

# Non-Romani Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity: Queer(y)ing One's Own Privilege

## Lucie Fremlova

lucie.fremlova@gmail.com

Postdoctoral Research Fellow  
Romani Studies Program, Central European University

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7123-702X>

Dr. Lucie Fremlova is a senior research associate, University of Portsmouth (previously a postdoctoral fellow, Romani Studies Program, Central European University). Her doctoral thesis investigated the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, intersex and queer/questioning (LGBTIQ) Roma. She is the recipient of the 2018 Council for European Studies Gender and Sexuality Research Network Best Early Career Researcher Paper Award and an Economic and Social Research Council postdoctoral fellowship grant for her research that challenges stereotypical representations of LGBTIQ Roma. She has authored numerous policy and research reports and papers and co-authored a book chapter.



## Abstract

This paper considers the positionality and reflexivity of non-Romani, ally-identified researchers vis-à-vis insider/outsider research by critically examining – or queer(y)ing – non-Romani researcher identity and the privilege that goes with it. On a theoretical level this can be facilitated by, for example, queer theoretical concepts and the concept of critical whiteness. Critical whiteness is “queer” by virtue of being counter/non/anti-normative in relation to whiteness as a social norm (white-normativity). In practical terms, employing queer, feminist, and critical whiteness methodologies means that reflective and reflexive researchers conducting research “with,” “for,” and “on” Roma do not “have to be” Romani in order to participate in knowledge production on Romani communities. Nonetheless, it implicates their ability to critically examine their own privilege and challenge it accordingly, that is, not only academically but also politically and socially.

## Keywords

- Non-Romani
- Positionality
- Reflexivity
- Identity
- Queer
- Methodology
- Critical whiteness

## Introduction

After centuries of studying without being studied, of examining without being examined (or so they thought), white scholars have found themselves face-to-face with an other that stares back at them, writes back, and analyzes back, and perhaps they have felt, as Sartre (1988, p. 291) felt, ‘the shock of being seen’ (Emirbayer and Desmond 2012, 581).

Romani intersectional feminist and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, intersex, queer/questioning (LGBTIQ) scholars often have been marginalized and excluded from Romani Studies and the mainstream, predominantly heteronormative Romani rights movement. However, there are “new” intersectional feminist and LGBTIQ Romani voices who have succeeded in showing alternative ways of treating Romani identities and identifications, that is, not through an exclusively ethnic lens but as multiple and intersecting. The articles contained in the special issue of *Roma Rights Quarterly* “Nothing About Us Without Us?” (2015) ask for the long-overdue inclusion and participation of Romani scholars in knowledge production that non-Romani scholars have been accustomed to and often have taken for granted. In a partial response to Stewart’s (2010) call for Romani Studies to transcend the “ethnic frame of reference,” the special issue goes much further. It presents a “new paradigm,” which seeks to include both Romani and non-Romani critical voices by asking (hence the question mark in the title of the issue) a series of questions, including questions regarding researcher positionality and reflexivity.

Recently, Stewart (2017) issued an academic warning on “the dangers of a close-society research paradigm” in relation to Critical Romani Studies. Debating this “rhetorical riposte to exclusion” (138), Stewart “question[s] whether discussing issues around the ‘authority to speak’ will advance the substantive issues that ought to concern all scholars in this field, Romani and non-Romani” (*ibid.* 125). One certainly may agree with the notion that “closed-society paradigms” are prone to being problematic or even dangerous due to often being signs of conservatism or dogma. In this vein, it is worth remembering that Romani Studies, a subject field which, until very recently, has been dominated by non-Romani (white), middle-class, often heterosexual, cis male scholars, provides an example of such orthodoxy – something that Stewart himself partially admits – thus raising a series of questions regarding researcher positionality and reflexivity.

Researcher positionality and reflexivity fundamentally impact all aspects of how social science researchers do qualitative research. This article primarily stems from Chapter 4 “Queer Intersectional Ethnography As a Methodology” of my doctoral thesis, “The Experiences of Romani LGBTIQ People: Queer(y)(ing) Roma” (Fremlova 2017), whose aim it was to contribute knowledge by shedding light on the lived experiences of Romani LGBTIQ people, an area which is largely unexplored in Romani Studies (and in queer theorizing, too); and to queer(y) historically constructed, stereotypical, and essentialized narratives about Romani LGBTIQ people. The article is an epistemological reflection that considers the methodological issues of non-Romani researcher positionality and reflexivity, what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, 68) termed “reflexive sociology.” It starts by outlining the main tenets of research positionality and reflexivity. Underpinned by Hall’s (1996b) conceptualization of “new ethnicities,” it goes on to discuss what “queer” and “queerness” are, and what their deployment can achieve in terms

of avoiding homogenizing and essentializing conceptualizations of “Roma” ethnic identity – not only theoretically but also methodologically. The article then moves to a discussion about the methodology of queer(y)ing ethics and ethnography-informed research, particularly in relation to the outsider/insider binary of the researcher’s position that has implications for and raises important questions about how a researcher is located within different social normativities and how reflexive/reflective they are of their researcher position and other privilege(s). These methodological discussions lead me to an exploration of what it means to be an ally-identified, non-Romani researcher doing research “with,” “for,” and/or “on” Roma, as well as what it means to be a lesbian/queer researcher doing research “with,” “for,” and/or “on” Romani LGBTIQ people, and critically examining – or queer(y)ing – my own privilege in the process.

## 1. Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity: Coming from the Inside and/or the Outside?

There’s no enunciation without positionality. You have to position yourself somewhere in order to say anything at all (Hall 1990, 18).

Positionality refers to a researcher’s discursive *situatedness* in the social world in relation to power relations that are often asymmetrical and exist in inequitable ways. It is “relational, unstable, not fixed and contextually situated” (Grimaldi et al. 2015, 147), determined by *where* the researcher stands in relation to power; this can shift over time and/or in the course of conducting research (Greene 2014). Positionality reflects the ontological and epistemological values and worldviews into which the researcher – the main orchestrator of collecting, collating, analyzing, and interpreting data – is discursively embedded (Gadamer 1975) and enmeshed. It is complemented by a gamut of variable, intersectional, and interlocking factors, such as the researcher’s identities, including ethnicity/race, gender/gender identity, sexuality, socio-economic status and/or class, educational background, dis/ability, political views, religious beliefs, etc. Browne et al. (2017) understand these identities as “reiterated performativities, that are not fixed over the course of the project, but are also seen as relationally constituted, (re-)created through interactions between people, places and things (...), and requiring explicit and ongoing self-reflectivities (...)” (2017, 1379).

It is therefore reasonable to expect that these variables – or “multiple social belongings” (Grimaldi et al. 2015, 138) – impact the “contemplative eye” of the researcher (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 69) and, by extension, the research process, thus “impeding or allowing for certain insights and affecting the researcher’s attitude towards the researched” (Grimaldi et al. 2015, 138). Researchers always brings into their research – the process itself, the product, as well as the researcher-researched relations – their own sets of values, views, and beliefs that are framed by the wider socio-cultural contexts and social systems in which they are embedded and through which they then construct meaning. Grimaldi et al. (2015) warn of the potential risks of reproducing “conventional narratives of cultural inquiry” (Thomas 2003, 45) due to “the lack of attention towards the ‘politics of social research’ (Punch 1994) and its mundane practices and settings” (*ibid.* 136). Additionally, still referring to Thomas (2003), they opine that “this requires the adoption of ‘a more reflective style of thinking’ (2003, 45) about the relationship between knowledge production, research practices, power relations, wider societal frames of meanings/values

and social domination” (*ibid.* 137). Writing about whiteness as a social norm, Emirbayer and Desmond (2012) make the following observation:

Whiteness often informs the types of questions sociologists pursue and the audiences they address. Needless to say, behind each sociological question inevitably stands a whole host of background assumptions. When sociologists attempt, without questioning their own questions, to address such issues, they implicitly affirm the legitimacy of these threads of inquiry (579).

All of this means that very little – if any – qualitative social science research is or can be value-free, however “objective” social science researchers think they are; in turn, the resulting research affects the individuals, social groups, and/or communities under investigation. Additionally, as Browne et al. (2017) observe,

[f]eminist epistemologies across disciplinary boundaries have long understood that there is a politics of location in research, arguing that a ‘view from nowhere’ does not exist (Longino 1993, 137; WGSF 1997). If all knowledge is created through the politics, history and location of where it is produced, then it matters where this knowledge is produced – as well as how, why, and by who (Stanley and Wise 1983; Haraway 1991; Monk and Hanson 1992; Rose 1993; Harding, 1997; Silva and O’Rourke 2016) (1377).

Ultimately, the how, why, where, and who of the positionality/situatedness of a qualitative social science researcher vis-à-vis social normativities – such as white-normativity, heteronormativity, cis-normativity and patriarchy, and the researcher’s ability or lack thereof to navigate them and reflect on them – fundamentally impact on their involvement in all aspects and at every stage of their research.

The relationship between positionality and reflexivity is an organic one: the researcher engages in the process of self-analysis and self-scrutiny, thereby reflecting on their research in the context of their own positionality. Reflexivity entails a self-conscious awareness of the relationship between the researcher (self) and the “other” (Chiseri-Stater 1996; Pillow 2003), as well as of the lenses through which the researcher views this relationship. The notion of reflexivity encapsulates an ongoing process whereby the researcher tries to gain a full understanding of their work, which is linked to their researcher identity and the reasons for conducting the research (Lather 1991a; 1991b). Feminist and critical theory research scholars, such as Harding (1991), Lather (1996), Naples (2003), or Hamdan (2009), consider researcher reflexivity a desirable methodological tool vis-à-vis the position(ality) of the female researcher. Employing researcher reflexivity throughout the process of conducting rigorous academic research requires the researcher to pay close attention to and assess the impact of their involvement in how they devise research methods and methodologies, conceive of the “field,” are able to engage with the participants, collect and collate particular types of data and analyze and interpret them.<sup>[1]</sup>

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1 Besides being reflexive of the workings of social normativities, or “the social unconscious,” reflexivity entails also being reflexive of two additional levels of oft-neglected assumptions or presuppositions: “the disciplinary and scholastic unconscious” (Emirbayer and Desmond 2012, 592), which are beyond the scope of this article but undoubtedly merit much deeper investigation.

## 2. Insider/Outsider Research?

Anthropologists who study their own societies will also add immeasurably to their theoretical understanding of mankind. It has been suggested that lack of fieldwork in the anthropologist's own society is a measure of the anthropologist's 'disassociation' from his own culture and has probably led to distortion in his abilities to grasp another culture (Lewis 1973, 590).

Later in this article, I will focus on my own researcher positionality as both an outsider and an insider. My own experience of being a non-Romani lesbian researcher conducting qualitative research with Romani LGBTIQ people supports the notion that the boundaries between insider/outsider status can be somewhat blurred, and rather than conceiving of it as a binary opposition, it is helpful to conceptualize the role of the researcher on a continuum (Breen 2007; Trowler 2011). For now, I would like to make a few remarks about "insider research": the study of one's own social, cultural group, community, or society (Naples 2003) into which the researcher is enmeshed and "imbricated (...) and possesses an *a priori* intimate knowledge of the community and its members" (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 2013, 251). There, researcher reflexivity naturally has a place, too.

Although insider research has flourished in recent years, the phenomenon spans over four decades (Thorne and Paterson 2000). Additionally, Merton (1972) wrote about some of the academic debates pertaining to insider/outsider research. In anthropology, Lewis (1973) tried to put an end to the colonial and logical positivist argument that "objective" reality about other, "outsider" cultures could be ascertained exclusively by an outsider researcher. Insider research has been conducted across the humanities and social sciences, often with members of marginalized and underprivileged groups and/or communities that are sometimes referred to as "hard to reach," such as sexual/gender or ethnic/racial minorities. Insider researchers may share multiple cultural traits, identities, and/or profound experiences with the community they study or perhaps but a sole category of identification (Chavez 2008). For instance, in feminist research, Chmielewski and Yost (2013), who self-identify as bisexual women, have investigated bisexual women, exploring their own "dual roles [that] blurred the lines between researcher and participant" (242). Insider positionality then refers to "the aspects of an insider researcher's self or identity which is aligned or shared with participants" (Chavez 2008, 475). Additionally, insider researchers may be confronted with methodological and ethical issues regarding access, bias, objectivity/validity, and confidentiality that may be deemed irrelevant to outsider-researchers (Breen 2007; Greene 2014, 3–6). Such a positionality located "within" may affect the type of data gathered, as well as data analysis and interpretation.

Banks (1998) makes the following differentiations: *indigenous-insider* (possessing the values, perspectives, behaviours, beliefs, and knowledge of their respective community); *indigenous-outsider* (perceived by the community as an outsider due to having assimilated into mainstream/outsider culture); *external-insider* (socialized into mainstream/outsider culture, rejecting the cultural values of their community); and *external-outsider* (a visitor, interested in learning more about the group, they are not a part of as they are socialized into a community different from the one they study and have only a partial understanding and appreciation for its cultural values). While the typology itself may be too prescriptive, restrictive, and at times problematic, it does serve as a useful illustration of the wide range of positions one may occupy on

the insider/outsider spectrum. Nonetheless, as Naples (1996) points out, “insiderness or outsidersness are not fixed or static positions, rather they are ever-shifting and permeable social locations (...)” (140). This suggests that neither the insider nor the outsider has “a monopoly on advantage or objectivity” (Chavez 2008, 476). Or, indeed, as Hellowell (2006) argues, one does not have to be a member in order to have and/or gain knowledge of the specific community under investigation.

### 3. Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity in Romani Studies

In Romani Studies, there historically has been an abundance of non-Romani scholars researching and theorizing almost every aspect of the lives of Roma (or “Gypsies,” according to some scholars). Some non-Romani researchers (e.g., Tremlett 2009, 2017; Kazubowski-Houston 2010; McGarry 2010; Grimaldi et al. 2015; Lambrev 2017; Fremlova 2017) have touched upon and/or addressed, albeit to differing degrees, the issue of their researcher positionality and reflexivity. However, there is an urgent need for non-Romani scholars engaging in what is sometimes referred to as “outsider research” to consider and incorporate the topics of researcher positionality and reflexivity on a much larger scale.

Consequently, it is especially critical for academics – especially those who are members of dominant social groups and/or cultures and who engage in researching minority and/or marginalized groups (Bhopal 2010) – be aware of and reflect on their positionality and privilege, all the more so since doing research that highlights difference may contribute to the further marginalization and/or stigmatization of the research participants and their communities (hooks 1990). In Romani Studies, Tremlett (2009), for example, demonstrates how some of the scholarship that seeks to highlight the heterogeneity of Roma minorities often unwittingly contributes to perpetuating the trend of homogenizing and “othering” Roma. Thus, well-meaning research can perpetuate the stigmatization of Roma. Research can inflate the ethnic aspects of the multiple identities of Roma to the exclusion of other identifications or ways in which Roma are and belong as ordinary members of society. Research can also neglect or even ignore Romani ethnicity altogether, thus denying the notion that antigypsyism targets Roma on the basis of Romani ethnicity. This is detrimental to Romani communities. For example, in the Czech Republic, non-Romani scholars Jakoubek and Poduška (2003), Jakoubek and Hirt (2004), and Jakoubek (2004) made highly controversial claims suggesting that the common traits that Roma share are poverty and loyalty to kinship, which in their opinion do not constitute the principle of ethnicity and/or nationality.<sup>[2]</sup> These considerations are particularly salient for the subject field of Romani Studies where there has been a reluctance to engage with critical views. For instance, introducing the concept of critical whiteness (e.g., Roediger 1991; Frankenberg 1997; Levine-Rasky 2002; Vajda 2015) into Romani Studies, in her paper “Towards ‘Critical Whiteness’ in Romani Studies,” Vajda (2015) raises fundamental questions about the structural positionality of white non-Romani scholars in a monological and monocultural vacuum without the input of those most acutely affected by academic racism, i.e., Romani

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2 Subsequently, the legitimacy and validity of these radical versions of constructionism have been questioned by a number of Czech academics (Barša 2004; Elšík 2004) due to the implications and politically detrimental impact the research had on Czech Romani communities, particularly at the local level.

scholars. Consequently, in its current form, Romani Studies actively contributes to recentering hegemonic white power structures. Echoing Spivak's (1987) "epistemic violence," Brooks (2015), for instance, uses the term "epistemological erasure/invisibility" (2015, 61) to refer to the absence of Romani subjects, Romani communities, Romani knowledge production and its producers, whose silence or allegedly "inexpert status" continue to "conserve the West as Subject" (2015, 57). Such epistemic or "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, 4) "can (and often [does]) occur as a result of the intertwining between power relations" (Grimaldi et al. 2015, 134, referring to England 1994, 249) within the research process and practice.

Commenting on whiteness and white positionality being, by default, a benchmark, and a norm against which everything else is measured, Howard and Vajda (2016) argue that:

the invisibility of white positionality is the product of a lack of acknowledgement of the historical processes which have created white, and in this case, non-Romani, privilege and the social norms which maintain this advantage: '[W]hiteness has long reserved the privilege of making everyone but itself visible, lest it be exposed as a position within a constellation of positions' (2016, 44, referring to Leonardo 2002, 41).

Whiteness as a taken-for-granted privilege results in white-normativity. Historically, it has been associated with colonialism and its attendant hegemonic asymmetrical power relations. According to Bhabha (1984), its bearer/enforcer – who can be white or what Fanon (1952) called "black skin/white masks" – produces a mimetic representation that "emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (Bhabha 1984, 126) and knowledge production, for that matter. Similar to the whiteness/white-normativity nexus, male privilege results in another type of social normativity – patriarchy. Feminist, and later intersectional feminist scholarship, have been instrumental in questioning how researcher-researched relations are framed by patriarchy (and other, intersecting axes of inequality). As such, it has long sought to challenge the presumed "neutrality" and "objectivity" of the research process and practice, including reflections on the positioning of the researcher vis-à-vis the "researched" in the process of producing "objective" knowledge (e.g., Harding 1987; Maynard 1994; Morris, Woodward, and Peters 1998; Al-Hindi and Kawabata 2002) and its attendant power relations. The researcher's position(ality) vis-à-vis power relations in the social world is but one of a series of factors, albeit important, that impacts scholarly insight. Taking into account all of the considerations laid out in the two sections above, this article also notes that while the persistent lack of Romani scholars in Romani Studies can be seen as symptomatic of white-normativity as a dominant social orthodoxy – a social phenomenon very much in need of redressing – scholarly and scientific acumen also comes by way of long years of instruction, education, specialized expert training, and rigorous academic research. More often than not, researchers are experts in their respective fields. Nonetheless, their expert status should not – and cannot – be the alpha and omega of social science research. The following section explores two additional aspects of the research process and practice that go hand in hand with positionality and reflexivity, and which impact directly on the epistemology of research:<sup>3</sup> methodology, and theory.

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<sup>3</sup> According to Harding (1987), epistemology is a theory about how knowledge is produced: who can know what and under what circumstances. Methodology is an argument about how method – a technique for gathering and analyzing information – is linked to epistemology (i.e., about the implications of an epistemology for research practice).



## 4. The Researcher As a Cartesian or a Sociological Subject? At the Intersection of Methodology and Theory

As England (1994) remarked, feminism and poststructuralism opened up social science research to “voices other than those of white, Western, middle-class, heterosexual men” (242). Nevertheless, epistemic or symbolic violence is at times still enacted when researching marginalized groups, including Roma, through *epistemocentrism*s, bias, and a focus on the values and concerns of the dominant group (Harding 1987) such as androcentrism and ethnocentrism. This entails the “ethnocentrism of the scientist (...): ignoring everything that the analyst injects into his perception of the object by the virtue of the fact that he is placed outside of the object, that he observes it from afar and from above” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 69–70). Grimaldi et al. (2015) posit that another danger is posed by “neopositivist empiricism” (cited in England 1994, 242):

an epistemology which specifies a strict dichotomy between object and subject as a prerequisite for objectivity and is supported by methods that position the researcher outside of the researched worlds and reduce engagement to a mere nuisance or a possible threat to objectivity. (...) Whereas apparently working to enact an ‘emancipatory, non-exploitive and democratic research practice’ (Punch 1994, 84), the adoption of such epistemological stance poses distance, impartiality and neutral detachment as ‘a criterion for good research’ and constructs the researcher as ‘a carefully constructed public self’ which is ‘a neutral collector of facts’ and objectify the researched as a ‘malleable’ and passive ‘mere mine of information to be exploited’ (England 1994, 243). In this respect, we argue here for the need to challenge the view that ‘science is intrinsically neutral and essentially beneficial’ (Punch 1994, 88). Conversely, we assume as criteria for ethical research: a) the building of relations of mutual respect and recognition, and b) the abandoning of the search for objectivity in favour of critical provisional analysis based on plurality of (temporally and spatially) situated voices and silences (Grimaldi et al. 2015, 145).

The above description of the neopositivist researcher is strikingly reminiscent of the Enlightenment’s ideas about the Cartesian subject as self-determining, self-evident, self-sustaining, coherent, rational, and stable. It was Stuart Hall (1992) who argued that the loss of the Cartesian fantasy of a stable “sense of self” that occurred in the latter part of the twentieth century resulted in “de-centering individuals both from their place in the social and cultural world, and from themselves – (...) a ‘crisis of identity’” (275) and in the emergence of the postmodern subject. The postmodern subject was reconceptualized as fragmented and having “no fixed, essential, permanent identity, (...) composed not of a single, but of several sometimes contradictory or unresolved identities” (*ibid.* 276), “never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (Hall 1996a, 4). This type of subject is also a sociological one: a modern, interactive conception of identity and the self where the inner core of the subject is formed in relation to “‘significant others’ who mediate to the subject the values, meanings and symbols – the culture – of the world he/she inhabit[s]” (Hall 1992, 275). This conception of the postmodern sociological subject is one that is salient not only for the researched but for the researcher as well.

In the above sections, I have established that the researcher's positionality – and researcher identity, for that matter – is a discursive one. At this juncture I would like to look at a number of theoretical considerations emanating from Hall's ideas about identity and identification, and queer theorizing that have a direct methodological and epistemological bearing on the researcher, their positionality, reflexivity, the research process and practice.

From an epistemological point of view, identity – which, for Hall, signified both a “product” as well as a discursive “process” – underwent major reconceptualizations, particularly in the late twentieth century. “Old” collective social identities – or sets of cultural values, symbols, meanings, and systems of cultural representation – were formed along the lines of ethnicity/race, class, nation(ality), and sex/gender as part of essential, universal, homogenous, unified “already-produced stabilities and totalities” (Hall 2000, 45). Hall believed that the main sources of people's cultural identity in the modern world are national and ethnic identities as systems of cultural representation they are born *into*. These “old” collective social identities have been fundamentally transformed, giving rise to “new” types of collective social or cultural identities, which “do not stitch us in place, locate us, in the way they did in the past” (Hall 2000, 63), yielding a much greater degree of plurality and fragmentation. These “new” identities offered a glimpse into a politics that is “able to address people through the multiple identities which they have – understanding that those identities do not remain the same, (...) that they cross-cut one another, that they locate us differently at different moments” (Hall 2000, 59).

Elaborating extensively on a significant shift in conceptualizing the term “black” in black cultural politics in the United Kingdom, Hall ushered in a new approach to conceptualizing ethnic identities or “new ethnicities” as multiple, multifaceted, fluid, constantly changing, and intersecting. “Black” did not cease to denote the specific experiences of individuals who identified as “black”; however, it was no longer sustainable for referencing ethnicity/race in its narrowest sense as the only defining aspect of identity. It was necessary to account for other aspects of identity, or categories of identification, predicated on *difference*. These locate each postmodern subject, qualitative social science researchers included, differently within different social and cultural systems, paradigms, and discourses. This “new” logic of (ethnic) identity grounded in difference enables each subject to “speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture. (...) We are all, in that sense, *ethnically* located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are” (Hall 2000, 447; original emphasis). This means that even the researcher's identity and positionality are *ethnically located*.

When reflecting on identity and identification, Hall was talking about the location or position(ality) of the subject in relation to *difference* from social norms and normativities. That is exactly where “queer” comes in. Just as Hall (2000) calls for an anti-essentialist “politics of recognising that all of us are composed of multiple social identities (...) through their diversity of identifications” (57), in which identity becomes a “movable feast” always (trans)formed by how we are represented and addressed in the surrounding cultural systems (Hall 1996c, 598), Butler (1993) suggests that identities are open to continuous negotiation and influence. Thus, it is in relation to the circumstances surrounding us that we locate our sense of “self”:

Identifications are never fully or finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted, and as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability. They are that which is constantly marshaled, consolidated, retrenched, contested and, on occasion, compelled to give away (Butler 1993, 15).

Halperin describes queer as “an identity without an essence (...), demarcat[ing] (...) a positionality vis-à-vis the normative – a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or feels marginalized because of his or her sexual practices” (1995, 62). Additionally, according to Gamson (1995):

[q]ueerness in its most distinctive forms shakes the ground on which gay and lesbian politics has been built, taking apart the idea of a ‘sexual minority,’ and a ‘gay community,’ indeed of ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ and even ‘man’ and ‘woman.’ It builds on central difficulties of identity-based organising: the instability of identities both individual and collective, their made-up, yet necessary character (390).

In queer theorizing, the term “queer,” which often refers to non-heteronormative sexualities and non-cis gender identities, takes on a new meaning: non/counter/anti-normative. With this in mind, queer theorizing can thus be understood as a critical, counter-normative, anti-identitarian, and anti-assimilationist theoretical approach that looks at the deployment of social norms and interrogates dominant social normativities, orthodoxies, and dualisms: what Butler (1990) calls “regulatory fictions.”

Queer theorizing highlights the unstable and fluid nature of identities, whilst disrupting and doing away with fixed identity categories and socially, discursively produced binaries such as man/woman, gay/straight, heteronormative/homonormative (Browne, Lim, and Brown 2007). It deconstructs and sabotages dominant hierarchies and normativities and takes them “beyond the heterosexual/homosexual binary to a usage of queer theory as an approach that critiques the class, race and gender specific dimensions of heteronormativities as well as homonormativities (...) that does not simply describe and reify the spaces of sexual ‘others’” (Oswin 2008, 96). Queer research, methods, and methodologies can then be seen as any form of research, methods, and methodologies situated within conceptual frameworks that critically examine, uncover, unpack, and explore – or queer(y) – the unstable and taken-for-granted nature of social norms, meanings, and their attendant power relations.

Within queer theorizing one particular queer concept, queer assemblages (Puar 2007), enables a conceptualization of identities and identifications as fluid, rhizomic “becoming/s beyond being/s” (Puar 2005, 128). Such a conceptualization of identities and identifications is very helpful, especially in subject areas such as Romani Studies where, as discussed, identity has tended to be understood primarily along essentialist lines and through an ethnic lens (Fremlova 2017), thus leading to conceptualizations that homogenize and “other” Romani identity.

Nonetheless, “queer” is not without limits or problems. The predominantly white mainstream of queer theorizing was the subject of critique from lesbians of color (e.g., Hull, Scott, and Smith 1982; 1983; Lorde 1984; Anzaldúa 1987) and later from queer of color theorists (Reid-Pharr 2002; Anzaldúa 2002; Ferguson 2004; Gopinath 2005, 3; Eng et al. 2005) for its “disconnect” from and epistemological silences on structural

oppressions experienced by non-white and non-cis queer subjects, such as racism or transphobia (Helen (Charles) 1993) or classism (Cohen 2005). This includes Romani LGBTIQ people, some of whom are striving for basic survival against antigypsyism, homophobia, and/or transphobia. As a result, they do not always have the privilege of choosing to “playfully destabilise” (Tucker 2009, 16) – in a queer way – the very same structures that threaten their lives (Fremlova 2017). Queer of color critique makes up for this deficiency by trying to understand, dissect, and unpick the ways in which discourses of sexuality are inextricable from prior and continuing histories of colonialism, nationalism, racism, and migration.

Queer theorizing has also been critiqued for its neglect of the workings of asymmetrical hegemonic power relations (Yekani et al. 2010) – an area of inquiry attended to by intersectionality (its popularization is largely attributed to Crenshaw 1989, 1991; preceded by Truth 1851; the Combahee River Collective 1977; hooks 1981; Davis 1982; Lorde 1984, 1988; Mohanty 1988). Intersectionality signifies “the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts” (Brah and Phoenix 2004, 76). Importantly, Crenshaw *did not* intend intersectionality as “some new, totalizing theory of identity” (1991, 1244). Intersectionality as it has been applied in Romani Studies by Romani intersectional and critical race theory scholars (e.g., Oprea 2004; Kóczé 2009; Jovanović and Daróczy 2015), has been critiqued, for instance, for fixing and stabilizing identities (Puar 2007) and for failing to interrogate power relations around class (Skeggs 1997), disability, and transgender (Erel et al. 2010). Notwithstanding these critiques, intersectionality still offers one of the most viable and comprehensive theorizing of the workings of asymmetrical hegemonic power relations.

Given the benefits offered by both queer theoretical concepts and intersectionality, I argue for the need to read intersectionality in conjunction with queer assemblages (Puar 2007). Queer intersectionalities enable us to account for the fluidity of identities and identifications or “becoming/s beyond being/s.” Simultaneously, they make it possible to attend to the workings of asymmetrical hegemonic power relations associated with social normativities through which identities and identifications are in a constant process of being discursively shaped and formed. Queer intersectionalities are relevant to the researcher’s positionality vis-à-vis hegemonic asymmetrical power relations that lie at the heart of social normativities. However, it cannot be followed through in this article.

In this section, I have made a number of observations regarding the theoretical underpinnings of identity, including the researcher’s identity, in relation to researcher positionality and reflexivity, which impact directly on the research process and practice. In the following two sections, I proceed to offer some insights into research practice with respect to queer(y)(ing) ethics and ethnography-informed research which I gained during my doctoral research.

## 5. Queer(y)(ing) Ethics and Ethnography-informed Research

I conducted the fieldwork for my doctoral research between 2015 and 2016, having been aligned with Roma-related causes since the early 2000s and involved in Romani LGBTIQ activities and events since 2008. I

participated in the first and second International Roma LGBT conferences in 2015 and 2016, resulting in a particular level of entanglement in a delicate network of friendships and social relations with many of the research participants. It was important for me as a researcher to acknowledge that emotions were an important factor during social interaction with the participants, which manifested in recurrent, socially-recognized routines and/or patterns (Wetherell 2012). Consequently, I came to appreciate that I exercised a “significant influence on the development of the research and the engagement of the participants” (Curtin and Fossey 2007, 92–93). I became aware that this could potentially influence the interpretation of data (Creswell 1998; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Creswell and Miller 2000). Simultaneously, I realized that as someone who has been involved in Romani and Romani LGBTIQ activism and activism-driven research, not only was I “allowed to have a political project in my research (...), I [was] also allowed to ‘perform myself’ as a social actor within the research through the reflexive implication that entangle[d] me into the lives of [the] participants” (Detamore 2010, 168; Denzin 2003). I came to recognize that it was not just my activist background and commitment to social justice and equality but also my emotional attachment to the “cause” and to the participants that was a driving, motivational force behind the research, as well as the events, and which gave meaning to the emotional experience. At the same time, I felt I had a duty to be transparent about that influence by “bring[ing] [my] preconceived beliefs into the dialogue” (Harry, Sturges, and Klingner 2005, 7). I did that by disclosing those aspects that I was aware of to the research participants, along with aspects of my background, including my non-Romani ethnicity that could influence the way in which I conducted the research and analyzed and interpreted the data. As a result, over the course of the fieldwork, I assumed an overt researcher position that moved between the role of “participant as observer” and “observer as participant.”

Despite some of the challenges related to my being non-Romani (discussed below), in order to make sure that all the research participants were fully aware of my “role,” I informed the participants of the exact nature and purpose of the research, of what exactly I intended to do and why at every stage of the research. When the fieldwork took place at events, I made all the participants aware of the nature and purpose of my presence, ensuring that I explained the nature and purpose of the research to the participants after they had received all the information in writing prior to their participation in the research. This degree of openness and transparency was of pivotal importance in terms of the research ethics of the researcher-researched relations, particularly in terms of maintaining my preexisting friendships and relations with the research participants, built on trust, and building new ones. Detamore (2010) refers to these elements that constitute the researcher-researched relations as “ethical formations,” “ethical constructions,” and “ethical terrains” (168–169).

As a result of my “queer” positionality and reflexivity as a researcher interrogating my own privilege (discussed below), the ethics of conducting social science research that makes a maximum effort to not reify and/or reinforce existing normativities, social divisions, and asymmetrical hegemonic power relations became “not merely a management tool for methodology but a methodological tool for the constitution of methods itself” (Detamore 2010, 182). Consequently, “queer ethics” sat at the core of my doctoral research as a method for crafting and defending alternative social worlds (*ibid.* 168).

It is in the rational flip of the ethical and the methodological, of ethics and methods, as a means to constitute complex researcher/researched relations that the queer enters as a technique to explore such assemblages. (...) The result is something unnameable and uniquely special that has the tendency to resemble something that looks much more like kinship (*ibid.* 170, 178).

It was within the context of researcher-researched relations that queer(y)ing ethics as well as my “queer” researcher positionality became constitutive of the methodology.

In my previous research with, for, and/or on Roma, which has spanned the past two decades, I tended to perceive my role as a *messenger* although I often asked myself many questions pertaining to the social positioning and privilege associated with who gets to *emit, carry, and receive the message*, as well as to the discursive context in which this *transmission* takes place. As Jackman (2010) reminds us, “researchers must recognise the role of the ethnographer as mediator and interpreter of cultural text” (116). Rooke (2010) cites “the assumed stability and coherence of the ethnographic self,” reminiscent of the aforementioned neo-positivist/Cartesian conceptualizations of the researcher. She recalls the “considerable criticism ethnography has been subject to due to its epistemological underpinnings and its representational conventions,” and its trajectory from its earlier colonialist, imperialist, ethnocentric versions to postmodern critiques of ethnography. These have led to what is referred to as an interpretative turn – recognizing that ethnography is more than mere cultural reportage, relaying the truth or “reality” of a situation, stressing its role as a cultural construction of both self and the other (Rooke 2010, 25, 27, 28). Ethnography, according to Rooke (2010), is “methodologically untidy, (...) filled with ontological, epistemological and ethical dilemmas” (27, 28). My use of ethnography-informed research in my methodology entailed the introduction of “a queer sociological ethnographic perspective that brings together queer theories of sexual subjectivity and an ethnographic approach to researching identity categories and the practices which generate them (...) [to] counter the tendency towards high abstraction and [over] reliance on theory” (*ibid.* 26) with a view to illuminating complex and abstract concepts such as queer assemblages.

Assemblage has been applied as a research methodology across social sciences (Murray Li 2007; Fox and Alldred 2013, 2015; Wetherell 2014; Alldred and Fox 2015). From a methodological point of view, queer assemblages have an important ethnographic dimension as demonstrated by Puar (2007) who assembled “varied and often disjunctive primary sources” and ethnographic data, including formal interviews, participant observation, and discursive analyses in *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007). Writing about the cross-cultural use of ethnography as a theoretical and practical guide in the study of sexuality, Jackman (2010) recalls Engebretsen’s (2008) claim that ethnography allows for the use of “multifaceted ‘think’ data that enables effective re-thinking of received analytical paradigms” (Engebretsen 2008, 112) in conceptualizing “the situated realities of everyday realities” (Jackman 2010, 116). Jackman thus points to the socially and culturally “constructed” nature of the notion of the ethnographic “field.” He makes a suggestion to reorientate and resituate researchers’ perception of ethnographic “fieldwork” by conceiving of it by means of two related concepts: “queer publics” (Warner 2002, 14) and “queer assemblages” (Puar 2007, 221). Jackman (2010) considers queer publics to be a useful conceptual tool as it is relational and metacultural; it neither delineates clear boundaries nor designates identifiable constituents or bound diffuse social forms in time and space, unlike the “field” (126). In Jackman’s view, the study of queer assemblages entails a more radical, albeit less clearly defined reorientation and repositioning of researchers in relation to conducting research – ethnographies of queer assemblages have the potential to study sexualities and experiences. They also help to facilitate an understanding of identities and identifications as the rhizomic, intuitive, fluid workings of queer assemblages, characterizing links and relationships between constitutive categories of identification that do not assume either an overarching system, structure, groupness, or a common set of roots (Puar 2007, 212, 215). Theoretically and methodologically, this is highly relevant

to and useful for conceptualizations of Romani identities and identifications. Conventionally, within Romani Studies research and scholarship, where Roma constituted the “researched,” non-Romani researchers have theorized Roma through an ethnic lens, thus homogenizing and essentializing Roma predominantly as an ethnic group. In my queer take on ethnography, the researcher-researched relations also were informed by our common identifications and belonging as LGBTIQ on the basis of sexuality and gender identity.

The properties and traits of queer assemblages as both a theoretical concept and a methodology inherently benefit queerness (i.e., non-normativity) thanks to the challenges they pose to ways in which dualisms, binaries, and orthodoxies are deployed. Importantly, the choice of methodology for my doctoral research was informed by the nature of information that I needed to elicit in order to understand the lived experiences of Romani LGBTIQ people and to inform the theoretical considerations with respect to conceptualizing the multifaceted identities and identifications of Romani LGBTIQ people. Ultimately, my ability to collect the data was contingent upon my position(ality) and reflexivity as a researcher, which I discuss in the following section.

## 6. Methodological Reflections on Queer(y)ing Non-Romani Researcher Privilege

I am a lesbian/queer, non-Romani, ally-identified researcher who has worked with and for Roma and on Romani-related issues for almost two decades. On a personal level, I am an individual with long-term emotional attachments to many self-ascribed Roma, including Romani LGBTIQ people, who have been either acquaintances or close and/or good friends of mine. When starting to conduct this research, my personal and professional backgrounds came together. As a researcher, I was aware of beginning to walk a very thin line separating the notion of being an outsider as a non-Roma and an insider as a lesbian/queer person. At the same time, I was also *neither of the two*. Breen (2007) makes a similar observation:

Researchers, particularly those using qualitative methodologies, often position themselves as ‘insiders’ rather than ‘outsiders’ to their research domain. (...) I discuss the role I occupied within my PhD research, including the personal experiences that led me to consider myself to be neither ‘inside’ nor ‘outside’ the research domain. I explore the ways in which my experience ‘in the middle’ influenced my choice of research topic, the scope of my study, access to informants, the collection and analysis of data, and the maintenance of research rigor (163).

I had to critically examine – or queer(y) – how my own “ethnically located” and other forms of privilege were operationalized and how they played out in different contexts. For instance, when I am in the UK, I am (“read” as) a post-doctoral researcher who obtained her doctoral degree at a British university, a middle-class, migrant, lesbian, white, Eastern European female foreigner whose white/non-Romani privilege is perhaps not so obvious because of my migrant status as an EU citizen (made uncertain by the implications of Brexit) and due to not being a native speaker of English. Nevertheless, my position in relation to privilege – hence my researcher positionality – changes when I am in my home country,

the Czech Republic, where a substantial part of the fieldwork for my doctoral research took place. There, I am (“read” as) a post-doctoral researcher who obtained her doctoral degree at a British university, a middle-class, white/non-Romani, Czech, lesbian, female researcher working in the UK, who can pass and passes as straight and whose white/non-Romani privilege is perhaps much more obvious because I am an ethnic Czech and a native speaker of Czech who is also fluent in English and French. Additionally, I am an openly lesbian/queer person who (*still*) exercises a lot of privilege in relation to my social status and my white heritage (I add and emphasize the word “still” because as an openly lesbian/queer person and a female in the Czech Republic, I exercise much less privilege as opposed to straight women and/or men). However, as a white/non-Romani person, I still exercise an enormous degree of privilege.

Ultimately, my being lesbian/queer in my everyday personal life does not automatically “qualify” me to speak on *all* matters related to LGBTIQ issues. By extension, this means that in the academic world, my lesbian/queer identity and identifications *cannot* be regarded as “qualifying” me as a researcher to be an “epistemological insider” (Brubaker 2017) who, by default, can write with legitimacy and authority about *all* LGBTIQ-related topics. For example, in the course of conducting the doctoral research, I made a methodological observation relating to the underlying workings of gender in a collective, and the gender dynamics between men, women, and/or trans/intersex/non-binary people. In such situations, the language used plays a very important role, especially when engaging with participants who are not native speakers of English. In an attempt to find out more about why one particular Romani lesbian woman did not talk much during the focus group, I learnt in a subsequent interview with her that my occasional use of the word “gay” when referring to lesbians was problematic. Even though the words “gay” and “lesbian” may be used interchangeably in English at times, this is not the case in Slavonic languages. I was using vocabulary that signalled to the interviewee what can be termed a “linguistic erasure” of lesbian existence. Even though as a native speaker of another Slavonic language, Czech, and a lesbian, I use the word “lesbian” in Czech on a regular basis, following that experience, I corrected and adjusted my use of the word “lesbian” in English. As a researcher, I felt the need to be attentive to the notion that certain voices tend to dominate while others remain silent. Had I only employed focus groups, I may not have got the voices of Romani women and/or trans and intersex Roma.

While conducting my doctoral research, I had to acknowledge that for me as a lesbian/queer person, a non-Roma and simultaneously a researcher, involvement in the research was not the same as for the Romani LGBTIQ research participants. Therefore, by definition, I *was* an outsider and could not and did not pretend otherwise. And not only that – I was also a non-Romani researcher who was asking Romani LGBTIQ people to share with me their lived experiences so that I could then write a doctoral thesis. This presented a key challenge in a situation where a large portion of academic research *on* Roma – as opposed to *with/for* Roma – has been done by non-Roma. Consequently, there may have been a perception that non-Romani researchers, myself included, were advancing their careers on the back of Roma. Additionally, the impact of some research on Roma has been at times detrimental to Romani communities (for example, research by Jakoubek (2004) or Jakoubek and Poduška (2003)). These considerations became critical aspects of my positionality and reflexivity as a non-Romani researcher. Still, the notion that I am openly lesbian/queer identified, as well as overtly ally-identified, acknowledging openly that Romani identity is an identity that I do not/cannot claim and a heritage that I do not have, came to represent a fundamental link between me as a researcher and the Romani LGBTIQ participants



in the research. This thin line separating the notion of epistemological out/insiderism also enabled me to work towards becoming closer to some of the Romani LGBTIQ research participants; nonetheless, there were a small number of research participants who also participated in the international Roma LGBT conferences and found my position as a non-Roma problematic. This was mainly due to perceptions and assumptions about my heritage made by some of the Romani LGBTIQ participants as a result of my alignment with Romani-related causes and my involvement in Romani LGBTIQ activities and events, particularly the International Roma LGBT conferences.

Since I have been acknowledging openly my non-Romani heritage for almost two decades and have never been elusive about my non-Romani heritage, have never pretended to be Roma and/or been taken for Roma, none of the written information sent to potential participants contained an explicit reference to my heritage. Consequently, unless the research participants had known (of) me before, they had no way of knowing whether I was non-Romani or Romani. When those research participants who also participated in the conferences eventually met me for the first time, a few were unpleasantly surprised when I said I was non-Romani. This realization led me to appreciate that my non-Romani positionality as a researcher was an issue.

While conducting fieldwork, one of the research participants helped clarify some of the ways in which assumptions about my ethnicity and the eventual realization that I was not Romani related to experiences of antigypsyism, and how these considerations were key to subsequent interactions. I planned to hold a focus group with four self-identified Romani LGBTIQ people whom I had identified and contacted several weeks before. When I approached the potential participants on the day the focus group was supposed to take place, I reiterated that participation was voluntary, everything was anonymous, and all references to places would be removed. One of them started asking me about the guiding questions and why I was asking specifically about Roma. I explained that I was asking only those people who self-identified as Romani and LGBTIQ. The person said they felt that the questions were formulated in a way that suggested that Roma were somehow different from non-Roma, as if to suggest Romani people's sexuality was different. I said that although their response was legitimate, it was not my intention, and that it would be okay to have a discussion about exactly that during the focus group. Then I stepped away for a bit and when I came back, they were still discussing the guiding questions. However, it was clear that the Romani LGBTIQ people did not want to take part. I said that I respected their decision and I left it at that. About two months later, I received the following message from one of the Romani LGBTIQ people who had originally agreed to participate in the focus group, along with permission to use it in subsequent publications:

I just wanted to tell you that I was thinking a lot when I wasn't sure to do the interview or not. I am sorry. It's not very easy to trust 'white' people. Too often, we get abused from them or I wasn't sure what happens exactly with the information you get. It was not personal. And I still thinking of that. I don't understand, I felt very bad. It's not easy for us. This paranoia is very deep with white people (anonymous).

In this communication, the Romani LGBTIQ person was referring to the reasons for their initial decision not to do the focus group. My non-Romani ethnicity was the element linking their experiences of anti-Romani racist abuse from non-Romani (white) people with their reluctance and suspicion. In the

subsequent exchange of messages, at no point did I ask the person whether they would be willing to participate in the research. In the end they suggested that they wanted to participate in the research by sharing their story.

Looking back, I can appreciate that the responses by some of the conference participants were understandable, especially when taking into account the lived experiences of antigypsyism: a term I use in line with the definition proposed by the *Alliance against Antigypsyism* (2016).<sup>[4]</sup> In addition to these considerations, as a lesbian/queer person, I also can conceive of a situation where someone might be co-organizing an LGBTIQ/queer-themed conference and because of that, others, myself included, might make the assumption that the person is LGBTIQ. Consequently, my interaction with them might be impacted upon finding out that they are straight: an “outsider”, “representative” of the very normativity that the LGBTIQ/queer-themed conference challenges. Similarly, some of the conference participants made the assumption that I was Roma and were taken aback, disappointed and/or unpleasantly surprised upon finding out this was not the case.

One solution to this dilemma could have been to include a reference to my non-Romani ethnicity in the written communication with the research participants – something that I will consider for my future research activities. Regardless, all of the above considerations raise some important questions about the “epistemological out/insider” binary. Recalling the concept of “critical whiteness” that Vajda (2015) brought to Romani Studies, she makes the following claim:

[T]he project of Romani emancipation will have difficulty moving forward until the concept of critical whiteness is incorporated into it, both theoretically and practically. I contend that until such time that non-Romani people are willing and able to examine their own racialised identity, even those non-Roma who are committed to dismantling the discrimination experienced by Romani communities will be unable to play a powerful role in this process; whereas those non-Roma who are indifferent, resentful of or actively hostile to Roma could be persuaded to budge from their positions through a deeper understanding of the history of their own identities and how these are formed and performed in the present (48).

What Vajda is proposing is “queer” by virtue of being counter/non/anti-normative in relation to whiteness as a social norm (white-normativity). In practical terms, it means that a “critical-whiteness” researcher

4 The definition proposed by the Alliance against Antigypsyism (2016) to signify:

a historically constructed, persistent complex of customary racism against social groups identified under the stigma ‘gypsy’ or other related terms, and it incorporates:

A homogenising and essentializing perception and description of these groups;

The attribution of specific characteristics to them; Discriminating social structures and violent practices (...), which have a denigrating and ostracising effect and which reproduce structural disadvantages. (...)

The term Antigypsyism – in citing the majority’s projections of an imagined out-group of ‘gypsies’ which simultaneously constructs an imagined in-group – is analytically more accurate and makes clear that other groups – Sinti, Travellers, manouches [sic], Egyptians – are equally affected (Alliance against Antigypsyism 2016, 5–6; emphasis added).

“Antigypsyism” is spelt with a lowercase “g” to refer to the notion of an imagined, essentialized group of “gypsies,” to whom non-Roma stereotypically attribute specific traits, thus marking them as essentially “distinct,” “different.” This difference is then embedded systemically within dominant social structures and practices that (re)produce structural disadvantage and oppression.

does not “have to be” Romani; however, it implies that they are able to critically examine their own white/non-Romani privilege and challenge it accordingly, not only academically but also politically and socially. By the same token, a “queer” researcher does not “have to be” LGBTIQ; however, if they are straight, it implies that they are able to critically examine their own straight/heteronormative/cis-normative privilege and challenge it accordingly at all levels: academically, politically, and socially.

## Conclusion

The researcher’s positionality within the social world vis-à-vis power relations may be seen by some as an essentialist, preexisting, “always-already-produced” condition – something that existed prior to the researcher starting the investigation or even prior to the person becoming a researcher. While this may be true of natural sciences, in the course of the social science research process, researcher positionality develops and unfolds discursively, in relation to others, especially the researched. Therefore, positionality, which is underpinned by identities (re)constituted through relations among people (particularly researcher-researched), places, and things, is relational, context-dependent, fluidly shifting on a spectrum, or continuum, where one “pole” may be seen as representing “insiderness” and the other “outsiderness.”

There are undeniable benefits to insider research, as shown by feminist, queer, critical whiteness, and other research. This is the case especially when researching historically misrepresented groups and communities such as Roma. In Romani Studies, a subject field with a long colonialist legacy, Romani researchers have been severely underrepresented, leading to an epistemic invisibility or even erasure enacted at times through non-Romani research ethnocentrism. Yet, whether the researcher is a member of the group/community under investigation or not, their identity *cannot* be regarded as the sole – although it is very important – criterion “qualifying” or “disqualifying” them as an epistemological insider/outsider to write with legitimacy and authority about *all* topics related to the social group(s) with whom they share the same identity/identifications.

The researcher’s “cultural,” ethnically-located identity is reflected in their discursive, spectrum-like positionality vis-à-vis power relations; this impacts all aspects of the research process, including the interaction and relations with the researched. Using my own experience of being a non-Romani lesbian/queer researcher conducting research with Romani LGBTIQ people, I demonstrated that despite being non-Romani (outsider), it was through my lesbian/queer (insider) and *neither-of-the-two* positionality that I was able to negotiate the relations between myself (the researcher) and the participants (the researched). This means that the social locations of “insiderness”/“outsiderness” do not exist as a binary opposition; nor are they static but rather ever-shifting, complementary, and permeable. Reflexivity then entails an ability to critically examine the nature of these shifting ethical terrains as part of an ongoing research process, whereby the researcher tries to understand themselves, their researcher identity, and the researcher-researched relations by viewing their work with a contemplative eye.

As research methodology, this reflexive, contemplative process implies a close link between researcher positionality, ethics and the “field.” Queer(y)ing ethics and ethnography-informed research allows for the reconceptualization of the “field” or “fieldwork,” as well as for the emergence of alternative types of

relations between the researcher and the researched. These alternative, non-normative, non-hierarchical, assemblage-like relations help reorient the researcher's positionality, including through their use of reflexivity. For example, in my queer take on ethnography-informed research, the researcher-researched relations were influenced by our common identifications and belonging as LGBTIQ, that is, on the basis of sexuality and gender identity rather than foregrounding the dichotomy of Romani/non-Romani ethnic identity – a factor which played a significant role nonetheless.

While researchers are required to adhere to their respective ethical protocols, they still exercise a significant degree of flexibility with respect to how exactly they *do* ethics in the “field.” Based on my experience of queer(y)ing ethics as a methodological tool for constituting the method of conducting research that makes a maximum effort to not reinforce existing normativities and divisions, I have argued in this article that whether non-Romani or Romani, hetero/cis-normative, or LGBTIQ-identified, a queer and/or critical whiteness researcher has an opportunity to avoid reproducing conventional social paradigms and narratives by espousing a critical, queer-informed approach to research. This may entail the researcher's sensitivity to, for example, Romani participants' previous experiences of antigypsism – or by the same token, LGBTIQ participants' previous experiences of homo/bi/transphobia – which are likely to play a role in their subsequent interactions with the non-Romani – or non-LGBTIQ – researcher. Such a positionality vis-à-vis the normative thus enables the researcher to critically examine – or queer(y) – their privilege by virtue of being reflexive and reflective of their positionality within these norms and the role it plays in the research process and practice.

Given the researcher's discursive role and positionality within the research process, one aim of Critical Romani Studies, informed by critical approaches such as queer theorizing and/or critical whiteness, could be to conceptually grasp the theoretical, methodological, and analytical underpinnings of non-Romani researchers producing knowledge about/on Roma and what kind of knowledge is thus produced (and to do so at least as much as Roma have been theorized). It would be desirable if particularly non-Romani researchers asked themselves questions including but not limited to the following:

- What role is played by my positionality as a non-Romani person researching issues of ethnicity/race in relation to Roma?
- Do I have white/non-Romani privilege and if so, how does it impact my research?
- How do I use my positionality to navigate different spaces? How is it operationalized?
- How does my positionality influence the interactions that I have with research participants?

The ability of researchers from dominant social groups/communities such as non-Roma and/or non-LGBTIQ to reflect on these or similar questions would be a significant step towards establishing research processes and research practices that provide rigorous academic insight and that understand, endorse, and promote the principles of social justice.

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