented as a shortcoming of the apparatus rather than the absence of hostile activity. Reports use seemingly self-reflecting, even self-critical language that points to implementation shortcomings that must be overcome through ever more “intense” activity. A presumption of guilt looms large over the ideological-operative measures of the Securitate state. The invitation to “intensify” further “firm measures” is open-ended and can only logically stop once the predicted culprits are identified.

Romani children and youth, in particular, are treated as recalcitrant members of a work-oriented society focused on industrial progress. In this context, “productive work” is narrowly defined as filling the place allocated by the state, while traditional trades are targeted for elimination. Reports mention “measures to annul and desist authorization for Gypsies who practice occupations outside the framework of organized state and cooperative work” (ACNSAS, 11201, Vol. 15, p. 12). “Temporary occupations” are equally discouraged and regulated.^[20] The state proposes measures of “reeducation” that “intensify the cultural-educative activity” to socialize young Roma into state organized work (p. 10). Refusal to enroll in “useful activities”, branded as “parasitism” is met with both legal punishment and a socio-political campaign of social pressure (p. 11).

Overall, government measures converge toward an institutional mechanism of controlling Romani lives through interment institutions or their equivalents. Reports consistently propose what is opaquely

19 See, for example, county reports in ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 13, p. 45-74 all dated 1989 which respond to order nr. 123/PV/D/0074860 (09.16.1989) to provide information regarding the participation of any Roma in the “National Council for Christian Roman.”

20 Instructions go to the level of detailing how the state should deal with the collection of recyclables, activities perceived as being primarily undertaken by Roma: “Also, regarding activities of a temporary nature (the collection of bottles, down feathers, various refuse etc.), socialist units, both state and cooperative, should issue nominal authorizations valid only in a limited area in the county of domicile” (CNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 12).

termed “conjugated programmes of permanent activities” to “diminish and eliminate a negative state of affairs” (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 27). The institutional “conjugation” charts the deployment of vast social and institutional mechanism of control and surveillance. For instance, education reports require mandatory enrollment in state schools, testing, and allocation of Romani children in “reeducation units” if they are found to be intellectually, physically or “morally impaired,” or mandatory “special educational institutions” if they have other physical or intellectual challenges (p. 10–11).^[21] The ambiguous language of reports captures large swathes of behaviors. Romani children who “commit criminal acts or are *exposed* to them, exhibit vicious behaviour or *negatively influence* other minors should be interned in special reeducation schools” (emphasis added; p. 10). Lack of school attendance is punished by cutting off a Romani family’s child support allocation. The language of these directives leaves space for interpretation, from what “exposure” is, to what “negative influence” might look like. The interpretive power rests with state functionaries and those civic bodies empowered to reach into Romani lives to police their behaviors.

In an effort to extend the long arm of state law, reports propose that the best way to reach Roma en masse is to create a broad, collaborative social-institutional system that involves people at every level of bureaucracy as well as civil society members (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, 1978 Report, p. 21–36). This socio-administrative collusion meant to bring Roma to heel is led by the Orwellian “Central Committee for Coordination and Reeducation,” an institution created at the direct request of President Nicolae Ceausescu (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 35). This committee patents an inverted, *outside-in bureaucracy* – a system based on a broad civic base guided by the administrative center and meant to turn society at large into a mechanism for policing the Roma. The system relies on the “intense participation” of so-called “help collectives” (*colective de sprijin*) which include parliamentarians, teachers, doctors, lawyers, administrators from Internal Affairs, and representatives of youth and child organizations, teacher-parent associations, collectives of women/mothers, as well as representatives of other local institutional branches and a party secretary (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 8, 34); where appropriate, the committees are supposed to recruit some influential or “more advanced Gypsies,” but only if they exhibit “appropriate behaviour” (*comportament corespunzător*). The goal of these committees is to intensify social and legal control and take firm legal measures against all Roma who lead a parasitic life (a zero-tolerance policy). Regardless of what is required of the broader population, Roma are to be subjected to “mandatory immunizations” for a variety of diseases. This requirement is coupled with commentary regarding the sad state of hygiene in Romani communities (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 11). Lack of compliance with “civilizational” norms is perceived to require additional vaccinations, quarantining, and interventions from schools and community groups. Recommendations favor disciplinary language, which requires compliance and swift enforcement.

The society-internment complex is connected with the forced sedentarization of Roma (ACNSAS 11201, Vol. 15, p. 3). The prescriptive frame is dominated by language marshalling Roma into state institutions tied to a specific location. Whereas Romani trades allowed Roma to travel, state work ties to them to fields or factories. At the same time, medical language reduces Romani communities to “foci of infection,”

21 The results of this policy were disastrous for the Roma community. Roma children entered various special schools in overwhelming percentages. See the Schvey et al. report 2005; also Danka & Rostaş 2012.

and allows the state to break up “concentrations” of Roma at the edges of villages or towns. Romani communities are subjected to a medical segregation policy framed as essential for public safety.

On the repetitive lists of “civilizational” efforts, Roma are presented as the object of mandatory, punitive state intervention guided by the “dispositif.” The language is notable for both its institutional mandates and its paradoxes. Reports recommend that the state should “enforce norms for social coexistence” putting together the monopoly of state violence (“enforcement”) and the language of “coexistence.” “Coexistence” here means “others” being forced to live by the standards defined by the dominant group. The state gaze conflates “coexistence” and “assimilation.” The result is a socio-political siege of the Romani population founded on networks and systems channeling them into state control through education, employment, and medical measures resulting in the *society-internment complex*.

Conclusion: A Fixable Object

The language deployed in the Securitate representation of Roma is quasi-scientific and instrumental. The inquisitorial record serves the ideological purpose of the state to “civilize” and control its object. Orientalist notions (laziness, lack of work ethic, promiscuity, immorality, backwardness etc.) coexist with a project of assimilation presented as necessary and progressive. But the “civilizing” discourse creates a threat scenario: identified as resisting the socio-economic trappings of modernity, Roma are presented as increasingly hostile to state order. Reports document resistance and institutional failures that require ever more violent corrective and preemptive measures. Where subversive behavior is not found, it is assumed by the anticipative framework of the institutional gaze. The declarative policy of inclusion gives way to exclusionary measures predicated on a constellation of undesirable but ultimately fixable traits. Despite the racialized, orientalist discourse of Securitate presentations, state mechanisms aspire to a transformational process that brings state and social institutions in total alignment. Roma are the fixable object of a state project.

In the programmatic effort to achieve the goal of state socialism, representation (the image of Roma in the file) is framed as presentation (what is; the reality on the ground). The “enunciatory subject” and agent of power presents the object of its power as malleable, and the study conclusions appear true and inescapable. The agents of power embody both expertise and common sense: the study itself is framed as both commonsensical (the “mundane truth” that everyone can observe) and scientific (it meshes with structured study done by “experts”). This echoes Goffman’s (1961) “moral career” of state experts and reflects the combination of selective “commonsense” sensibilities that fit the state and the pretense of expertise. The “normalizing judgement” (Foucault 1975) of state experts artificially streamline observations to highlight purportedly repetitive and idiosyncratic behavior reifying Romani ethnicity. Roma are thus presented as knowable and “fixable” through policies and practices that must engage the total institutional and civic apparatus.

The difficulty and the richness of studying the language of these files has to do with identifying hermeneutic layers. Meaning is created with reference to the audience (the state), the enunciatory subject (state agents), and the enunciatory object (the Romani minority) – each of these with their own political

teleology. These perspectives jostle for attention, and surface and resurface unevenly throughout the texts. The overarching ideological perspective lends the text an interpretive framework, but we can learn more about the way in which the state deployed its sovereign logic by tracing frame “clues”. Handwritten notes disproportionately urge further action; “off-script” accounts focus on a pathology of social deviance that prays on familial and social norms of trust and solidarity. Repetitive references to “hostility” and the emphasis on parasitic behavior produce an image of the Romani community as an external organism that drains the body of society. The uneducated, diseased, and promiscuous Roma suck resources and corrupt socio-political organization. Their presence is a literal and social disease, and the solution is to control and neutralize them through segregation measures implemented by both social and political institutions acting in concert.

Hegemonic discourse requires the transformation of Roma into corrective subjects. The operating assumption is that Roma can be forced to join schools, they can be educated out of their “backward” culture, and they can join the civilizational ranks of “advanced socialism” within existing state structures that discipline them. The prescriptive assumption guides the descriptive frame which identifies “shortcomings” that are fixable with vigorous state intervention. Romani “illumination” is a project of the unitary state, and Roma must be forced into that corporatist unity. Despite the slew of imputed behavioral (laziness, unwillingness to work or contribute, resistance to solidarity), cultural (persistence of “backward” Romani language and beliefs, affinity for gold), and social (promiscuity, early marriages) issues, Roma are not presented as incorrigible. That would defeat the purpose of state intervention. Instead, they are presented as a project to be achieved with the help of appropriate expertise and “sufficient” state action. Some file fragments point directly to the lax policies “of the past,” which led to the sorry condition of Roma in the present, and the language imputes ineffective or weak intervention for the poor results. It is therefore state inaction that allows for what is presented as the deviant behavior of this fringe group and only *more* state action can correct it and normalize it. Hegemonic self-critique presents an opportunity to consistently expand the power of the state and its violent interference.

Despite the pretense of structured study in demography, the language of the files encompasses a slew of stereotypes presented as fact (including selective examples of criminality used to comment on the character of all Roma) and the policy recommendations come down to policing Roma rather than addressing behaviors and stereotypes in the general population, and the connected structures of power. The state takes charge (Foucault 1976, 143) of Romani lives, and these lives come under intense state scrutiny. They are subjected to cultural, social, and medical surveillance and expressions of political and cultural rights are criminalized. Securitate documents frame Roma as the quintessential subject of state biopolitics.

More research is necessary to articulate the contours of these biopolitical mechanisms. This study is meant to provide a starting point and open several questions about both political and socio-cultural mechanisms. For instance, archival research can particularly highlight the apparent focus on Romani women in these files and the role of the state security apparatus in controlling their bodies, culturally and medically. In-depth research can also articulate the way in which the cultural-nationalist discourse of the Roma was perceived in Securitate archives, by state police cadres, and within the context of Romanian communist nationalism. Additional research can explore how these archives showcase the way in

which political systems function across administrative levels (state vs county/national vs. local) and how micromanagement of local political forces feeds into the national structure to build one repressive mechanism dedicated to social engineering. The dynamic of power must also be traced in comparative perspective between fascist, communist, and post-communist regimes in Eastern Europe and beyond, in order to establish patterns of continuity and change that inform the way in which current invasive and repressive policies (including fingerprinting, medical castration policies, and the creation of special “villages” for Roma) construct the modern state in a way that continues to centralize the monopoly of state violence and control the lives of the Romani population.

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