VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF ROMA IN CONTEMPORARY HUNGARIAN PHOTOGRAPHY

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore how the current photographic discourse is shaped about Roma in Hungary. Photography is a particularly interesting system of representation to consider, due to the fact that the photograph is still considered as a representation rather than an interpretation of reality. By using the photo database of the Chachipe on-line photo competitions, I argue that the photographic discourse constructs Roma identity predominantly along the lines of poverty, marginalization or a romanticized imagination of Romani culture. An image-based analysis of photographs characteristic of this discourse provides insights into some of the strategies that are used by photographers to construct meaning about Roma. I demonstrate how that meaning reflects, and at the same time maintains the broader discourse about Roma as the marginalized "Other" in the current socio-economic context. Finally, based on semi-structured interviews with photographers, I discuss the ethical and professional considerations that shape the representation of Roma communities. These are defined by a moral call to contribute to social change, and build to a large extent on the photographic conventions of the 1990s. The field of photography allows rather limited influence for Roma communities to shape the discourse about their own identity.

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Introduction

On the occasion of International Roma Day on April 8, 2015, the Roma rights advocate Martin Demirovski wrote an article titled "International Roma Day: A symbol of political unity"[1], which was published on Euractiv.com, an online news portal dedicated to EU-related news and policy debates, accessible in 12 languages and read by 667,494 visitors per month[2]. The article was a contribution to a public debate about the European Roma Institute, a joint initiative by the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations as well as the recently established Alliance for the European Roma Institute. Its supporters assert that the Institute will celebrate Romani arts and cultural heritage; will be a powerful tool to challenge the growing anti-Roma sentiment in Europe and beyond; and will be a source of inspiration and pride for Roma people. The editors at Euractive.com illustrated the article with a photo titled "Begging in Berlin", by photographer Joel Schalit. The photo shows a woman wearing a scarf, sitting on the pavement with a young girl in her lap, with a paper cup in front of them. We also see the back of a passer-by, as well as a rather ironic sentence written on a billboard behind the woman and the child which says "Sorry, we're closed"[3].

The rupture between the message of the article and the meaning of the photo accompanying it is illustrative of the contemporary visual representation of Roma in Europe: the image works as a sign, and it is through this visual sign of the begging woman and child that the readers are expected to find the concept of Roma in their mind.

Representation is a crucial process in every culture, since it is through representation that we make sense of the complex realities around us, and communicate about them with others

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[1] The article is accessible at http://www.euractiv.com/sections/social-europe-jobs/international-roma-day-symbol-endorse-political-unification-313566
[2] Source of data: http://www.euractiv.com/network
[3] The photo can be found at http://www.euractiv.com/sections/social-europe-jobs/international-roma-day-symbol-endorse-political-unification-313566

belonging to the same culture. As Stuart Hall (1997c) points out, representation involves two main stages. The first is the production of mental representations of things – real or imagined - in our minds, which are organized in complex relationships with each other, and into classificatory systems. We–who have heard about Roma–all have a mental representation of the concept of Roma in our head, even if we have never met or spoken with a person of Roma origin. It is through language, the second stage, that we are able to represent the concept of Roma, produce and exchange meaning about them through languages. The signs making up a language cannot only consist of words; sounds, images, facial expressions, etc. can also carry meaning about the world around us (Hall 1997c).

The representation of different groups in our society is not just a technical matter, a simple mirroring of "reality out there". Rather, our representations are human constructions, which are defined by relations of power, and it is the result of a long historical process in each society based on what criteria groups are constituted, how our concept is shaped about a group, and how we interact with, talk about, produce knowledge about a group in society in a given period at a given place.

The picture is even more complicated than that. As Richard Dyer points out very clearly: "…representations here and now have real consequences for real people, not just in the way they are treated (…) but in terms of the way representations delimit and enable what people can be in any given society." (Dyer 1995:3). What he is referring to has two major aspects.

On the one hand, the representation of different societal groups also defines the way people belonging to that group are governed, the general rules of conduct and institutional regulations that apply to them, how they are researched, communicated about, depicted in media or through the arts, what the majority society thinks about them, and what attitudes

other members of the mainstream society develop towards the group. Consequently, the discourse can be enabling, but also disempowering for certain members of the society.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues regarding the discourse of Western colonial powers about the Orient, that "…what we must respect is the sheer knitted-together strength of Orientalist discourse, its very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions, and its redoubtable durability." (Said 1979:6) Based on Said's argument, it is important to emphasize that a discourse about a certain group is not simply a collection of lies, but a coherent system of ideas that structure social interaction and permeate social institutions.

Let me illustrate the above argument through concrete examples. Research data and day-to-day social practices show that the leading discourse about Roma still includes ideas supported by wide social consensus that they are intellectually less capable, genetically prone to crime[4], having lower moral standards[5], and many more. Such beliefs about Roma translate into very concrete social practices, rules of conduct, institutional set-ups, etc. such as the overrepresentation of Romani children in special schools designed for mentally disabled children, school segregation in Roma schools or Roma-only classes having lower quality of education, and cases of discrimination in several segments of life.

The other, equally important aspect of Dyer's argument is that the representation of a group can also have serious negative implications for the identity and self-respect of the people who

[4] Based on a research conducted in June 2014, a Hungarian think tank named Political Capital concluded that 60 % of the Hungarian population agrees or rather agrees with the statement that Roma are genetically prone to crime. As they note, this belief has been held steadily since it was first measured in 2011.
[5] Geza Jeszenszky, Hungarian Ambassador to Norway and Iceland since 2011, faced severe criticism by Roma civil society in 2012 for a statement he included in a textbook published for a course he held as a visiting professor at Corvinus University, at the Department of International Studies. The text suggested that many Roma are mentally less capable due to the fact that Romani culture allows marriage and/ or sexual intercourse between close relatives, including brothers and sisters. Regardless of the case, he was not removed from his office and represents Hungary in Norway and Iceland to date. (Politics.hu 2012)

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belong to that group, can lead to internalized stereotypes about one's own group, and to the denial of one's identity. Roma people who get educated and make a career regardless of the structural barriers that the discourse about them generates often choose the strategy not to reveal their identity to their colleagues, in order not to risk the prejudice and discrimination that might result from that (Nicolae, Slavik 2003). Nonetheless, Roma professionals who decide to publicly identify as Roma are often considered as exceptions, not "real" Roma[6]. We know from Mary Douglas that these strategies serve to maintain boundaries and the order of our categories, that is, in this case the dominant discourse about Roma (Douglas 1966).

The history of Romani activism can be read as a constant struggle to challenge the discourse about Roma communities and the marginalizing social practices, as well as the institutional discrimination resulting from that discourse. However, the dominant discourse still bears the signs of centuries-old signifying traditions. As a result of a broader process whereby most European democracies are becoming more and more closed, instead of the renegotiation and redefinition of meanings about Roma identity, there are new walls being built between Roma and non-Roma – symbolically as well as literally[7].

The visual representation of Roma communities is a constitutive part of the general discourse, and at the same time it is also a reflection of that discourse. Certain aspects of the visual discourse have been addressed and challenged, such as the field of film or painting, as the result of the work of Roma and non-Roma artists, media professionals, curators, researchers and advocates in Hungary and also internationally. For instance, the works of Hungarian Roma painters were collected by and presented to the public by different institutions

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[6] Allport (1954) referred to the phenomenon as re-fencing, which is the treatment as exceptions of members of an outgroup who do not comply with their group stereotype.

[7] According to the European Roma Grassroots Organizations (ERGO) Network, a Brussels-based advocacy organization, walls separating Roma from non-Roma citizens were erected by the local municipalities in 14 localities in Slovakia, and such walls also exist in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Romania and other European countries. Information about the walls and ERGO's campaign named "Wall Free Europe" is available at http://www.ergonetwork.org/ergo-network/campaigns/wall-free-europe/

including the Hungarian Museum of Ethnography, the Roma cultural institute called Romano Kher or the Hungarian Cultural Institute since the 1980s. (Szuhay 2010). Contemporary Roma painters, including Andras Szentandrasy, Mara Olah or Tibor Balogh have also gained visibility through the publication of albums and catalogues and exhibitions, including one in the Hungarian National Gallery at the end of 2007. Concerning the field of film, there are prize-winning Roma film-makers who represent different segments of the life of Roma from their own point of view. One of these is Arpad Bogdan, who received the prize for the best young director at the 2007 Hungarian Film Week and received a certificate of merit at the Berlin Film Festival, for his first film titled *Happy New Life*. Led by Katalin Barsony, the Romedia Foundation produced a documentary series called *Mundi Romani*, which presents the life of Roma communities from around the world. The films explore Romani cultural heritage on the one hand, and investigate human rights issues from the perspective of Roma civil society and the Roma communities involved on the other hand. In 2009, the series won UNESCO's "Prize for the Rapprochement of Cultures".

The field of photography, however, is a segment of the visual world that has been less addressed; while it is a particularly interesting system of representation to explore. Photographs has been widely considered and used as "true" representations of reality, rather than interpretations of it. Their use for self-identification in our personal documents, their recognition as evidence in court cases, or their function to provide additional creditability to news articles all demonstrate the general belief that they mirror reality. Therefore, photography has considerable potential to shape the general discourse about Roma.

This paper aims to add to the existing body of literature by providing an analysis of the visual representation of Roma communities in contemporary Hungarian photography, exploring the production of photographs from the point of view of professional photographers. In the sections to follow, I will analyze the different practices, professional aspirations and trends

that shape the photographic discourse about Roma, including questions about the power of Roma themselves in shaping the visual representation about their communities. I will argue that the current photographic discourse defines Roma almost exclusively along the lines of an identity politics based on ethnicity, class and a romanticized imagination of culture. What I will pay special attention to is who represents whom through images, and whether Roma have power to influence the way they get represented through photographs.

In the section to follow, I position my research topic in a broader political context. I continue with the methodology that was used to explore the practices that characterize the current photographic representation of Roma. Section 3 is an introduction into the constructivist approach, and more particularly, to the discursive approach to representation, and shows their relevance for the research topic. The argument continues with the application of the discursive approach to photography, and an overview of the complexities of how meaning is produced through photographs. The next section provides a brief historical overview of the photographic representation of Roma in Hungary to demonstrate how a particular type of discourse is produced as a result of the interests of those who have the power to shape or maintain a discourse. An image-based analysis of three photographs maps and discusses the discursive implications of some of the most widespread codes–many of them stereotypes– used in the representation of Roma as the powerless "Other". I will move to the other side of the camera to explore the current photographic practices and the main considerations behind them that produce the images identified in the previous section. Finally, I will flash out some alternatives proposed by Roma to the dominant photographic discourse, which need yet to make their way into the field of photography to shape the discourse in a way that is more empowering for Roma.

1. Background to the research: what is Chachipe?

The research was inspired by and builds largely on the collection of 3,224 photos submitted to the Chachipe photo competition, an on-line photo contest organized by the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and the OSA Archivum in 2007, 2009 and 2011. Chachipe means "truth" or "reality" in Romani language. Chachipe is particularly interesting for my research, as it provides snapshots about the public perception of Roma communities in different countries. On a personal note, the inspiration for the research also came from my experience that the photos I usually see about Roma in the media, or on the walls of exhibition halls do not match the image I have of, and the image that is represented–e.g. through social media–by my Roma colleagues, friends, professional contacts who make up a considerable part of my acquaintances developed over the past nearly ten years of working in the Roma Initiatives Office of OSF, and some of them beyond.

Chachipe was closely linked to an international endeavor called the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Initiated by OSF and the World Bank in 2005, the Decade is an international commitment made by twelve participating governments and different international organizations to close the gap between Roma and non-Roma citizens, with a special focus on the fields of education, employment, housing and health, considering also cross-cutting issues such as gender-equality, poverty and discrimination. The launch of the Decade marked a historical moment in the struggle of Roma for equality, as it was an unprecedented political declaration by the participating states to take action to make up for the structural inequalities and discrimination that pushed several Roma citizens into the margins of societies. Roma civil society organizations were officially recognized as active participants in shaping and monitoring the process. While the results of the past ten years have not always met the

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original expectations, the Decade has served as a model for the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategy adopted by the European Commission in 2011[8].

The aspirations of the Decade triggered the need for a new visual representation of Roma to reflect the changes that the endeavor set out to achieve. Chachipe was an effort to initiate a public debate about the criteria that define Roma identity, using the language of images. It invited professional and amateur photographers, Roma and non-Roma alike, to submit photos which look at Roma communities from a new visual perspective, leaving behind widespread stereotypes. The photos entered into the contest must have been taken in one of the twelve countries participating in the Decade not earlier than 2005.

As part of the staff of the Roma Initiatives Office of OSF, I was involved to varying degrees in the work with the photo material collected through the three competitions. The Office is led by the mission to empower Roma communities through grants-giving and capacity building, to be able to influence the decisions concerning their life. Given my involvement with OSF, this paper is not meant to evaluate the impact of the Chachipe contest in the field of photography and beyond, or suggest what type of representation would be appropriate. For my paper, the Chachipe photo material is used as a snapshot of the representation of Roma from the past few years, which confirms that professional photographers still mostly define Roma identity through poverty, or the romanticized imagination of Roma culture.

The paper might rightly be challenged based on the fact that the topic of the research frames Roma identity, in advance, and investigates the nature of identity politics at play in photography, while excluding the possibility that Roma are rather or are equally photographed based on gender, class, or any other type of identity, rather than along the lines

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[8] Information about the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategy is available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/eu-framework/index_en.htm

of ethnicity. The same question is relevant for the concept of the Chachipe competitions. The fact that the contest seeks photos about Roma also invites people to represent Roma visually in terms of an ethnic category. The question that needs to be answered both in case of Chachipe as well as this paper is whether Roma should be photographed as Roma at all.

Regardless of the framing by the Chachipe contest, Roma are defined in public discourse in Europe–but also beyond–as a group based on ethnicity, which is the result of a long historical process. The history of Roma communities shows that the discourse about Roma has been defined by unequal power relationships and along the interests of the more powerful, which made an impact on all the aspects of the life of Roma since their arrival to Europe. The ambiguities of the discourse through which the group is constructed are used and made advantage of by populist political discourse today, as well. As a result, Roma identity gets defined more and more through poverty and non-compliance with the social norms of the society, which is marked by the term "Roma criminality" that has made its way into the general public discourse about Roma in a very short period of time in the past few years. Such additional ethnic markers connected to Roma identity lead to further essentialization, and produce ambiguity of meaning when it comes to representation.

I will show based on the interviews with photographers that they photograph Roma as a separate ethnic group, rather than members of groups defined along the lines of characteristics other than ethnicity. Even if Roma ethnicity is a social construct which often leads to the marginalization of a group of people who are identified as Roma, ethnic identity is a "fait accompli", as Warnke notes concerning racial identity (2007), which organizes everyday social practices. The unexpectedly high number of photographs submitted to the contests also suggests that people use ethnicity to communicate about the people who belong to that group.

On the other hand, we cannot and should not simply stop using the category of Roma in representation, as people do identify and draw inspiration and self-esteem from their Roma identity (Warnke 2007).

Based on the argument above, a more relevant question is along what criteria Roma identity is defined, and most importantly by whom.

Chachipe was initiated by a private foundation that has been influential internationally in challenging the ambiguities and the discriminatory practices that result from the discourse about Roma communities. The contest can be interpreted as an enterprise to question the terms through which Roma identity is defined. It offers a virtual space for conversation, where Roma and non-Roma can conceptualize Roma identity the way they see it most adequate. The multiplicity of perspectives including photos ranging from romanticized images through photos from family albums about important events to photos about Roma activism contest the dominant identity politics transmitted by the media, school books, arts, public policies etc. that construct Roma identity almost exclusively along the lines of class (poverty), and/or a romanticized perception of Roma culture.

The wording of the open calls, as well as the design of the thematic categories of the contest mark the main directions along which the dominant visual discourse was meant to be questioned. Thematic categories such as "Common denominator" or "Dream come true" were looking for commonalities rather than differences between Roma and non-Roma. A category such as "Local hero" was meant to gather images that show Roma as active agents who benefit society rather than passive victims. Themes from the second contest such as "My colorful life" or "My Street, My Neighborhood" invited photographs taken from within a community (not necessarily defined exclusively along ethnic lines) rather than from a distance. There were, however, some less fortunate categories, as well, such as "What is the

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problem?", which run a high risk of inviting people to link Roma identity with social problems.

The photos which were awarded a prize could be regarded as potential recommendations for the definition of a new identity politics, and consequently a new visual representation of Roma. However, while they made part of the photo material selected for exhibition, the winning photographs were not put in the spotlight beyond the awards ceremonies more than other photographs. They would be problematic to consider as bases for a new identity politics or a new visual representation, as the legitimacy of the jury members as well as the organizer OSF and the OSA Archivum–which are not democratically elected bodies–would immediately be questioned. The composition of the jury was mixed in terms of geography, ethnicity, gender as well as professional background–Roma and non-Roma professionals were invited from the fields of Romani activism, media, arts and photography. However, they were selected by the organizers of the competition based on their reputation and experience in the field, and not nominated from the different fields. Furthermore, they did not represent all the countries covered by the contest. The evaluation of the photos was primarily a small-scale example of the debate that the photos are meant to provoke about Roma identity. In this regard, Chachipe is the question, rather than the answer to what constitutes Roma identity.

2. Methodology

The research is a qualitative analysis of the photographic representation of Roma and the corresponding professional practices in Hungary. Focusing on professionals from one country made it possible to map how professional photographers reflect on each other, and who they define as significant contributors to the depiction of Roma in photography. Their photographic projects are not bounded by country frontiers, as many of them took photos of Roma communities living in neighboring countries. My focus is not limited to photographic representation either in media, museum spaces or photographic albums. Rather, I look at the producers of these images and their practices, as there is very often no clear division between who is a photojournalists and who is a photo artist.

The research builds on semi-structured interviews with four professional photographers. Three of them–namely Zoltan Molnar, Istvan Gabor Molnar and Janos Kummer–submitted photos for the Chachipe contest, and the fourth person, Andras Hajdu D. served as head of the jury of the second contest. Hajdu D. is currently the most visible Hungarian professional known for his photographic projects focusing on Roma communities. The semi-structured interview format allowed me to gather comparable data, while leaving enough flexibility to explore the photographers' individual experiences and approaches. (Gray, Williamson, Karp, Dalphin 2007)

I picked them for the interview as their work is representative of one of the visual patterns reflected by the Chachipe photos submitted from Hungary by professionals. My choices were also driven by the influence, visibility and reputation of the selected photographers in the field of documentary photography in the country. This means that they are winners of different national and international photo awards, including the Hungarian Press Photo competition, and/or their Roma portfolios were presented to the public in different photo exhibitions.

One of my interviewees, Istvan Gabor Molnar (MIG[9]) is of Roma origin himself. His photos can be seen as an alternative to the dominant photographic discourse about Roma, although his photographic work is less visible in the public sphere. I followed the approach that Edwards used when arguing for the inclusion of photography within the boundaries of anthropology. She explained, with reference to Feyerabend, that "…formal properties of a practice (…) are revealed by contrast, not by the analysis of the thing itself. Knowledge is not a series of self-consistent theories converging towards an ideal view, rather it is an 'ocean of mutually incompatible alternatives' forcing others into greater articulation." (Edwards 1997:56) The strategies deployed by a photographer who represents Roma from within a community introduced important new aspects for the research.

During the interviews, I was particularly interested in understanding different aspects of the work of the photographers, such as their self-defined mission; the place of their Roma-related photos within their overall work and their primary intentions with their Roma-related photos. Furthermore, I also asked them about the intensity of their engagement with their photo subjects; the control of Roma over the images as well as the photographers' reflection on the effectiveness of their photographs. I also wanted to learn whether they see any aspects of the life of Roma that have been less represented in photography; and also which photographers are considered as the most prominent in representing Roma. Last but not least, the interviews also allowed me some insight into the justification behind their aesthetic choices.

I also conducted an unstructured interview with Kinga Rethy, Deputy Director of the Roma Initiatives Office at OSF and the initiator of the Chachipe project; she informed me about the considerations behind the idea to launch the Chachipe competition, which I will discuss in

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[9] I will use the acronym MIG to make reference to Istvan Gabor Molnar, in order to make a clear distinction between him and Zoltan Molnar, a photographer having the same family name. MIG is an acronym that is used also by the photographer himself.

Section 5. A discussion with Gabriella Csizek, curator of the Mai Mano House of Photography–a prominent institution of contemporary photography in Hungary–, and the head of the jury of the third Chachipe contest provided me valuable information about the field of photography, and the representation of Roma in particular.

Besides interviews, I analyzed three photographs by using an image-based research method to identify some of the main representational strategies that produce meaning about Roma in the contemporary photographic discourse (Prosser, 1998). I mostly followed the structure of analysis outlined by Graham Clarke in *The Photograph* (1997), starting from the structure of the image itself, and broadening the scope of the analysis step by step.

The reading of the images started from their denoted message, and approached their connoted message and the codes through which meaning is produced by considering factors such as the social context of the picture (Barthes 1984); the background of the photo space and the relationship of the photographers to their subjects. Furthermore, the analysis took into consideration the relationship and added value of the photo title for the message of the photograph; the relationship of the photo subjects; the geometry of the image as well as the different objects used as signifiers of more abstract ideas. Finally, using the websites of the photographers, I looked at the wider photographic context that the photos I analyzed made part of, in order to see if it provides additional meaning to the images. I identified the place of each selected photograph in the photographic projects that the photo made part of, as well as the relevance of the particular portfolio for the self-declared mission of the photographer and the relationship of the particular portfolio to other photographic projects.

I also looked for additional meaning provided through the text which is meant to introduce the particular portfolio to the visitors of the website wherever available. In case of one photographer I was unable to access the portfolio; therefore I contextualized the selected

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image by looking at similarities and differences between the nine other photographs submitted to the Chachipe context from the same portfolio.

Wherever it was possible in the framework of the interviews[10], I used the image-based research method to collect qualitative data from photographs (Prosser 2003) about their images. Using this method, I explored through a particular photograph what the photographer considers to be innovation, the meaning of their aesthetic choices and the "story" behind the photograph, with a special focus on their engagement with the photo subjects before and after taking the photographs. I also gained an insight concerning the different photographic influences that impacted their work.

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[10] I interviewed two out of the three photographers whose photos I analyzed. The third person was also contacted; however, the interview was not made due to her not being available in the period of the research.

3. Representation vis-a-vis reality

As the introduction foreshadows, my research takes a constructivist approach to representation. Contrary to the reflective approach, which holds that meaning is inherent in things themselves, as well as to the intentional approach, which places the origin of meaning in the individual, the constructivist approach interprets meaning as a social construct (Hall 1997c). I follow the argument of structuralist anthropologists such as Marshal Sahlins and Mary Douglas, who perceive culture as an order-producing mechanism, through which the social structure remakes itself. They argue that in a chaotic world, culture provides us a pattern, offers points of reference for our experiences, and provides basic categories which order our perception of the world as well as our actions (Douglas 1966; Sahlins 1981). These categories are our concepts about the world, and we produce meaning through the practice of representation, which makes the match between the concepts in our head, the things out there and the signs that stand for them (Hall 1997c).

Since meaning itself is not inherent in things, it changes all the time. Using the definition provided by Hall, culture is the process of producing, exchanging and negotiating shared meanings, so that we can mutually understand and thus be able to communicate about the world (Hall 1997c). All the social movements are about renegotiating, reshaping meaning about different groups.

Within the constructivist approach, I will use the so-called discursive approach to analyze the visual representation of Roma communities in contemporary photography, which was conceptualized by Michel Foucault (1980). Using Hall's distinct definition, the discursive approach "…examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced and studied." (Hall 1997a:6). In my case it means that

the unit of analysis needs to be broader than photography, which is understood in this paper as a particular system of representation through which we communicate and negotiate meaning. Instead, I will take into consideration the complex power relationships which make the broader discourse emerge about Roma, in order to understand how meaning is produced about Roma today.

It is the concept of power that is a particularly important aspect of the discursive approach, as it is a crucial question in case of different social groups, and therefore for my research, who has and who does not have the power to shape and consolidate the discourse, and how it relates to the actual socio-political environment in which representation takes place. It is exactly this aspect which is missing from the structuralist approaches.

The photograph described in the introduction is an example of how representation of a marginalized group is defined by wider socio-political interests. The photo of the begging woman and child was selected to represent Roma as seen in Western-Europe, where Roma migrants from Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and other East-European countries are referred to in the public discourse as welfare tourists, beggars or people involved in organized crime. They embody the fears of Western-European countries of masses of immigrants arriving from Bulgaria and Romania (especially related to lifting the limitations on their access to the labor markets of Western-European EU member states in January 2014) in an increasing anti-migrant atmosphere. Politicians capitalized on these feelings and consequently, anti-Roma discourse and anti-Roma measures became part of the political campaigns of several Western-European political parties.

It is important to note here what Said (1979) points out when talking about the discourse about the Orient produced by the Western colonial powers. The discourse about Roma today is not only an abstract idea; it is indeed connected to reality. Discourse is rather like a pair of

glasses covered by special filters through which we define who the Roma are. The way the 'filters' are used is not devoid of feelings. As Said argues, "…the imaginative examination of things 'Oriental' was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections." (Said 1979:8).

Hall emphasizes that when it comes to the representation of difference, including racial difference, many of these feelings, fears and anxieties are activated during the interpretation of an image (Hall 1997b). Emotions, however, are not only mobilized by the viewers during the interpretation of images, but are indeed relevant when it comes to different representational practices, such as designing a research, drafting a law, or taking a photo. To use Said's words, "…no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances" (Said 1978:10).

Representation is very much also about producing identity. When we represent difference, at the same time we also define who we are and who we are not. Making reference to Dyer, Hall explains that all societies use the representational practices of typing and stereotyping. "Types are instances which indicate those who live by the rules of society (social types), and those who the rules are designed to exclude (stereotypes)". (Dyer, quoted in Hall 1997b:258) Stereotyping covers a number of representational practices that are deployed when it comes to racial or other types of difference. One of these is essentializing, which is at the core of stereotyping. Through this practice some visible, easily identifiable, socially agreed characteristics of a person are singled out, and he or she is reduced to these. These "essential" characteristics often get exaggerated and simplified. A very dangerous practice is

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naturalizing, that is, explaining differences not by culture, but by nature, by something that is "in the blood" (Hall 1997b). The belief of the majority of Hungarian society that Roma are genetically prone to criminality (Political Capital blog 2014) mentioned earlier is an example of naturalizing. It is dangerous as it fixes meaning, and makes it more difficult to alter.

Colonial history reminds us that the role of photography in producing stereotypes should not be underestimated. M. Height and D. Sampson discuss in the introduction of a collection of essays titled *Colonialist photography: imag(in)ing race and place* (2004), that soon after it was invented, the camera, perceived as an objective tool in the hands of physical anthropology, had a key role in providing "scientific" material for the classification of colonized people into different racial types based on their bodily features. Backed by theories of the period that suggested a hierarchical order between races, photographs of colonized people helped justify and also consolidate colonial rule by producing knowledge about colonial subjects so that they could be governed. The gaze of the photographer was definitely that of the colonizer. However, photography had an ambiguous approach towards colonial subjects, deriving from different feelings. While they were seen as inferior, they also triggered fascination. Exoticized postcard images and photographs in magazines were used to present the colonies as exciting, appealing places for people in the West, and contributed also to the construction of a colonial culture.

As the colonial example demonstrates, stereotyping is also very much a question of power. Stereotypes are imposed from outside of the group that is actually created by this practice, and it is done in a way that justifies the power exercised over a particular group. Slavery of Roma is an example of this. As slaves, Roma were treated as commodities of their masters, and especially those slaves who lived a settled life were considered liars, thieves and truants, which served as a justification for their masters to do whatever they wanted to regulate them, except for killing them (Petcut). It was only at the time when slavery as a resource was not

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needed any more due to the inventions of the industrial revolution, as well as when Moldavia

and Wallachia were eager to be seen as part of a modern Europe, that after 500 years slavery

got abolished in 1855 and in 1856 respectively (Hancock 2002).

4. Reality and photography

As presented in the introduction, visual language is part of the broader discourse about Roma. While it reflects that discourse, it also contributes to it by producing knowledge about Roma that complies with the discourse. Visual representation includes several things, such as painting, drawing, photography or films. Photography is also a wide field, as photos are taken by almost everyone, due to the technical developments making it possible for almost anyone to take photos and make them public through social media. An ever smaller segment is occupied by professional photographers, many of whom also choose Roma communities as the topic of their photos. It would be a mistake to underestimate their role in the visual representation of Roma communities. Just to name a few examples, it is professional photographers who produce images for different publications and reports; whose work is channeled into photographic databases; who get commissioned by different stakeholders to produce images about a topic, event or a group; and it is often professional photographers who take photos that serve as illustrations for different printed or online news media. This paper is focusing specifically on their practices.

As mentioned earlier, in the past photography was considered to provide an absolutely objective representation of reality. As Peter Hamilton explains, the reason for it is that the photograph was invented in the best days of positivism, and the fact that it was a mechanical machine and a chemical process that produced an image gave it the authority to serve as evidence. What is captured in a photo was thought to be the true representation of reality, rather than its interpretation (Hamilton 1997).

Susan Sontag provided a blunt counter argument concerning the objectivity of the photograph by pointing out that there is nothing in the world that would be photographed in exactly the same way by two different people (Sontag 2001). My interviews with photographers and a curator suggest a general understanding in the field that photographers do not mirror but

interpret the world by looking through the cubic window of their cameras and by deciding in which moment they push the button to capture a moment. John Berger described this as follows:

> Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. For photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights. (…) The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject. (Berger 1972:10)

He also argued that how we see the things around us depends on our knowledge and our beliefs. This resonates with what I said earlier about the discourse about a certain thing at a given place in a given time in history.

Nonetheless, photographs still enjoy a special credibility granted not only by the public, but also by different institutions, such as courts or the police.

Roland Barthes (1990) provides a clue for us by conceptualizing this schizophrenic characteristic of the photograph. He explains that there are always two main layers of messages in each picture. The first message–as he calls it–is a continuous message, which means that we do not need any codes to match the object and its photographed image. This is the denoted message of the photograph, which simply tells us what is there in the photo. But there is always a second layer, a connoted message, as it is very rare that a photograph is without any additional interest for us. The connoted message is communicated to us by codes, which are added to the photograph by the photographers through the different stages of photo production. As Barthes points out, the connoted message makes use of a "repertoire of stereotypes", such as colors, gestures or scales. Barthes calls this ambiguity, the parallel existence of a coded and an uncoded message the photographic paradox.

He brings this idea further by adding that it also induces an ethical paradox: photographers want to provide a true representation by providing an uncoded image of the world, while at the same time their action always adds values to this image (Barthes 1990). It is important for the understanding of how photographs taken of Roma are of real people, while they are also very much defined by the wider discourse about Roma in the culture that the photographer is also part of.

It is exactly this connoted message that makes photographs interesting for analysis. As Elizabeth Edwards, an advocate for the inclusion of expressive photographs within the discipline of anthropology put it, photographs "…constitute documents of culture or cultural documents whose legitimacy is drawn from the fact that their creators are attempting to communicate values and negotiated realities which are integral to human experience and consciousness." (Edwards 1997:54). The connoted message, or what Edwards called the "expressive" in the photograph can contribute to knowledge production by using a different, often ambiguous voice, which can be even more revealing in certain areas of human experience than the traditional methods that anthropology as a discipline usually uses. This is exactly what my research builds on in order to understand, through photographs and photographic practices how the visual representation of Roma is shaped by photographers.

Furthermore, as Gabriella Csizek, curator at the Mai Mano House of Photography also emphasized, it is not only that the photo is not reflecting reality, it even alters reality itself. As Sontag put it: "Photographs do not simply render reality – realistically. It is reality which is scrutinized, and evaluated, for its fidelity to photographs." (Sontag 2001:87) The best example is the posing, the adjusting of our set-up, and our putting on a smile whenever a camera is directed at us. We want to be portrayed on a photograph the way we want others to see us (Berger 1972).

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Sontag (2001) emphasizes a very important aspect of images: their meaning is very fluid, and regardless of what the photographer meant to communicate with the photograph. Each photo immediately becomes part of and gets interpreted within the actual photographic discourse, based on its own conventions.

The meaning of an image also depends on its framing, that is, the external narrative that it makes part of. The World Exhibitions organized in metropolises in the 19th century that displayed the colonies to the Western audience are examples of such framing. The way the "spectacle" of cultures was arranged reflected the categories and the social evolutionist world view of the colonizing powers, and at the same time contributed to the production of such views that justified colonial rule (Mitchell 1991).

In my case, it implies that a photograph taken of Roma can be interpreted very differently in a museum in Budapest, or on the website of the extreme right Jobbik party. The same is also true for Chachipe as a framing–a photo of a poor Roma neighborhood carries a different meaning if it is surrounded by photos that represent a wide range of experiences lived by Roma, as rather than being the ultimate signifier of Roma identity, poverty becomes only one of the experiences lived by certain Roma communities.

Besides the context, our individual "habitus" (Bourdieu 1990) also defines what meaning a photograph signals to us. Barthes conceptualized this by arguing that the two main factors that define our personal relationship to a photograph is the studium, which is our general knowledge about the world; and punctum, which is a more personal, emotional connection to a photograph (Barthes 1984).

Apart from the audience and the context, time is another important factor that can change the meaning of a photograph (Sontag 2001).

5. The history of the representation of Roma in photographs in Hungary

There are three reasons why an overview of the major trends in the photographic representation of Roma in Hungary since the end of the 19th century is important for the argument presented in this paper. First, it illustrates the relationship between power and representation in any given historical constellation. Second, the images used as signs in a particular era do not fade away without any traces – many of these are still well and alive today, and I will show later how they influence contemporary visual representations. Third, a short historical overview helps to locate Chachipe in time, understand its goals and reflect on the photo material that was gathered, as a screenshot of the visual representation of Roma from 2005 to 2012, as well as to explain the choices of photographs that will be analyzed in the paper.

I will rely on the classification made by Peter Szuhay (2014), ethnographer of the Hungarian Museum of Ethnography, who specializes in Roma communities in Hungary. His work is based on a Roma photo collection made of 736 items, compiled by the Museum of Ethnography, embracing a period from the 1870s to the 1990s, and collected from diverse sources, including public collections, photo museums, ethnographic and photo history archives, as well as editorial archives of newspapers, private collections of photographers and heritage of photo ateliers. As Szuhay points out, a large majority of these photos were not commissioned by Roma, and were made by non-Roma in a way that the photo subjects rarely had any control over how they were being photographed.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, photographers represented Roma basically in two ways, either as musicians who contribute to the cultural life and reputation of the country; or, as the "historicized savage", the unsettled, exotic and wild people who carry archaic values and traditions. They are often depicted with their tents, horses, uncombed hair, half-naked

and in ragged clothes. As Szuhay notes, there are also some rare photographs about well-off Roma persons or families, who commissioned photographs about themselves.

Concerning the socio-photos of the 1930s and 1940s, Szuhay points out that poverty at that time was not ethnicized yet, so class was a much more important aspect than ethnic belonging. Images illustrative of this period include naked children and mothers breast-feeding their babies, although these are not schematized yet as Roma images. In this regard, the representational practices align with the approach of the American documentary photography of the 1930s, following the Great Depression, when photographers including Dorothea Lange, Margaret Bourke-White, Russell Lee, Walker Evans documented the consequences of the economic crisis on urban and rural communities (Clarke 1997).

In Hungary, ethnographic photos and photo series from the 1930s onwards focus on the documentation of traditional Roma handcrafts, rather than on recording Roma culture systematically.

Szuhay identified a period which embraces roughly a decade, starting from the beginning of the 1950s. Commissioned mostly by different ministries, photographers were documenting the living conditions and main problems concerning Roma communities to inform and justify future policy making in the socialist regime, aimed to assimilate Roma and to capitalize on their labor. As Szuhay points out, this is the specific period which turns poverty into an ethnic specificity of Roma communities. The photos are largely propagandistic, characterized by a distance between the photographers and the people photographed. The typical imagery of this period includes mud huts, naked, hungry looking and dirty children.

The photos from 1960s and 1970s are meant to illustrate the progress that was supposed to result from the decree of the Hungarian Socialist Labor Party issued in 1961, aimed at

integrating the Roma into the working class through different educational, employment and housing policies.

The socio-photos of the 1970s were reactionary to the state image, and aimed to reveal that the policies of the socialist state were ineffective, and many Roma communities were still facing poverty, discrimination and segregation. As Szuhay points out, the photos give an account of poverty rather than an insight into the complexities of the life of Roma communities. At the same time, anthropologists started to document the complexities of Roma culture. There are also some photo essays from this period exploring the life of Roma families who got integrated into the labor class.

Szuhay notes that the representation of poverty of the Roma communities turned into a "conventional form of expression" by the 1990's. An additional message of the photos, for example those taken by Judit Horvath M. and Gyorgy Stalter, was "beauty and love", that is, an aestheticized image of Roma communities despite the poverty of the slums.

When it comes to photos in the press, Szuhay makes reference to research conducted by Ilona Bodnar between 1996 and 2000, which analyzed the visual illustrations connected to Roma-related articles in four daily newspapers. She concluded that the photographs reflect thick boundaries between Roma and non-Roma. Roma occur in the press in connection with ethnic conflicts or social problems. Furthermore, she notes that the diversity of Roma groups is not represented, middle-class Roma are mostly absent from the printed media representation. This conclusion resonates with the findings of a media research by Vera Messing and Gabor Bernath from 2011. Messing and Bernath (2013) note that only 4% of the images used as illustrations in newspapers represent a person performing a job, while in the majority of cases Roma are represented as passive individuals, a staring crowd or children.

As Kinga Rethy, Deputy-Director of the Roma Initiatives Office of OSF and the initiator of the Chachipe contest explained, the idea of the photo competition was strongly connected to the trends concerning the photographic representation of Roma in the 2000s. Following the launch of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, the number of Roma-related professional publications and articles increased, and there were hardly any photos representing Roma in other ways than linked to poverty and marginalization. The Decade was an initiative with the promise and high hopes for change, and also a political commitment to involve Roma civil society as the agents and monitors of that change, therefore photos of Roma communities suggesting the lack of agency and the lack of potential for and the sign of progress were not relevant.

OSF needed photos to illustrate its work, and was also approached by other international organizations, conference organizers and journalists for photos. On the other hand, OSF also saw potential in Chachipe to develop a group around this initiative to challenge the usual visual stereotypes associated with Roma by showing a wider spectrum of the life of Roma people. Rethy explained the following:

> We were asked why we did not commission a photographer to take photos about specific topics. But it would have covered only what we needed under a certain topic. The contest was much more about whether the representation of Roma can be seen in a different and more diverse way, and whether people see it indeed in a more diverse way. As media is always projecting the image about poverty, we expected to see what people submit to a relatively broadly defined competition.

As she explained, the organizers anticipated that professional photographers would submit photos that represent Roma in the context of poverty, as it is professional photographers who supply the newspapers, photo agencies and international organizations with photos about

Roma. Therefore, the call for the competition was designed in a way that made it relatively easy for amateurs to upload their photos[11].

Having extracted the photos taken in Hungary from the database, as well as photos taken in Romania by Hungarians, it was not a difficult task to identify the photographs which were not taken to be included in family albums, or to document the initiatives of a local organization, but were produced by professional photographers. The picture is, of course, not "black and white"– it would be wrong to claim that all those photographs represent Roma in the same way. However, the assumptions of the organizers was mostly right, in that professional photographs have the tendency to represent Roma on the one hand as marginalized people living at the edge of society, or as people who are closer to nature than society, and live a wild and less civilized life.

In the following section, I am going to provide an analysis of photos which exemplify major trends in the representation of Roma by photographers. There is one photograph that is not from the Chachipe database, it was taken by the head of the jury of the second Chachipe contest. The goal is to identify some of the major strategies of representation through which meaning is produced about Roma in contemporary photography.
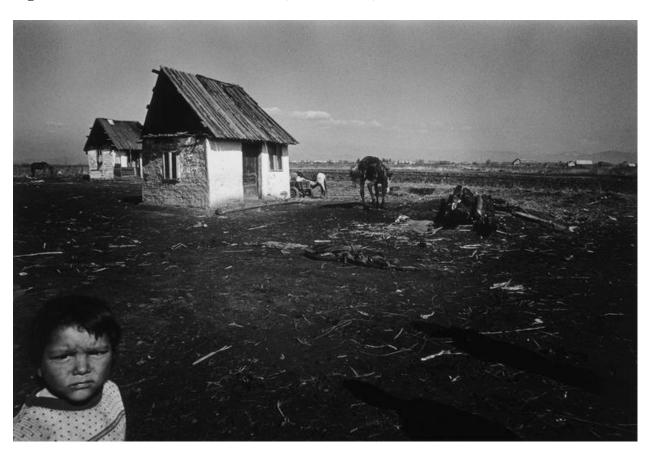
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[11] The organizers provided translations of the Chachipe call including the technical details for the uploading of photos in all the languages of the Decade, as well as in Romanes. Furthermore, the technical parameters were such that it was not necessary to have an expensive and highly professional camera to meet the technical criteria.

6. Analysis of photos that exemplify major trends in the contemporary photographic representation of Roma

I explained earlier that the meaning of iconographic signs is very fluid, and it depends less on the intention of the photographer than on the conventions of the photographic discourse that the photo enters, the context in which it is placed and shown, the background of the viewer; as well as the overall cultural context its meaning is understood in. The photographs below are read from a sociological point of view, using the approach outlined in the Methodology section of this paper[12].

Figure 1. Romani Child, 2007, Romania (Judit Berekai)

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[12] As explained earlier with reference to Berger (1972), the way of seeing something is always informed by the experience, knowledge and beliefs of the viewer. My reading is based on my background that I outlined in the Section 2 in this paper.

Figure 1 was photographed in Transylvania, in Miercurea Ciuc, in 2007. Miercurea Ciuc is a relatively big Romanian city with about 42,000 habitants, the large majority of whom are ethnic Hungarians.

On the level of the denoted message (Barthes 1990), we see a child, two small shacks behind him/her and three horses grazing around the small, ruinous houses. We can see some houses in the far distance in the background of the photo, as well as the contours of hills.

The condition of the houses suggests that the photo was taken in a poor social environment, far from a more developed infrastructure of the city that one might suspect in the distance. We are not sure whether the houses are remainders from the past, or whether anyone is living there. The main character portrayed in the picture is a child, and we learn from the title of the photo that he or she is of Roma origin. We do not learn more about the child from the title, we do not get to know him or her by name, and we might not even be sure whether it is a boy or a girl. As a depersonalized figure, s/he stands as a symbol for Romani children. The child is looking up at the photographer, with worries and suffering on the face.

Concerning the structure of the photograph, the protagonist of the photo is placed at the bottom left corner, and is present only as a half-length portrait. The ground fills in much of the photo, which carries the meaning of emptiness and loneliness in the language of photography (Clarke 1997). Due to the dark tone of the photograph, the ground looks like a site after fire, which adds to the gloomy atmosphere of the photograph and suggests a sense of loss.

The deep tones of black and white can be understood as reference to photographic traditions of the past, and lends the scene an atavistic feeling. Horses are often used elements of photographs about Roma, and they make symbolic reference to the nomadic way of life that they lived in the distant past.

The ruins, the wilderness, the loneliness of the child and the horses as symbols of an itinerant way of life all seem to come together to suggest that Roma–symbolized by the child–were left out of modernization; time forgot about them.

Judit Berekai submitted nine other photographs from the photo series named "Gypsies" to the third Chachipe competition. The rest of the photos are less sober, although poverty mixed with joy and playfulness come through most of the photographs as a message.

According to the introduction on the website of her art studio (Berekai 2014), she started to take photographs in order to show to others what she experiences in different parts of the world while traveling. She also declares that she considers photography as a tool for self-expression. In 2007, she took photographs of Roma in Transylvania, which were presented to the public in the Polish Cultural Institute in Budapest in 2011. The introduction to the exhibition suggests that as a photographer, she is interested in the life of traditional societies, and this is why she got interested in Roma communities, which she represents in a "nostalgic and fascinating" manner (Polish Institute 2010). The introductory text refers to Roma as part of a tribal system, which protects the individual from the threat that "strangers" might present from outside. Roma are mentioned as a closed community living at the periphery of society, but finds happiness and piece regardless of the hostile external environment.

Figure 2. Roma Children in Transylvania, 2011 (Zoltan Molnar)

Figure 2 was also taken in the Transylvanian part of Romania in 2011, in Plaiesii de Sus, a small village with less than 1,000 habitants[13]. The photo brings us into a room. We see a man and a woman in the front, although it is not clear whether they are adults or bigger children. They are holding two small children in their arms, and a man is sleeping or lying in the background of the picture.

The room is rather crowded, which is emphasized also by the composition of the photo which frames the scene in a way that some of the faces are only partly seen or not seen at all. It reminds the viewer of family photos, although it is hard to decide who is who in the family.

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[13] There is discrepancy between the information available on the Chachipe website and on the photographer's website. I make reference to the information available on Molnar's website: http://www.molnarzoltan.com/

There is a carpet on the wall at the background of the photo, the soft materiality of which lends a warm atmosphere to the interior. The clothing of the photo subjects suggests that the photograph was taken in the home of a poor family, and we learn from the title that it is a Roma family. We do not learn anything more about them, their life or relationships from the title. The photograph allows the viewer to enter their private sphere without revealing who they are.

The composition of the photograph suggests that the photographer was in an almost uncomfortable proximity with his photo subjects. The gesture of the woman or girl at the center of the photo presenting a pot of plastic flowers reveals that the scene was performed for the photographer, and for the viewer. The flower might have several meanings, and in this case it may signify femininity or beauty. However, due to its presence as an imitation, a plastic copy, it seems to be present as the signifier of desire.

The man lying in bed in the background is in contrast with the dynamism of the group, and thus provides an internal tension to the picture. He is the only person about whom we surely know that he is an adult, since he has a moustache. The embryo pose of his adult body is a reference to a reversal to a passive status, a sign of depression and the lack of capacity to take action.

One of the babies in the picture is half-naked. Nudity of children is a recurring theme of photographs portraying Roma, and there has been debate about the meaning of nakedness of children in Roma culture. Szuhay (2010) explains in one of his articles that the naked child signifies the health and strength of Roma people as opposed to non-Roma, whose children are not, or much less represented naked. It is also taken as a natural state of children and closeness to nature. A debate about a photograph of a nude child exhibited in Budapest in 2005 revealed that for some Roma viewers it signified defenselessness (Szuhay 2010).

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Molnar explained to me that nakedness is part of everyday life in the Roma communities he photographed.

He told me during our discussion that his main task as a photographer is to interpret the world and the era in which we live, with the help of the camera. Molnar has several photographic projects dedicated to the representation of Roma communities from several European countries. The photo discussed above is part of a larger portfolio named Roma Children, which includes 21 photographs taken between 2005 and 2011 in different cities in Romania[14].

Molnar recalled that he encountered Roma communities during a trip in Transylvania when working on a photographic project on people and their material environment. He found himself stuck by the poverty that the Roma he met lived in. He felt a moral obligation to document on photographs how they live. The viewer cannot see happy Roma children in the photo series dedicated to them. All of the photos were taken of children living in deep poverty. The pictures are black and white, with very deep tones, which multiply the emotional load of each look and each situation. The wider context turns the message of Figure 2 above several tones gloomier. There are five more photographs from the same locality as Figure 2; however, we do not recognize the same photo subjects on any other photographs. The meaning that the portfolio adds to Figure 2 is that those portrayed are not the only Roma children and families neither in their locality, nor in Romania who live in poverty.

The portfolio is accompanied by a text on the website. It talks about several problems in relation to the life of Roma communities, including high child mortality, lower life expectancy or barriers to accessing social benefits. It mentions some "typical" facts about

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[14] The portfolio titled "Romani Children can be accessed at http://www.molnarzoltan.com/stories/roma/3-roma-children/

Roma, such as the traditionally high number of children, which he explains by socio-economic factors. He mentions another, "special cultural characteristic", which is early marriage and child birth, as a consequence of which young mothers decide to leave their children in orphanages. Research revealed, however, that such practices are not part of Romani culture only; and while in some communities it is seen as part of culture, in other communities it is explained by socio-economic factors rather than cultural ones (Bitu, Morteanu 2010). Figure 2 gets further loaded with potential messages, and based on the text we might anticipate that the man lying in bad is sick.

Molnar considers Josef Kudelka, one of the well-known photographers of the Magnum Photo Agency, to be a reference point for his images. The dramatic tone of the photographs reminds us of Kudelka's photographic language. Molnar explained his decision to use black and white by the fact that it allowed him to show feelings more effectively, as colors might have taken away from the message.

Figure 3. Untitled (from the photo series "The wall we call a fence"), 2012 (Andras Hajdu D.)

At the center of Figure 3, a photograph by Andras Hajdu D., we see a 3-4 year-old girl in a red dress. She is standing bare foot between railway lines and is trying to arrange her hair with a comb without quills. On the left side of the photograph, we see a row of shacks, and further at the back, there are houses with colorful walls and red tiles. There are silhouettes of mountains at the back of the picture.

The setting of the photograph gives the viewer clear indications about the social background of the photo subject. The railway divides the photograph in three. The ruinous houses with their scrappy roofs on the left hand side are contrasted to the houses seen further back on the right hand side and their bright red-tiled roofs. The electricity cables on the right signify the lack of infrastructure in the houses on the other side. The railway lines are slightly more directed towards the left, and this connects the girl to the world of the shacks. The girl does

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not look at the photographer, so the moment captured by the photograph looks spontaneous. Contrary to Figure 1, the photographer cowered to take the photo frontally, from the eye-level of the child. This signifies an equal relationship between the photo subject and also between the girl and the viewer.

The railway is a recurring element of Roma-related photographs. The reason for this is that the Roma communities portrayed live close to the edge of towns, in segregation from the rest of the habitants. As a sign, the railroad can signify the connection between past and future, coming from somewhere and going somewhere else. We do not know from the photo if there is train traffic on the railway, and it gives a sense of danger to the photo.

The figure of the girl carries several meanings. Her red, tulle dress and the beautifying effort she makes suggests that similarly to any girl of her age, she imagines herself as a princess. Her activity, however, is doomed to failure as her tool is dysfunctional. The scene has the meaning of hopelessness. While she looks self-confident, as opposed to the child on Figure 1, she is the only living being on the photograph, which adds the meaning of loneliness and helplessness to the photo.

Figure 3 does not have a title, and the title of the series, "The wall we call a fence" does not add meaning to the photograph without the rest of the elements of the photo series. Figure 3 is part of a photo essay that consists of 36 items. 23 of the photographs represent the life of the people who live in the shacks that we saw on the left hand side of Figure 3 through portraits, interiors, and moments captured from the life of the community. We learn that the photographer spent a longer period with the community, as some of the photos were taken in the summer, some of them in the winter, some during daylight, and others during the night. The rest of the photographs were taken of another poor community, living in blocks of flats.

From the captions we learn that the photo series investigates the life of a Roma community that is being evicted from their illegally built, substandard homes at the edge of Baia Mare, Romania, without offering them proper alternative housing. The second part of the photo series shows us the place where the community of the neighborhood called Craica is supposed to move when the municipality demolishes their houses.

Hajdu D.'s photographic projects fall into the category of photo journalism, or, as I would call the genre "investigative photo journalism." He gets involved in a project when he gets shocked by a story, which is often identified through his work as a photo journalist for a news portal. The photo essay made in Baia Mare was also identified through the news, as the major who declared that he would make the Roma citizens leave the city got re-elected.

Hajdu D. articulated that his work is unique in the sense that he chooses topics that no-one else covers, and engages deeply with the photo subjects to explore the complexities of the issue. The time-span of "The wall we call a fence" project and the photos taken during the day as well as during the night, in the private sphere of the residents as well as outside, suggest indeed a longer engagement with the people photographed. He justified the decision to make color photographs by the intent to tell the message in a more objective manner, without manipulating feelings by deep black and white contrasts.

He shared with me his personal connection to the photograph, as his daughter was of the same age as the red-dressed protagonist of Figure 3. He sees the image as a synthesis of the story of the community in Baia Mare.

7. Connections to the broader discourse

I share the view that Gabriella Csizek explained during our interview–which is also confirmed by the Chachipe photo material–, that there are two main topoi when it comes to the representation of Roma in contemporary photography. On the one hand, there are "atavistic photos", which emphasize values such as freedom, closeness to nature or the intimacy and protection of a tribal life. These often include signifiers such as horses, chariots, the violin, women breast-feeding, etc. These usually present a romanticized image of Roma communities, and remind the viewer of the "historicized savage" photos from the turn of the past century. Berekai's photos belong to this category, and so do many of Molnar's[15].

The second category of photos deals with the photographic representation of the social and economic marginalization of the Roma communities portrayed. The images associated with these types of photos include sad children, crowded interiors, children looking sadly out of a house through a window, a look into the a shack, people posing in front of shacks, etc. Many of these photos remind us more of the photos of the 1990's that aimed to "beautify" poverty by looking for tenderness and aesthetic values in the midst of human struggle. Part of these photos, on the other hand, stand also as a political statement that shouts for a solution to end the inhumane conditions that Roma communities face. Many of Molnar's photographs and Hajdu D.'s work make part of this category.

As discussed earlier with reference to Said, this photographic discourse definitely has a reality that the photographs are referring to. The photographic discourse that these types of photos reflect and at the same time maintain speaks about Roma from outside the community, and defines Roma identity predominantly through poverty, marginalization, or, in case of more historicized photos of Roma, a rather archaic imagination of Romani culture.

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[15] His photographic work can be accessed at http://www.molnarzoltan.com/

This discourse leaves a large spectrum of the life of Roma communities silenced, missing from the discourse. A Roma intellectual, Anna Mirga (2014) argued the following:

> When you think about us, say, in Slovakia, perhaps you think only of horrifying pictures of a segregated population—a people walled off from the rest of society. All Roma are portrayed as living a terrible life which, in fact, some of them do. But you might be surprised to learn that at least half the Roma living in Slovakia are actually integrated among the majority population—attending schools, working, paying their taxes, and contributing to the society among which they live. In Slovakia, numerous political groups frame the Roma issue in terms of problems, for example, that the Roma are dominant in using (and also misusing) social welfare provisions.

Mirga makes an additional point, regarding the implications of a particular discourse for Roma identity and self-respect. She argues that it is not only non-Roma but also Roma themselves who contribute to the construction of Roma identity along the lines of poverty and marginalization, which results in the problematization of Roma identity itself. Instead, she calls for a discourse that builds on Roma culture, which can be a source of pride and dignity for Roma.

As the photos above demonstrate, Roma communities are often defined through their marginal status as passive bearers of the life they live, without much control over their fate and without much hope for change. As Mihai Surdu (forthcoming) notes, based on his analysis of the use of the same type of "poverty" photos in expert publications, that such images represent "an essentialist identity in which the appearance of circumstances of a particular person stands not merely as a descriptor of an individual identity but, by extension, as a representation of a typified Roma group."

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What Surdu points out is also evident in the photographs analyzed above. While all the photos visualize an individual story, we rarely learn about the particular constellation of issues and the individual life stories that explain the situation of an individual or of a particular community. Individuals are essentialized to their poverty. The titles of Berekai's and Molnar's photos highlight this generalizing tendency, as these do not refer to a particular person of family, but to a generalized category of Roma: "Roma Children in Transylvania"; "Romani Child". The people portrayed on the photographs represent Roma not through their individual stories, but through their bodies. (Rajaram 2002)

In this regard, the photo series about Craica by Hajdu D. is different, as it tells us a concrete story in a particular time and place. However, the photographic discourse in which the meaning of the photographs is decoded is already permeated by images of passive, desperate Roma faces, therefore it cannot go beyond these stereotypes.

The representation of Roma as a passive crowd living at the margins of society, having no agency over their fate results in the depoliticization of Roma identity. This type of discourse is reflected in a recent political statement by the Hungarian Minister of Justice, Laszlo Trocsanyi, who stated that Hungary is unable to host economic migrants since the country needs to take care of the integration of its 800,000 Roma (Adam 2015). The statement carries the meaning that all the Roma are in the same economic situation, and that they all need to be taken care of, as a kind of surplus population.

I will show, based on the interviews I conducted with photographers that their intention is not the disempowerment of Roma. Similarly to the photography of the 1990s, what they want is to raise awareness that the poverty faced by the communities they take photos of is unacceptable. However, as Sontag highlights (2001:21), the more we are exposed to images of suffering, the more we get immune emotionally:

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The vast photographic catalogue of misery and injustice throughout the world has given anyone a certain familiarity with atrocity, making the horrible seem more ordinary – making it appear familiar, remote ('it's only on photograph'), inevitable.

She explains that regardless of the fact the endeavor to represent a bitter piece of reality, the photograph still has an aesthetic quality, and consequently it "beautifies" the situation, and as a consequence poverty can also seem beautiful and thus acceptable rather than shocking (Sontag 2001).

In the next section I will look at the other side of the camera to explore the different photographic strategies and practices that define the visual representation of Roma.

8. On the other side of the camera

The photographic approach of the 1990s to Roma communities is a strong reference point for photographers to date. When asked about the most influential photographic achievements regarding the representation of Roma communities, all the photographers made reference to the album titled *Other World*, by Judit Horvath M. and Gyorgy Stalter, published in 1998. As mentioned briefly in Section 5, *Other World* takes a rather aestheticizing approach to depicting the slums where the photographed Roma communities lived. The introduction to the album by Imre Kerenyi (1998) reads as follows:

> These people are beyond their Gypsyness. It is merely an ID card, a brown stamp that keeps and detains them in Gypsyland. But they are more than this: they are proud, happy, exhausted, sad, in love. If only we knew just this much about them, the days of Gypsyland would be counted.

The introduction suggests that Roma are the people who live in deep poverty and have darker complexion. It aims to challenge stereotypes by showing that the marginalized Roma have the same emotions as anyone else. While Kerenyi articulates the lack of photos where Roma and non-Roma are portrayed together, he does not suppose that such situations actually exist, and there are Roma who live outside of the slums. By the notion of "Gypsyland" he delegates Roma into the category of the marginalized, excluded "Other".

The introduction also suggests that the album's goal is to raise empathy in the viewers. The interviews I conducted revealed that this goal has not changed when Roma are photographed. Molnar and Hajdu D. both started their Roma portfolios as a result of the shock they felt when they encountered marginalized Roma communities. They answered the moral call to do something about it with their camera. As Hajdu D. explained, he usually gets engaged in topics as a photographer when he finds something so absurd that he wants to explore it further with his camera.

Clarke notes about documentary photography in general that "The very subject matter of the documentary photographer is an index of the contentious and problematic as well as of emotional and harrowing experiences…" (1997:145). Non-Roma related portfolios of the photographers–Kummer, Molnar and Hajdu D.–confirm this tendency: they cover topics including homelessness, life in the orphanage, welfare food delivery, eviction, etc. This trend might be one of the reasons, but not the only reason why Roma identity appears on the photographs related predominantly to problems, and not through other aspects of life, as Mirga (2014) noted in the previous section.

Kummer's story is very revealing in this regard. I selected him because several photographs entered into the Chachipe contest were devoid of the usual stereotypical signs. However, he did not consider himself relevant for my topic, and neither did Hajdu D., who knows and appreciates Kummer's photography[16]. The image-based research revealed that most of those photos were singled out from portfolios which were not Roma-specific. It suggests that representing Roma as part of society without the usual ethnic markers of poverty, marginality or exoticism is considered irrelevant as Roma representation in photography. This relates to Berger's argument (1972) discussed earlier regarding the different ways of seeing, which are informed by our previous knowledge and experiences: in the photographic tradition that the photographers consider relevant, Roma are indeed seen as the marginalized "Other".

The prevalence of this type of photographic discourse was also confirmed by the fact that photographers do not see any missing aspects of the life of Roma communities in photography. Kummer explained:

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[16] Hajdu D. was the head of the Chachipe jury when Kummer applied with his photographs. I know from Kummer that Hajdu D. provided feedback about his photos when the competition was closed.

I consider the (Roma) topic interesting, and also a bit over-discussed. It was covered by so any people that it is difficult to do something new. If I started a Roma project, I would like to do something brand new, but I don't know what, it has not occurred to me yet what could present this topic as interesting.

Hajdu D. is considering changes to his approach, and he would like to concentrate on positive stories, meaning ways out of poverty. In this sense, he might challenge the hopelessness associated with Roma, but their identity will still be defined through poverty.

Csizek shared that she has a sense of lack; however, she does not know what it is, as she does not know Roma communities. In other words, the ways of seeing (Berger 1972) are defined by the knowledge that is rooted in the current discourse about Roma, and there are no images coming from beyond the boundaries to question them.

The answers also imply that the Chachipe contest itself did not introduce new knowledge and new pathways to explore Roma identity into the photographic tradition.

The representation of Roma through photographs depicting marginalization is clearly led by a moral call to do something about the situation. However, when I asked the photographers whether mainstream society is sensitive to such images, they were all aware that these types of messages do not work. Given the immunity of the viewers who have been exposed to photos of poor Roma too often, photographers consider documentation the value of what they do.

Photographers practices and choices are not guided by the social context in which their photos will be read–they mentioned ignorance and preoccupation with other problems as reasons for ineffectiveness of the photos, but none of them mentioned the general anti-Roma sentiment and the political discourse of the past few years in Hungary that blame the poor,

especially Roma for their marginalized situation, which turns the photos into counter-productive, as MIG pointed out.

As discussed earlier, representation is the result of complex power-relationships. Susan Sontag compared to act of taking a photograph to aggression:

> To photographs people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed." (Sontag 2001:14)

When it comes to representation, it is a crucial question who defines the discourse about a particular group. The interviews suggest that the control that Roma have over their photos is usually limited to consent. Photographers do not receive feedback about their work from Roma (except for MIG), which shows the isolation of the producers of the discourse and the group they represent –also beyond those who appear on the photos.

MIG's work presents an alternative to the power-imbalance between photographers and photographed. His principle is that no photo is kept unless its subject likes the photo, regardless of the photographic value and quality of the image. As Sontag's argument above suggests (2001), there is always a power imbalance between the photographer and the photo subject, as it is the photographer who has the skills and technical equipment to take a photograph and produce the representation about a person or group. Due to the principle that MIG applies, this power is put into use to empower others by offering technical skills to produce a representation that is approved by the photo subject, providing authority over self-representation. Furthermore, he does not claim ownership over the photos; they are considered the property of the community.

Photographers developed their own ethical principles to photographing Roma communities, which are largely defined against the unethical approach of the media. These are strongly

criticized for their superficial and sensationalist attitude, and for staging photographs, which is a taboo for documentary photographers. MIG highlighted also the typifying and generalizing nature of press photographs, as well as their one-sided portrayal of Roma as negative characters most often connected to crime.

Consequently, all photographers consider autonomy an important factor for quality photographic work, and absolute preference is given to portfolios rather than individual photographs, as these can explore a topic in depth. They all believe that time is an important factor, as it is necessary to gain the confidence of the photo subjects and a better understanding of their life.

Concluding remarks

Photography is only one segment of the discourse about Roma, and professional photographers are an even smaller group of producers of images about Roma today. It would be an illusion to expect that the overall discourse about Roma could be altered through photography only. While challenging the existing boundaries that define Roma identity today needs to happen within several discursive formations and by using different tools, the role of photography should not be underestimated in the production of meaning about Roma. As I argued in the paper, due to the photographic paradox (Barthes 1990) that there is a denoted and a connoted message in the photograph simultaneously, it is still generally considered to represent rather than interpret reality (Sontag 2001). On the other hand, as one of my interviewees, MIG pointed out, what remain as "historical documents" to represent Roma are the photographs taken by photographers and legitimated through different prizes, their inclusion in albums, school books, and so on; rather than the family photographs or self-portraits shared for example in social media.

The analysis based on photographs selected from the database of the Chachipe photo contest confirmed that photographers shaping the discourse about Roma understand and at the same time contribute to the production of meaning about Roma by focusing almost exclusively on their marginal status, or on an exoticized imagination of Roma culture. While photographers are mostly guided by a sense of moral duty to bring about social change and they produce images according to certain ethical standards, they are also aware that exposure of poverty and the feelings of those involved in it is not effective, as it makes the situation familiar, and after a while natural for the viewers.

The interviews revealed the power imbalance that characterizes the representation of Roma in photography, as Roma have very limited influence on defining the discourse about how their identity is constituted beyond the stereotypes imposed from outside. There have been some

recent initiatives led by Roma to challenge some of the visual stereotypes associated with Roma. The photographic project titled *Roma Body Politics I - No Innocent Picture*[17] by Gallery 8 aimed to challenge the reduction of the representation of Roma to their bodies by exposing photos of Roma intellectuals as embodiments of well-known stereotypes vis-à-vis their self-defined image. A recent campaign by the Roma Press Center[18] portrayed everyday heroes of Roma origin to question the stereotypical representation of Roma as a passive, faceless crowd without agency. However, these initiatives seem to have remained isolated from the debates in the field of mainstream photography, and so did Chachipe.

As I demonstrated, the photographic discourse about Roma is a result of a long historical process and is interlocked with the broader discourse about Roma in the current socio-political context. The findings of the research show that the representation of Roma identity along the lines of poverty, marginalization or an imagined exotic culture is unlikely to change unless Roma have the power to enter the discursive field to define what it constitutes to be Roma today. It is yet to see if the European Roma Institute, mentioned in the Introduction, will be able to question boundaries more effectively in an institutionalized format.

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[17] The pairs of photographs are accessible at http://gallery8.org/hu/news/2/73/a-roma-test-politikaja-i-nincs-artatlan-kep-kiallitas
[18] The portraits and life stories of the persons nominated for the prize are available at http://romasajtokozpont.hu/aranypant-dij-szavazas/#more-3792

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