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**Belonging, houses and Roma
women from southern Romania.
- An anthropological approach**

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The Dual Consequences of Politicization of Ethnicity in Romania

To belong in the modern society means to reflexively talk about home and your sense of place (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a: 207).

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INTRODUCTION

It was April 2011 when the head of a family with five daughters had arrived in his village from southern Romania, after having spent few months in France in order to earn money for his household in Totoieni¹. Among other goods the family members were enjoying due to his return, such as a pig to be sacrificed and a new car, they had at their disposal two new plasma displays. In Romania, such objects were (and still are) considered luxury goods, affordable only by those with a high level of income. In regard to these objects, a 35 years old man - assistant manager of the housing project implemented in Totoieni between 2009 and 2011 - expressed great indignation, arguing that instead of having invested money in the improvement of its house, this family had spent money on such luxury goods. But this is not a singular example at all. There is a 'common sense' perception at the society's level which agrees on the fact that Roma people are not doing anything to improve their situation but waiting for social assistance and aids from the state or from NGOs. And this 'common sense' perception is extended to the point that Roma people are blamed for acquiring or aspiring to purchase commodities like cell phones or television sets. It is not uncommon at all to hear statements such as 'they have nothing

to eat but they want to have a ...' [cell phone or a television]'

But how is this piece of ethnography related to the main focus of this paper, which is the notion of belonging? *Where do I belong?* (Anthias 2006:21) or *when do we belong?* (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011b: xii) are empirical guiding questions that have been asked in order to comprehend the subjective and structural circumstances that encourage or hinder people to have a place in the distinct collective spaces of belonging.

What stems from the above mentioned episode in terms of belonging is related to connectivity to other places and to other people. Having a TV set or a computer is not a matter of an undeserved commodity that Roma people living in isolated rural areas unjustifiably want to enjoy, but it represents one of their extremely limited possibilities of being in contact with the world outside their domestic environment and with its emerging changes. Hence, a television set becomes a device that confers to socially and territorially excluded people the possibility to reach an understanding about the norms and the standards that regulate a world which seem to be further than it is geographically.



Yes, we're also using water based wall paint, this is in fashion now, we have to be like the others, don't we? Similar expressions of social aspirations (Clarke 2001) articulated by Roma women that I witnessed while doing ethnographic research in Totoieni (southern Romania), have fostered my preoccupation with the question of belonging, understood here as the constant oscillation between *sameness* and *otherness* (Theodosiou 2011), and between other conventionalities such as *old* and *new*, *local* and *global*.

The focus of this paper falls on the question of belonging, examined through the intersection of ethnicity, domestic materiality and gender, and proposes an analysis based on empirical data collected by means of anthropologic research carried out in Totoieni in 2011. It hopes to contribute to the understanding of the conditions which contextualise and shape the feeling of belonging of Roma women living in small communities, departing from a study of domestic materiality and home which are illustrative frameworks for understanding the establishment of 'relationships of inclusion and exclusion that reflect existent structures of power and forms of social organisation (such as ethnicity, gender or class) that clearly surpass the domain of self-expression' (Rosales 2010: 518).

Following Theodosiou's critique according to which the 'new Gypsy ethnography' neglects to analyse Roma people's attachments in localised contexts (2011: 100), my research seeks to address the gap in the knowledge about Roma people that have been settled for a long period of time by exploring commonalities and attachments as essential components of belonging (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a, 2011b). In addition, the relevance of exploring the notion of belonging in relation to settled Roma people is that experiences of exclusion greatly exacerbate the struggle for acquiring the sense of belonging (Anthias 2006).

Using a theoretical framework that conjures up notions from social anthropology and material culture, this paper falls within the scope of the call to critically reflect on the notion of identity. Among the on-going

conceptual debates regarding identity, I opt for Pfaff-Czarnecka's perspective according to which there is an analytical precision between identity and belonging. Unlike identity, which tends to homogenise collective units (Brubaker 2000) and encourages dichotomous characterisations of the social, belonging is deemed to combine categorisation with social relating, emphasising the importance of contextualisation and situatedness (Anthias 2006, Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a). This view is even more adequate when focusing on the study of Roma women because it enables 'a complete abandonment of the residual elements of essentialisation' implied by notions as identity or multiple identities (Anthias 2006:20). Therefore I opt for this conceptual framework because it allows moving forward from the perspective of studying settled Roma merely in terms of culture and identity towards a more socially contextualised perspective.

Against the backdrop of this theoretical framework, and drawing upon empirical evidence from Totoieni, two are the main questions addressed in this paper. The first one refers to how dynamics related to housing projects labelled as social inclusion initiatives shape people's sense of belonging and configure their aspirations to commonness. Meanwhile, the second question enquires about the input that the study of houses and of women's material attachment can bring in a discussion about belonging.

Departing from these exploratory questions, there are two main arguments that will be put forward throughout the analysis sections. The first states that housing represents an important dimension which needs to be addressed in the framework of social inclusion projects and initiatives as triggering the sense of belonging. The second argument claims that Roma women are important actors in mediating the relations between their households and the rest of the world, by expressing their aspirations and making investments to belong through the domestic practices and homemaking activities they permanently engage in.



I. METHODOLOGY

The primary data I am using for these arguments is based on the research I have undertaken for my MA thesis. I have carried out ethnographic research in and around Totoieni-between February and October of 2011. It included approximately 2 visits per months, each of them lasting more or less 3 days. During my stay there, I have been accommodated in the house of one of the resident families, an aspect which facilitated my engagement in participant observation as a methodological strategy (Davies 2002). Therefore, the ethnography included direct observation of daily life and household activities, semi-structured interviews, and discussions with members of the community, as well as with representatives of local authorities and of a housing non-governmental organisation. The research's main objective was to analyse the transformations that a housing project (implemented by the aforementioned non-governmental organisation) generated at the level of domestic space and practices in the Roma community from Totoieni.

Totoieni is the imaginary name I decided to give for ethical reasons to the southern Romania village where I carried out this research. Situated at approximately 90 kilometres from Bucharest, Totoieni is inhabited by *ursari*²Roma representing almost 34% of the total population of the locality. They are living at the margins of the locality where very few non-Roma are residing. Between 2009 and 2011, the above mentioned housing NGO has implemented a project designed to 'break the circle of poverty' (the project manager's words) by building and renovating houses of Roma living in extended families in very scanty and overcrowded dwellings. Despite a certain critical view which can be identified in the following lines, I am very much grateful to the project manager of this housing project who supported my research endeavours and facilitated me the access in the community.

Apart from the empirical data I collected while doing research for my MA dissertation, this paper makes reference to additional data that

resulted from a sociological investigation carried out by the Centre for Research and Consultancy on Culture (CRCC) under the Ministry of Culture (Bucharest). Based on a nationally representative sample for the population of Roma women from Romania, this research provides quantitative data which complements the qualitative data I mainly invoke. Furthermore, the reader will find several citations from policy analysis and reports focused on housing issues. Besides, content analysis of documents issued by representatives of the implementing organisation will be sporadically encountered throughout the paper.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Between belonging and identity

The on-going debates regarding the contested notion of identity advanced to such extent that even the fact of using it became questionable (Brubaker 2000). Whereas suggestions to replace it with notions as 'location' or 'translocation' have appeared (Anthias 2002) Yuval-Davis stresses that social location belongs to a different analytical dimension and claims that identity is an important concept when investigating notions of belonging (2010: 262).

The theoretical framework related to the differentiation between identity and belonging that I am presenting here encompasses two broad perspectives. One of them highlights the overlaps between the two notions and the contributions brought by the concept of identity in the analysis of belonging, while the second one indicates that 'belonging' is a more appropriate notion when studying modes of being and modes of becoming.

In what concerns the first perspective, asking what identity is in relation to notions of belonging (and the politics of belonging) Yuval-Davis recalls a variety of approaches on identity, enrooted in sociological, psychological or anthropological traditions which conceptualise it



as a mode of narratives, a mode of performativity or as a dialogical practice (2010: 263). The narratives' approach is the one highlighting the fact that identities as 'stories that people tell themselves and others about who they are, and they are not' provides means to understand to whom and how they would like to belong (Yuval-Davis 2010: 266). Along the same line on which identity lies as an 'analytical dimension in which belonging needs to be understood' (Yuval-Davis 2010: 266), earlier conceptualisations refer to belonging through the notion of performativity (Fortier 1999, Bell 1999) inferring that 'practices of group identity are about manufacturing cultural and historical belongings' (Fortier 1999: 42). But other overviews on this standpoint claim that taking identity as 'separate and self-contained set of properties and possessions' (Theodosiou 2011: 101) conduces to polarisation (Probyn 1996: 10, Anthias 2006: 20) and maintains antithetic characterisations of the social (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a: 203).

This critique is driving us toward the second perspective on the analytical distinction between identity and belonging. While acknowledging that identity does constitute 'the major narrative for expressing commonality', but based on categorisations, Pfaff-Czarnecka depicts belonging as a concept which is tending to combine categorisation with social relating (2011a: 203). It reflects people's relationships with other people, with places, and things (2011b: xvi), whereas identity is relational just in the sense that it positions itself in contrast with the other (2011a: 203). Similarly, previous approaches that distinguish between identity and belonging highlight the quality of the latter to accurately comprise the desire for attachment - to people, places, modes of being - and to address 'the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become' (Probyn 1996: 19).

By encompassing *situatedness* (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a: 203) and conferring the required attention to social processes, the notion of belonging supersedes the one of collective identity too. Unlike the collective identity,

which enforces a 'methodological ethnicisation' by 'homogenising notions of commonality' and strengthening the collective boundaries (Yuval-Davis 2010: 263), belonging reflects the processes in which people engage when expressing their will to belong (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011b: xii).

Hereinafter, belonging will be considered as an affective dimension which helps to understand the desire, the relationality and between-ness (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a, 2011b, Probyn 1996). The reason why I decided to make use of this concept is because it 'enables a complete abandonment of the residual elements of essentialisation' implied by the notions of identity or multiple identities (Anthias 2006: 20). Moreover, notions as *positionality* and *social location* provide the researcher with the analytical tools that enable him/her to look at social exclusion, inequalities, and differences as processes, and not as intrinsic characteristics of individuals.

Social locations and positionalities

But how do people reflect on their own belonging or on the others' belonging? This question might find its answers embedded in a classification of three different levels of analysing belonging: social locations and positionalities, identifications and emotional attachments, and ethical and political value systems (Yuval-Davis 2006, Theodosiou 2011). The objective of the following section is to make clear the contribution that notions such as social location and positionalities are prone to bring within the discussion about belonging.

Within the critique of the notion of identity, terms as identification, categorisation, commonality, connectedness, self-understanding, and social location have been stated as notions which would be more convenient to use. In particular, social location has been differently defined, from an identitarian (Brubaker 2000) perspective and from an instrumentalist one. While the former



emphasises the experiences that people live as individuals with ‘particularist categorical attributes (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation)’, the latter calls the attention to the individuals’ social existence within certain structures (such as occupational structures, modes of production etc.) (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a: 216). The advantage entailed by the notion of belonging is that it combines both the identitarian and instrumentalist perspective (2011a: 217), acknowledging ‘the importance of the contexts and the situated nature of claims and attributions’ (Anthias 2006) relative to the specific social structures.

Along the same line, Anthias uses the term *positionality* as being at the intersection of structure and agency (Anthias 2001: 635). On the one hand it articulates the social position that individuals have within a structure, while on the other hand it reflects their social positioning, which is a process driven by agency entailing ‘a set of practices, actions and meanings’ (Anthias 2001: 634). Such conceptual tools are relevant because they underpin an understanding of belonging as a concept that reflects the way in which people feel about their location in the social world, bringing into the discussion experiences of inclusion and exclusion (Anthias 2006: 21).

At the same time, these notions speak about the social spaces to which people aim or aspire to belong. Emphasising the importance of both formal and informal experiences of belonging, Anthias stresses that belonging to any social space should not be reduced to membership or to identifications (2006: 21), but that it should be understood as a result in which both conditions are reflected.

Moreover, the notion of positionality is important because it helps us to understand that, apart from self-identification with certain categories, belonging supposes people’s engagement in processes specific to those categories. That is to say that people position themselves by performing certain practices and operating meanings attached to the social places they aspire to be part of (Anthias 2006: 27).

Additionally, dwelling on the idea that the sense of belonging is not merely a question of identification, its performative dimension will be understood as an aspect which ‘cites’ the norms that constitute or make present the ‘community’ or group as such’ (Fortier 1999, Bell 1999).

But departing from the internal plurality that characterises ethnic collectivities (Brubaker 2000), it becomes obvious that individuals differ in their social location and positionality, no matter the given collective unit and the social space they might find themselves in (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a: 207). Consequently, due to their concern with situatedness, context and performativity, notions as belonging, location, and positionality are preferable because, unlike identity, they seem to reject ‘residual elements of essentialisation’ (Anthias 2006: 20).

Belonging vs. policies of belonging

Aiming to understand the relation between the notion of belonging and social inclusion approaches, this section is intended to clarify the differentiation between belonging and politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006, 2009), to comparatively address the politics of identity, and to frame notions of social inclusion within the realm of the politics of belonging.

Yuval-Davis calls the attention to the importance of the analytical differentiation between belonging and the politics of belonging, claiming that the politics of belonging consist of political projects envisaged to ‘construct belonging in particular ways to particular collectivity/ies’ (2006: 8). While belonging speaks about emotional attachment (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a, 2011b, Yuval-Davis 2006) and about the feeling of being safe within a collective unit (Anthias 2006), projects of belonging address the ways in which ‘differences between “us” and “them”, civilised or moral “us” versus barbarian or immoral “them” in cultural terms’ are constructed (Yuval-Davis 2009: 8). In other words, whilst belonging rests on the premise of the existence of certain boundaries, politics of belonging



represent the frame in which these boundaries are reproduced according to different principles, ‘from the phenotypical to the social’(Yuval-Davis 2006: 8, 2010: 266).

One specific type of projects of belonging is represented by identity politics (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a, Yuval-Davis 2010). Being prone to homogenise the characteristics of the individuals belonging to the same collective units, and to enforce the differences between insiders and outsiders, politics of identity are criticised because they treat each individual ‘as a ‘representative’ of the grouping and an equal contributor to the collective narrative’ (Yuval-Davis 2010: 271). Exemplifying indigenous activism as being launched by identity politics, Pfaff-Czarnecka states that identity politics effectively become politics of belonging when collective mobilisation goes beyond the demands and aspirations constructed upon essentialised identity representations (2011a: 215).

Apart from these implications related to politics of identity and belonging, the notion of belonging articulates some ‘fresh perspectives on the social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion’ (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011b: xii). For instance, according to FloyaAnthias, belonging should focus more on the unequal social resources (2006: 17). In fact, politics of belonging should frame people’s access to new types of resources and the abandonment of their ‘subjected social positions’(Pfaff 2011a: 214). A relevant example is constituted by the language of human rights, which claims equal access to resources and to recognitions (Pfaff 2011a: 214). In this sense belonging is deemed to be tied to experiences of inclusion and exclusion, even though belonging does not implicitly bring about social inclusion or cohesion (Anthias 2006: 21). Developing the example of Himalayan societies, Pfaff-Czarnecka touches upon the relation between belonging and social inclusion measures, as reflected by the projects implemented by think-tanks of the World Bank (2011b: xxv).

III. HOUSING AND BELONGING. A MATERIAL CULTURE PERSPECTIVE

The theoretical ground that has been covered so far reflects some of the formal dimensions embedded in the notion of belonging. But beyond aspects related to politics of belonging, belonging is also about imaginings and narratives of sameness and togetherness with respect to certain ‘we-groups’ (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011b: xi). In the following, the concept of aspirations and other related notions will be outlined, departing from the idea that people aspire to belong and desire to move within parameters of togetherness. Within this frame I will touch upon the relevance of domestic practices that ‘play a significant part expressing, but also producing new belongings.’ (Rosales 2010: 521).

Aspiration to belong and domestic practices

Shedding light on the positive dimension of desire, Probyn defines it as a producer of relationships among individuals and as a catalyst of relations of individuals with collectives and with objects (1996: 14). With this ability to ‘oil the lines of the social’ (1996: 12), desires flourish especially when people are aware of ‘the impossibility of ever really and truly belonging’ (Probyn 1996: 8).

Aspirations articulate the affective dimension of belonging invoked by Anthias (2006) and Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011a, 2011b), enabling people to develop imaginings of belonging to certain collective units. The importance of these imaginings reside in the fact that they reflect ‘the ways in which constructions of belonging serve to naturalise socially produced, situational, and contextual relations’ (Anthias 2006: 21). In fact, people’s imaginings and narratives about who they are, who they want to be and who they cannot be, are modes of expressing aspirations to belong, reiterated through social practices and, what is



even more of interest here, through domestic practices.

Domestic practices have been considered socially aspirant in the sense that they express projections of ideal social relations (Clarke 2001: 25) and projections of people's wish to be part of these relations. Moreover, studying domestic practices and domestic spaces from this point of view is a productive way to understand how aspirations comprise 'an idealised notion of quality of life and an idealised form of sociality' (Clarke 2001: 28).

It has been inferred many times that the sharing of practices, apart from the values and relations it creates, is essential for people to belong together (Anthias 2006, Fortier 1999, Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a, 2011b). Constantly shaped by social interactions and practices of all types, the share of 'collective knowledge reservoirs' (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a: 204) reflects a concretisation of the aspirations to togetherness. In other words, aspirations shed light on belonging as being 'hard working', requiring constant investments for maintaining relations and for making proof of commitments (Pfaff-Czarnecka's 2011a: 210) in order to gain access to those collective knowledge reservoirs.

In sum, practices related to house caring or home making (decoration, consumption etc.) are not simply expressive or normative activities, but more important is that they help inhabitants to project at the domestic level the relations they have, maintain, and seek to have with the external world (Clarke 2001: 29).

Materiality and houses.

Embodiment of aspirations

As a special property of social practices (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011b: xii) and as an emotionally charged social location, belonging comprises three dimensions: performance of commonality, a sense of mutuality, and attachments, both material and immaterial (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a: 201). In what concerns attachments, considerable insights spring from material culture literature which shows ethnographic

evidence of the material attachment at the intersection of home-making processes with class, gender, and ethnicity (Miller 2001, Clarke 2001).

Provided that in discussing belonging most of the academic, empirical or policy concerns are related to immaterial aspects (such as social boundaries, social inclusion/exclusion, integration, attitudes, acceptance, discrimination etc.), this paper seeks to call attention on materiality and houses' potentiality to reflect expressions of peoples' aspirations to belong and their investments made in this concern. In addition, taking into account that belonging is also a matter of acceptance and recognition (Anthias 2006: 21) aspects related to housing are relevant because they enable a materialisation and visualisation of people's positioning and social positions (Berescu 2010), generating either acceptance or rejection.

In pursuing this analysis, houses will be analysed as material contexts that have the aptitude 'to prove to itself and to others, through the objectivation of practice, its competences and status as an element of collective life' (Rosales 2010: 516), and to actualise the 'vision occupants have of themselves in the eyes of others' (Clarke 2001: 42). Likewise, materiality has the ability to illustrate the transformations people engage in so as to adapt the meanings of their inhabited space in accordance to the corresponsive dynamics. In this sense, the link between houses and belonging is traced by the fact that materiality highly contributes to make evidence of the '(re)making, negotiating and acknowledging of one's place in the world' (Rosales 2010: 521).

From house to home. 'A specific form of social organisation of space'

But what will facilitate the analysis of housing and belonging together is the notion of *home*, understood as a process and not purely evocative of inhabitants' self-expressions (Clarke 2001, Miller 2001, Rosales 2010). This perspective



buttresses the idea I am using as a starting point, according to which home is not indifferent to what happens outside its walls and fences.

For the purposes of this paper it is relevant to understand home as a site that reflects ‘existent structures of power and forms of social categorisation (such as ethnicity, gender or class)’ (Rosales 2010: 518). At the same time, home comprises the ways in which ‘past and future trajectories (inseparable from external abstractions such as ‘class’) are negotiated through fantasy and action, projection and interiorisation’ (Clarke 2001: 25). In short, homemaking practices assist inhabitants in their process to trace links between them and the parameters of the world outside.

In order to better understand people’s subjective experiences in regard to the process of drawing connections between them and the world outside, it is useful to recall again notions as aspirations and imaginings. As a connector between belonging and housing, home constitutes both a place and an imaginary (Gorman-Murray and Dowling 2007). Through domestic practices, home-making processes and all sort of experiences associated with the inhabited space, the house becomes a space in which people imagine their belongings and nurture their aspirations. Discussing the analytical potential of home in grasping processes of identity creation, of maintaining social relations and of generating collective meanings, Rosales underscores the household practices’ role in transforming a space into a place where ‘family relations are gendered and class identities are negotiated, contested’ (2010: 513).

Imagining belonging. Home as a spatial imaginary

The reason that stays behind approaching the relationship between housing and belonging through the lens of material culture perspective is that such view allows us to tackle relationality, which is essential when discussing belonging (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a, 2011b).

Houses have the aptitude to reflect the relation between ‘interior’ and ‘exterior’, offering a fertile ground to explore the intersection between the cultural and social dispositions of the inhabitants with the existing cultural, social, economic from outside the domestic domain.

In order to make interpretations along the connection between house and belonging it is necessary to understand home as a space which enables the analysis of the sense of belonging at different levels and scales, beyond the material and immaterial boundaries of the household. In this respect, Gorman-Murray and Dowling develop the notion of home as ‘a multi-scalar spatial imaginary’ (2007). By scales they mean different ‘layered arenas of everyday life: body, house, neighbourhood, city, region, nation and globe’.

Taking a cue from Morley who stresses that home is connected to all spaces of belonging, from neighbourhoods to nations (2001: 433), the value of this conceptualisation of home as a multi-scalar spatial imaginary resides in its potential to prop the analysis of the intersection between ethnicity, housing and belonging, in a context in which the exclusion and marginalisation of Roma people became an unquestionable state of fact at local, national, and European level. At the same time, it is worth mentioning here that home reflects the ways in which it is invaded by both nation and locality (Sibley 1995 in Morley 2001).

The inhabited spaces as connectors to the worldwide process

‘To belong in the modern society means to reflexively talk about home and your sense of place’ states Pfaff-Czarnecka in her introduction to *Ethnicity, Citizenship and Belonging: Practices, Theory and Spatial Dimensions* (2011a: 207). Elsewhere, discussing belonging in relation to global processes, the anthropologist states the importance of commonality, mutuality, and attachment as ‘dimensions of human sociability that instigate a



sense of loyalty and mutual commitment under powerful reconfigurations’ (2011b: xii). By ‘powerful reconfigurations’ she calls attention to modernity and globalisation.

What has been presented to this point suggests that the study of houses allows an analysis of the existent interrelationships between the public and the private domain, between macro-context elements and micro-level practices. In effect, it becomes clear that what is happening ‘behind closed doors’ (Miller 2001) is not independent at all from the structural norms and social standards that characterises the ‘outside’ (Miller 2001, Rosales 2010). This theoretical view provides means for understanding how the study of domestic practices and household routines is prone to offer a fertile ground to scrutinise the changes taking place outside, such as those prompted by the dynamics of the global market (Miller 2001, Rosales 2010).

In regard to capitalist societies, it has been stated that households are sites which enable people to formulate answers to corresponsive circumstances by adjusting their economic and domestic practices ‘in order to make evident their participation in the complex public economy’ (Silverstone and Hirsch 1994: 16). For instance, fostered by the rise of capitalism, the access to commodities and to a variety of consumption options invaded the social lives and structures, generating an ‘aesthetisation of everyday life (Hennessy in Theodosiou 2010: 91) and playing an increasingly important role in shaping identities and social values.

IV. HOUSING RIGHTS AND WOMAN IN MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES. A BRIEF REVIEW

The following section has two main objectives. The first one is to present an outline concerning the manner in which housing aspects and the situation of marginalised communities are jointly tackled and embedded in international

instruments and domestic policies. The second purpose of this section is to familiarise the reader with some of the notions invoked by current housing policies and projects labelled as social inclusion initiatives, such as territorial exclusion, spatial integration, and integrated housing measures. Making use of the housing rights language, aspects related to the gendered dimension of housing will be also outlined.

Housing rights and marginalised communities

Deriving from international instruments, housing rights have become an integral part of economic, social, and cultural rights, being considered equally important to civil and political rights.³All European states are legally bound to abide by the UN housing rights norms and the majority, including Romania, have ratified the European Social Charter in the original or revised version.⁴For instance, the Equality Directive is one of the EU acts that imposes the obligation on the member states to guarantee that access to housing is not threatened by discriminatory practices based on the people’s ethnic belonging.⁵

But it is national housing laws and policies that are responsible with including specific regulations for housing rights for marginalised and discriminated people.⁶The support for disadvantaged groups is deemed to be one of the important aspects of a successful housing policy at national level.⁷ But even though international instruments include housing rights, many states lack adequate measures and legislative tools to accommodate them⁸.

Therefore since housing policies and measures are considered to be the duty of national, regional, and local administrations and authorities, housing interventions addressing the needs of marginalised communities do not represent one of the main focuses of the EU Cohesion policy.⁹ Nevertheless the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), as part of the EU’s cohesion policy, does exceptionally take into consideration proposals for housing interventions in favour of marginalised



communities. In terms of implementing regulations, ERDF seeks to enhance the spatial integration of the communities subjected to exclusion, meaning that the physical location of houses should not enforce segregation and territorial exclusion.¹⁰

Integrating housing measures

Territorial exclusion of Roma has been widely identified across Europe.¹¹ Opposite to segregation, spatial integration aims to contribute to marginalised communities' inclusion into the mainstream society.¹² In this sense, housing represents an essential component in the policies envisaged to trigger social inclusion and to prevent problems instigated by segregation. Concretely, spatial integration should enhance access to infrastructure in order to facilitate people's mobility and their access to facilities and services. For instance, ERDF considers that proximity to the main villages/towns of marginalised communities should be one of the main dimensions of spatial integration.¹³

Besides, policy makers in the field of housing stress that measures and implementation of projects with a focus on housing only cannot achieve the objective of social inclusion and the integration of marginalised minorities. In this sense, it is important to highlight the interrelation between the access to adequate housing and other rights. Access to education, labour market, health services, social security, and the right to vote are inextricably intertwined to the enjoyment of adequate housing.¹⁴ For example, ERDF proposes a holistic approach recommending an integrated implementation of housing measures. What *integrated housing interventions* entail is related to 'complementary actions in, among others, the fields of education, health, social inclusion and employment, and often also in training, entrepreneurship, capacity building, security and equal opportunities'¹⁵. Such perspective is considered to ensure effectiveness of the implemented measures in the view of a long term socioeconomic inclusion plan¹⁶.

Likewise, referring to social and territorial cohesion, the Europe 2020 Strategy envisages 'a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' and suggests that the fight against poverty should be designed alongside an integrative approach, 'such that the benefits of growth and jobs are widely shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are enabled to live in dignity and take an active part in society'¹⁷.

Housing and women in the policy

There has been little attention paid to the aspect of gender in relation to housing, and even less in what concerns Roma women. In one of his reports elaborated in 2005 the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing suggests that states should integrate a gender dimension in their poverty reduction strategies, anti-poverty policies, rural development, and land reform programmes.¹⁸

Based on 'the adoption of an indivisibility-of-rights approach to promoting women's rights to adequate housing'¹⁹ he proposes a holistic tactic on housing rights. Taking into consideration that being prevented from adequate housing conditions women are subjected to deprivation of economic, social, cultural rights, as from right to security, and right to participation,²⁰ this holistic approach suggests that any reflection on women and adequate housing should consider the socio-cultural contexts and other living conditions of the community those women live in.²¹ Nevertheless, the right to culture and to cultural expression should not impede an effective accommodation of women's rights to adequate housing and land.²² Furthermore, what the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing underlines is the fact that, being deprived in many aspects from the right to adequate housing, women are to a higher extent exposed to endure domestic violence.²³



V. ANALYSIS

The case of a housing project and Roma people's sense of belonging and aspirations to commonness

Looking through the lens of unforeseen repercussions that the housing project implemented in Totoieni generated, the next section directs the attention to Roma's navigations between the different constellations of belonging. It will shed light on people's oscillation between an exacerbated self-identification as being 'the poorest of the poor', the perception of being victims of a defective housing intervention, and at a time, a feeling of being closer to the rest of the community due to the improvement of housing conditions. In addition, this section contains brief descriptions of the conditions that contextualise people's oscillation, framed by the implementing organisation's approach which sometimes seemed to overlook inhabitants' attachments and idiosyncrasies.

Self-identification as 'the poorest of the poor'

Clarifying the difference between *belonging to* and *belonging with* helps us to understand the current approach of social inclusion projects. While *belonging with* encompasses the meaning of togetherness, *belonging to* speak about a distance between subjects and we-collectives (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a: 201). The ways in which social inclusion is approached at policies' and development projects' level show the distance between 'us' and 'them', that is to say between the structures entitled to include and the 'outsiders' to be included.

Social inclusion and social exclusion trigger the existence of regimes of belonging which consist of 'devices' which are used by bounded collective units in order to enforce togetherness on one side, and to set the limits of 'otherness' on the other (Pfaff- Czarnecka 2011: 205). While at macro level the European Union

represents a bounded unit which functions as an entity that regulates standards of access and belonging criteria, at micro-level local authorities or non-governmental organisations play the role of such units which dispose of resources to decide on who is a beneficiary or not in the projects they develop in order to foster social inclusion.

For the Roma inhabitants of Totoieni it was very clear that they had to fit into certain characteristics in order to be included in the housing project as beneficiaries. These criteria were mainly concerned with the level of poverty indicated by the volume of space available to people living under the same roof, the number of children of schooling age, and their monthly income. But the negative consequence of such an approach is that, in order to become recipients, these people tend to exacerbate their belonging to the category of the poorest from the community's poor people. Being perceived as a person they had to persuade in order to receive a house or any dwelling improvement, I was more than once invited in their houses, either to see the level of their 'poorness' or to testify the low quality of the intervention they had been subjected to. This in turn suggests that essentialising the need as a driving force of social inclusion projects might encourage an excessive self-identification with that need. Thereby, this self-identification becomes in itself the basis of the distance between 'us' - those who need assistance - and 'them' - those who have the resources to offer that assistance.

People's perceptions regarding the housing intervention

An important aspect that this case study shows is the capacity of social intervention measures to shape people's local perceptions of belonging and commonality. Women's narratives are illustrative in this sense. I was once on a hill from where the whole Roma settlement can be glanced, when one of the women I was accompanying to collect firewood from the forest cried out:



‘Look! See? See how beautiful this community looks like? After having been built the new houses... you wouldn’t say that’s a gypsy settlement, would you?’ (32 years old, April 17, 2011).

The way I interpret this exclamation is twofold. Firstly, it speaks about a deeply enrooted perception of the hierarchy between ‘them’ (the non-Roma) and ‘us’, which is to a great extent shaped by what people see, that is to say by the way the inhabited space looks like. In effect, this phrase reflects a self-evaluation of the Roma as being below the mainstream standards, but at the same time with the potential of reaching those standards by having a house with a proper façade. Secondly, it indicates the contribution of the implementing organisation which, through its housing intervention, provided these women with a sense of commonality in relation to the rest of the community, where usually houses are considered to look better than houses from *țigănie*²⁴ do.

Nonetheless, there is also a perception of a certain intrusion that the non-governmental organisation seems to have exerted against the community. ‘They want to modernise us’ says a 25 years old woman while talking about the transformations activated by the housing project at the level of their domestic practices. This understanding suggests that people involved as beneficiaries in social intervention projects might feel that an external entity employs measures in order to ‘adjust’ them to certain standards dictated by some ambiguous and distant figures such as the local council, the state, the European Union.

Apart from enlarging the distance between them and the rest of the population, the perception of being subjected to a ‘modernising’ process generates the feeling of a threat against people’s (and especially women’s) attachment to the material space they inhabit. The case of a family I talked with shows that the

implementing organisation did not consider the material attachment dimension, intrusively imposing their rules to this game. Apparently, at the time the project was initiated, the family had already started to build a new house using financial resources they had saved in the past 10 years. Purporting that the final product had to fit into the EU standards, which the family’s dwelling did not meet, the implementers decided to dismantle the case the couple had raised. Though the family was provided with a new house, built from the scratch, the wife’s discourse evokes more than complaints related to the deconstruction of what they had achieved to that point, but she also explains how the new house does meet neither the family’s needs, nor qualitative building standards invoked by the NGO’s representatives (for instance, although the new house disposed of a space meant to function as a bathroom, it could not be used as such because the community is not connected to any sewage system).

In regard to these standards, the implementing team claims that the houses were built up in accordance with the European Union’s regulations concerning the building of dwellings for under-privileged categories, including Roma people. The architect that leads a housing programme implemented by the funding organisation wrote a document meant to describe the new houses’ design built in Totoieni. Here, he noted the main characteristics that the new houses were compelled to have, that is to say: a minimum 350 square metres surface; a ‘correct’ emplacement providing access to infrastructure; a location that fosters the integration in the community, ‘eliminating from the selection process the isolated areas’; recipients should receive property or concession documents. But just by visiting the community one is able to notice that these standards are not fully met by the new dwellings, especially in what concerns the third principle. Most of the houses have been built on a territory which is located right at the margin of the area were Roma people from Totoieni live, which is itself placed on the outskirts of the village.



a.2. Intervention and belonging

Participative intervention and *integrated housing* are terms frequently used within current housing projects and policies in relation to social inclusion and integration of marginalised communities. But at the same time, I find them being good premises to engage in a discussion about the feeling of belonging.

Participative intervention is an approach that the implementing housing NGO claims to have used in developing the project in Totoieni. The same architect highlighted in the above-mentioned document that this project was the first one in Romania to implement a participatory design. In the light of such an approach, according to the architect's explanations, the beneficiaries were supposed to be consulted in regard to the houses they were to occupy, so that these people could be more than 'socially assisted passive and obedient individuals' and rather 'partners in the creation processes'. But according to the inhabitants there was not an effective consultation. If it was or not is not the point I am interested to tackle here. My preoccupation is to articulate the aspect of belonging that resides in such a participatory design.

Recalling Pfaff-Czarnecka's view, according to which both material and immaterial attachment represents one of the essential dimensions of belonging, it is useful to understand that an effective participation in the implementation processes of housing initiatives of people who suffer social exclusion brings to light three positive aspects. Firstly, it has the potential to trigger togetherness. Secondly, it could be envisaged as a first step in the home making process in which the beneficiaries engage in order to transform a new building into their home. Thirdly, a participatory design is also likely to lead to the empowerment of these socially excluded people, instilling a self-positioning that enables them to achieve a higher level of commonality in relation to 'the others'' housing standards.

The data I have collected in Totoieni shows that by simply renovating or building new dwellings, this housing project did not foster the sense of belonging or the feeling of being included; instead it encouraged people to exacerbate their claims to belonging to the category of 'poor and in need to be assisted' people. This was not difficult to observe anytime a person considered to be a potential aid supplier would arrive in the community, as s/he would be approached by the locals with claims describing how poor they were and how bad the environment in which they and their family life was.

Consequently, despite the participatory model of action proposed by the implementing organisation, this housing project does not seem to have instigated 'a sense of local agency' (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011b: xxiv). Instead, it appears to have activated a sense of dependence on this external body, sometimes perceived as an adversary whose actions prevented the Roma from enjoying their 'rights as gypsies and poor people'. For instance, the discourse of one of the community's members, from those who were not beneficiaries in the housing project, reveals such understanding according to which all the Roma from Totoieni should have received aid because 'the funding was obtained due to the gypsiness of every Roma from the community' (April 16, 2011). His indignation went to point of accusing the implementing organisation members of not having invested properly the money which by right, were *their* money, that is to say 'Gypsies' money'.

Belonging and the study of houses and of women's material attachments

The main purpose of the following section is to show the contribution of housing in the creation of the adequate circumstances for belonging. Based on the study case of Totoieni, there are four main aspects that the study of houses and material attachment highlights with regard to belonging in many of its dimensions.



Firstly, it indicates that housing rights are not simply a matter of affordability and adequacy, but that they should be understood as triggers of empowerment of the people living in marginalised communities by fostering the sense of having a material and immaterial place in the society.

The second aspect that the analysis of houses and attachment to materiality reveals about belonging is that marginalised people's efforts and aspirations to improve their inhabited space translate social aspirations and desires for terrains of commonality. Here, women's role turns out to be essential. Through the domestic practices and other homemaking activities performed by women, they express desires and aspirations to have a place in the variously layered arenas of belonging (neighbourhood, locality, country, the world as a whole).

Thirdly, discussing notions of housing does not bring to light only marginalised people's aspirations in relation to the outside world, but it also directs the attention to women's aspirations to have a place and a word in the family they belong to. Being the main stage of women's performances, house is essential in being acknowledged by the members of their families (especially by their husbands, parents-in-law, and sisters-in-law) as being hardworking wives and mothers.

Last but not the least, due to their materiality and visibility, houses reflect the interactions between the intrinsic cultural and social dispositions of the Roma, and the so-called 'modern' influences and elements brought about by global dynamics and trends. Through the domestic activities they are responsible for, Roma women are the protagonists in the negotiation processes between descriptive categories of different constellations of belonging such as the 'old' and 'new', between 'traditional' and 'modern', between 'local' and 'global'. Aspects related to the housing project implemented in Totoieni are essential in touching upon these aspects.

The right to adequate housing and belonging. The Romanian case

The right to adequate housing should be understood as 'the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity'.²⁵ Accordingly, what this paper tries to articulate is that housing rights are not merely a matter of accommodating people's needs to have an adequate shelter and access to facilities. Housing rights are greatly related to the aspect of belonging. Ensuring that people have a house and dispose of the related commodities means acknowledging that they have a place in the neighbourhood, in the locality, in the country, in the world they inhabit. In this sense, the ways in which state policies as well as local and central administrations address (or not) the issue of housing in the case of Roma reflect states' and local and central administrations' keenness to create the circumstances for belonging.

In Romania, Roma people are subjected to different discriminatory practices regarding housing in which the involvement or the lack of involvement of local authorities plays an important role. Some of these practices are related to residential segregation, breach of private property right, forced evictions, lack of regulations concerning the legalisation of Roma houses, poor living conditions and poor access to social housing.²⁶ Therefore forced evictions, territorial exclusion, and deprivation from the access to adequate and affordable housing are practices with intrinsic symbolic significations in regard to the extent to which Roma people are allowed to belong to the society as a whole. For example, 80% of Roma from Romania live in housing conditions and areas that position them at risk of poverty, representing double the percentage of non-Roma that reside in the same areas.²⁷

In 2009, Romania was the country with the highest rate of severe housing deprivation in Europe, counting 28.6% out of the total population, while the EU average was 6.0%.²⁸ Housing deprivation does not simply refer to access to affordable shelter, but also to the



adequacy of housing. Two aspects that indicate the adequacy of housing are the volume of space available to people living in the same dwelling, and the existence of basic facilities (bath, running water, and central heating).²⁹ According to the European Commission, homelessness and housing deprivation are clear evidence of social exclusion nowadays.³⁰ In this sense, it is obligatory to explore the access of Roma to other rights - access to education, labour market, health services, social security, or the right to vote – as being inextricably intertwined to the enjoyment of adequate housing.³¹

Having a house, having a place in the world

As a fundamental right of every human being, the access to adequate housing and the safety of the place of living have a great influence on people's performance in society.³² Recalling the importance of performance when discussing belonging (Fortier 1999) it becomes evident that the contribution of housing in the creation of the adequate circumstances for belonging should not be neglected at all.

The investments made by Roma people, and especially by women, for improving their inhabited space and their aspirations to enjoy better housing conditions (whatever they understand by 'better conditions') are not a matter of emulation or of an unjustified wish to live in more than basic shelters. Neither the controversial castles that are built in certain communities³³ throughout Romania by Roma people who can afford such houses (very much criticised in the public discourse³⁴), nor the sometimes imposing houses built by those who return to Romania from western countries (after having been lived in extremely scarce conditions and improvised dwellings on the outskirts of big cities) show else than the desire and aspiration to have a place in world (and to different layered arenas of social life), and therefore to belong within a country where ultimately they did not ask to be born in.

In relation to belonging, housing also articulates the aspect of participation. By constantly seeking to improve their houses, Roma women from Totoieni are not just managing the domestic life of their families and guiding the lifecycle of their households. Their endeavours related to home improvement and home-making concretise and materialize their aspiration to be part of the global dynamics and trends. Talking about the domestic activity of painting the interior walls, a 39 years old woman explains:

'We like those colours which are... the painty ones, those showy... Look, take this woman as an example... she knows how to trace stripes; they used to look so good... But now [women] don't do it anymore... She used to draw such beautiful sketches on the walls... But I haven't seen this anymore these days... I even learnt from her (...). Now we paint a colour this wall, and another colour the other wall. Yes, we've also done so' (October 14, 2011).

Slightly nostalgically, but at a time somehow proudly, another woman that was taking part in the discussion concludes: "But this is not in trend anymore, is not in vogue anymore!" (52 years old).

Testimonials of this type indicate women's readiness to follow the actual trends and to engage in those acts that are prone to acknowledge them as being part of the worldwide processes. But at the same time, their reflections indicate that they seem to feel that, while trying to harmonise the old with the new, the 'traditional' with the 'modern', their material and immaterial attachments are under a threat. For instance, what a 25 years old mother states in regard to the switch from using the classic emulsion paint to the water based walls paint is illustrative:



‘They [the implementing NGO] are those who brought here this water based walls paint.... in order to modernise us’ (June 5, 2011).

‘Having a house, having a word’. *Houses and performing womanhood*

Totoieni is a community where the traditional distribution of labour is still keeping women dependent on the income generated by their partners, despite their permanent but invisible contribution in the activities developed in order to earn money. For instance, their contribution to the manufacturing of the aluminium kettles is extremely important. They assist in all the processing phases, and then file the final products in order to acquire the right aesthetic. Afterwards, the women are many times those who go by bus and sit in open air markets or along crossroads, trying to sell those objects which they know are not of interest - 'as they used to be' - for the consumers that 'nowadays prefer buying Teflon kettles' (April 2011). Nonetheless, despite the fact that women are heads of households in terms of house functioning, space controlling, management of impressions, Roma women from Totoieni affirm, both at discursive and normative level, that the male figure is the one embodying the family's head.

Even though property and inheritance are deemed to be very relevant for women to enjoy the right to adequate housing,³⁵ being the legal owners of the inhabited space is not perceived as a need among Roma women. Their immediate need, which was highly emphasised by the women I interviewed, is to occupy a house with their nuclear family only, without other members of their husbands' families.³⁶ A 32 years old woman – beneficiary of the housing project implemented in Totoieni - describes in detail how much has the relation with her husband improved once they moved in the new house. She stressed the nuisances she had been enduring while sharing the domestic space with her mother and sisters in law.

'How relieving it is when one has her own place! It's opposite to how we lived there, huddle upon huddle. We would always fight; he would always go by what they said! Until he really started to care about me, he would always do their way. Now it's totally different! I wake up whenever I want, I do the things my way, I clean whenever I like to, and nobody interferes in any way!' (April 28, 2011).

There are three main aspects that this testimonial sheds light on. Firstly, it is an expression of a need to family privacy, associated with an improved quality of the couple relationship. Secondly, it indicates that the sense of having the control on housing matters strengthens women's empowerment and enhances the affirmation of their status as hardworking mothers and wives. And thirdly, in rather abstract terms, this testimony articulates the house's aptitude to provide this woman with the feeling of having a place in the world. In addition, the idea of living in a house shared with members of the nuclear family only, speaks about both material and immaterial attachments. Connecting people to material and immaterial worlds, attachments instill a sense of entitlement (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011b: xii) and prompt people's sense of belonging to 'spaces and sites, to natural objects, landscapes, climate, and to material possessions' (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011a: 206).

Nonetheless, it goes without saying that the lack of information can be a reason why Roma women do not perceive themselves as being deprived from the rights to property and inheritance. Here, it is worth recalling the discussion about women as subjected 'to various forms of control in the name of "culture and tradition"' (Yuval-Davis 2011:9). In his 2005 report on the situation of women, the Special



Rapporteur on adequate housing emphasises the existence of discriminatory cultural and traditional practices that precludes women from enjoying the rights to adequate housing, especially in terms of land, inheritance, and property.³⁷ Frequently, Roma women interviewees confessed that they continued to live with their partners despite the quarrels and/or domestic violence they were experiencing, invoking 'not having another place to go' as a main reason for enduring such behaviour.³⁸ Anyhow, it is important to make two disclaimers here. Firstly, that this is not specifically a discussion about women being deprived from legal ownership on their houses. In Romania, legalisation of Roma dwellings remains one of the most debated aspects in terms of violations of both Roma women's and men's housing rights.³⁹ For example, just 45% of the women included in the survey carried out by the Centre for Research and Consultancy on Culture in 2011 confirmed that they were living in a house whose owner was legally empowered as such (2011: 30).⁴⁰ Secondly, the women's decision to remain with their partners, regardless of whether they had an alternative shelter or not, is to an extent fuelled by the fear of community's criticism against them as wives and mothers (2011: 31).

Houses as spaces of self-identifications and extensions of the exterior world

Rosales' argument based on the study of Portuguese migrations that resulted from the Mozambican process of decolonisation in the 1970s is that the physical dimensions of home are involved in the structuring of domestic practices and in objectifying the relations that take place within the home (2010: 517). What this paper hopes to show is that houses, as complexes of practices and objects, do not merely materialise the relations that take place inside the home, but they also reflect and materialise inhabitants' relationships with what

exists and happens outside the walls of the house or the fences that define their courtyard.

For instance, the field research I carried out in Totoieni shows the way in which the houses' façades reflect the dynamics and the discourses produced in the frame of the housing project implementation, which enabled me to conceptualise the notion of 'space liminality'. It refers to the unfinished stage of the targeted houses, meaning that the renovation and building activities initiated by the implementing NGO were not completed, nurturing a lack of motivation among the community members to continue the respective house improvement activities by themselves. Apart from provoking the beneficiaries' discontentment and complaints, this situation threatened the effectiveness of the implementer's promises regarding the improvement of housing and of life conditions. In other words, the houses' liminality indicates the perception of the recipients that they were mistreated by the project's representatives who, according to them, did not take real responsibility for the work they were supposed to carry out in their 'gypsy community'.

All in all, understanding that houses reflect the relationships with elements of the 'exterior world' clarifies why the physical dimensions of home are relevant in the analysis of people's aspiration to belong and of the investments they make in order to gain the sense of commonality.

As stated elsewhere, the ethnographic evidence from Totoieni shows that domestic practices, such as the practice of painting walls, illustrate women's negotiations between the old and the new, between what is perceived as traditional and modern, indicating their navigations between different constellations of belonging. Despite the enthusiasm expressed by some of the women before concerning the use of the water based emulsion paint, others were complaining about this new product considered to complicate the development of the practice itself and to jeopardise the final result of this activity. Roxana, a 25 years old woman, visiting



her sister-in-law while the latter was painting the interior walls, interferes in the discussion I was carrying out with the women and her four daughters, stating the following:

‘Those with the houses [the implementing organisation] came up with the *lavabil*,⁴¹but I don’t know what to say... it smells very bad, it smells rather as dye than as lime... it smells toxic! It was much better to use lime... thousand times better. Is different when you use lime, it changes the house’s air... it is a lot different, you can feel you have been cleaning, but with this one [*lavabil*] it smells very badly in the house’ (October 14, 2011).

In this sense, the new water based emulsion paint, as a modern element, is perceived as a threat launched by the implementing organisation who proposes such changes in order ‘to modernise them’, as Roxana expresses.

Taking into consideration that houses are extensions of women and markers of their identity (Marschall 2002), such changes affect not only the practice itself, but they also prompt women’s reflections about who they are and about the extent to which they should compromise their stability in what concerns domestic and cultural norms and practices. For instance, the practice of blanching the walls is invested with a purifying capacity being meant to clean materially and immaterially the inhabited space. Both women participating in the discussion emphasised the ineffectiveness of the new and modern water based emulsion paint in purifying the house and making it smell of cleanness:

‘You know what? I decided to scratch the stoves, to cement them with mud and manure, then to buy 4-5 kilos of [classic] lime and to blanch my stoves... I won’t use this water based emulsion paint because it smells so bad... like urine... Jesus Christ!’ (41 years old, October 14, 2011).

In relation to belonging, this discussion sheds light upon what Pfaff-Czarnecka calls ‘common knowledge reservoirs’ which have the aptitude to provide a sense of belonging together. But at the same time, it highlights the importance of the domestic activities in women’s self-identifications. In many of the discussions I had with women from Totoieni, I was told about practices considered to be traditional and specific to Roma communities. ‘We like using painty colours!’, ‘I like yellowing my walls, that’s the gypsy colour!’, ‘Of course blanching the walls is a women activity’, ‘Men work for money (...), and women clean the house, that’s the way things go in our community’ – all these expressions show the domestic practices’ aptitude to embed a perception of the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘the others’, being to a great extent bearers of cultural and social values.

In sum, studying housing and the issues related to the domestic unit is extremely relevant in the discussion about belonging because they offer fertile ground to explore the intersection between the cultural and social dispositions and self-perceptions of the inhabitants with the existing cultural, social, economic space available outside the domestic domain.

So far this paper showed the women’s role in connecting the domestic space to the outside world through their navigations between the different constellations of belonging. In the following it will focus on the ways in which Roma women express nostalgia of the past in their process of dealing with ‘new resources and belongings’ (Rosales 2010: 512). The



interviews I conducted in order to deepen the meanings of the practice of painting the walls revealed women's nostalgia in relation to the old home-decorative practices. One of them stated: 'It looked so beautiful! After blanching the walls we used to besprinkle them with glittering emulsion!' (39 years old, October 14, 2011). Another one, the young mother of two children, explained that she still painted flowers on the walls of her mother-in-law's room, although this was not in fashion anymore and she was not doing the same at her place (23 years old, June 5, 2011).

Other similar examples show that women seek for feasible alternatives to harmonise their attachments and a certain loyalty to the practices that are considered to be their own with the actual trends. Managing nostalgia and seeking for ways to smoothly mingle the old with the new, women are actually bearing the role of managing the new resources and premises for belonging. Stating that they now buy household objects from Bucharest, one of the women I interviewed explains:

'We buy them [wall carpets] from Obor, from Europa⁴² (...) We like to hang carpets on the walls (...) We used to hang them before, and we still hang them now. But those we used to hang were not of such good quality as they are nowadays, these are... better... they are Persian - as they call them. But before them, we used to hang [on the walls] those hand woven ones...' (25 years old, June 5, 2011).

In conclusion, looking at nostalgias and houses offers an insight about the houses' aptitude to reflect women's engagements with the dispositions of the world outside the domestic unit, and their endeavours to harmonise these

dispositions with the intrinsic aspects which define their houses as spaces of identifications.

VI. CONCLUSION

Studying the notion of belonging in relation to houses is relevant not simply because such a discussion highlights the attachment people develop in regard to their inhabited space. What this paper sought to show was that the significance of studying belonging and inhabited space together resides in the houses' capacity to reflect people aspirations to belong and the investments they make in order to establish terrains of commonality with 'the rest'. Lacking materiality and spatial visibility, neither education, nor access to health services or to the labour market (as dimensions tackled by social inclusion policies) is illustrative of notions of belonging in the way housing does.

Another argument this paper developed is that conjointly studying notions of belonging and houses calls attention to the role that women play in expressing the aspirations to belong through the domestic practices and homemaking activities they permanently engage in. Being the main carrier of these activities they become the mediators between the inhabitants of the houses they watch over and the rest of the world. How? By seeking to adjust their space and the corresponsive practices in accordance to the 'fashion', that is to say to the elements that global markets make available in one way or another to such marginalised communities too. Being aware of the way global dynamics are reflected at the micro level of such rural, 'underdeveloped', and marginalised areas makes us understand the Roma women's role and investments they make in order to achieve the feeling of participating in the worldwide processes, and therefore of belonging to this world.

Moreover, the paper intended to show that studying notions of belonging in relation to houses and material culture can effectively assist the discussion about social inclusion. What the empirical data I used shows is that social



inclusion initiatives should not be thought merely in terms of providing basic services to marginalised people who lack access to adequate housing, education, health services, or labour market. They need to look beyond the perspective that treats Roma people as people who just need to be assisted and provided with goods aimed to ensure the coverage of their basic needs. It goes without saying that the elementary aspects invoked by social inclusion policies (housing, education, health, employment) should not be neglected, but it is very important to realise that, in order to provide them with the feeling of belonging, Roma should be equally treated as people having all those needs and desires as the mainstream society. Social inclusion projects should not be simply concerned with offering the conditions for obtaining minimum employment, but it should also be aware that a cell phone to be called and invited for an interview is needed. Social inclusion should not be merely about triggering access to education services, but also about providing the conditions for access to worldwide information for which adequate devices are required (be it a television set or a plasma display).

In broader terms, wrapping up all these arguments, what this paper tries to reveal is that under the conditions prompted by macro-phenomena like globalisation and Europeanization, marginalised people develop a certain awareness of their need to belong based on a comprehension of the distances between them and others, between here and there, between inside and outside. Becoming aware of this subjective and structural need of belonging, people, especially those who experience exclusion, develop aspirations which intermediate their actual social location and the desired one, between the perceptions they have about themselves and the projections of what

they want to be. In this sense, the Roma women I encountered in Totoieni are essential actors in mediating between aspirations and projections mainly because of their particular relation with materiality. Through the activities they carry out within the household universe, which is a fertile ground to grasp ‘the relationships between macro-contexts and micro-practices’ (Rosales 2010: 507), the women manage to harmonise their social and domestic practices with the elements that are constantly emerging from the exterior world. Painting the walls with water based emulsion paints, as the ‘others’ from any of the layered areas of belonging do, means being closer to them and making the required efforts to reach a positionality that might acknowledge their belonging. But essentially, this is not just about physical aesthetics. It is to the same extent about social aesthetics.

‘Do they really seek for terrains of commonality?’ is a question I have been asked while building my argument according to which Roma women express their aspirations to belong through their daily life household practices. In response, allow me to emphasise once more that belonging is about the desire to be inside, about the fear of exclusion and separation (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011b: xiv). But it is not an individual act, it is ‘a relational force among individuals’ (Probyn 1996: 25). Therefore the question inquiring about the Roma’s will to belong – which I consider to be driven by the perception of the failure of the Roma integration policies – should not be asked in terms of agency, but instead it should question more the circumstances and the context that facilitate or preclude people’s endeavours towards commonality.

Footnotes

¹ For ethical reasons I prefer using *Totoieni*, a fictive name of the village where the ethnographic fieldwork has been carried out.



²*Ursari* means ‘bear handlers’. The notion comes from the Romanian word *urs* which means *bear*.

Ursari Roma represent one of the Roma groups which defined as ‘the traditionally-nomad occupational group of animal trainers’ (information available here <http://worddomination.com/ursari.html>). Nowadays they are settled and are known as manufacturers of aluminium kettles and pots.

³*Housing Rights: The Duty to Ensure Housing for All*. CommDH/IssuePaper, Strasbourg, April 2008, p. 7. Available at <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1292391> (accessed 2 February 2013).

⁴*Ibid*, 5.

⁵Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, *Official Journal L 180*, 19/07/2000 P. 0022 – 0026. Available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32000L0043:en:HTML> (accessed 20 March 2013)

⁶See *Women and adequate housing. Study by the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, Miloon Kothari* of 25 February 2005, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2005/43, p. 18. Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ods/E-CN.4-2005-43-E.pdf> (accessed 27 January 2013).

⁷*Housing Rights of Roma and Travellers across Europe. A Special Housing rights Watch issue*. 2010, p. 15. Available at http://www.noticiaspsb.org/IMG/pdf/3870_roma_issue_en.pdf (accessed 23 January 2013).

⁸*Housing Rights: The Duty to Ensure Housing for All*. CommDH/IssuePaper, Strasbourg, April 2008, p. 6. Available at <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1292391> (accessed 2 February 2013).

⁹See *Guidance note on the implementation of integrated housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities under the ERDF, 2011*. Available at http://www.euromanet.eu/upload/86/94/Guidance_note_Housing_interventions_art_7_2_ERDF.pdf (accessed 23 January 2013).

¹⁰*Ibid*, 3.

¹¹*Housing Rights: The Duty to Ensure Housing for All*. CommDH/IssuePaper, Strasbourg, April 2008, p. 4. Available at <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1292391> (accessed 2 February 2013).

¹²See *Guidance note on the implementation of integrated housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities under the ERDF, 2011*, p. 6. Available at http://www.euromanet.eu/upload/86/94/Guidance_note_Housing_interventions_art_7_2_ERDF.pdf (accessed 23 January 2013).

¹³*Ibid*, 6.

¹⁴*The Right to Adequate Housing*. UN doc. Fact Sheet No. 21/Rev.1, Geneva, November 2009, p. 9. Available at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS21_rev_1_Housing_en.pdf (accessed 20 January 2013).

¹⁵See *Guidance note on the implementation of integrated housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities under the ERDF, 2011*, p. 7. Available at http://www.euromanet.eu/upload/86/94/Guidance_note_Housing_interventions_art_7_2_ERDF.pdf (accessed 23 January 2013).

¹⁶*Ibid*, 4.

¹⁷*Communication from the Commission Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*. Brussels, March 2010, p. 25. Available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF> (accessed 19 February 2013).

¹⁸See *Women and adequate housing. Study by the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, Miloon Kothari* of 25 February 2005, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2005/43. Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ods/E-CN.4-2005-43-E.pdf> (accessed 27 January 2013).

¹⁹*Ibid*.

²⁰*Ibid*, 13.

²¹*Ibid*.

²²*Ibid*, 11.

²³*Ibid*.

²⁴‘Gypsy’ settlement.



- ²⁵ *The Right to Adequate Housing*. UN doc. Fact Sheet No. 21/Rev.1, Geneva, November 2009, p. 3. Available at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS21_rev_1_Housing_en.pdf (accessed 20 January 2013).
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- ²⁷ *The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States. Survey results at a glance*. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Luxembourg, 2012, p. 24. Available at http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/2099-FRA-2012-Roma-at-a-glance_EN.pdf (accessed 19 March 2013).
- ²⁸ *Housing Europe Review 2012. The nuts and bolts of European social housing systems*. Published by CECODHAS Housing Europe's Observatory, Brussels, October 2011, p. 19. Available at http://www.housingeurope.eu/www.housingeurope.eu/uploads/file_/HER%202012%20EN%20web2_1.pdf (accessed 18 February 2013).
- ²⁹ Ibid, 16.
- ³⁰ Ibid, 19.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² *Housing Rights of Roma and Travellers across Europe. A Special Housing rights Watch issue*. 2010, p. 15. Available at http://www.noticiasph.org/IMG/pdf/3870_roma_issue_en.pdf (accessed 23 January 2013).
- ³³ Few examples of such localities are Strehaia, Buzesti, Timisoara. These houses called attention of national and international professionals from media, photography, and architecture. Few publications are: Castello. Palaces of the Roma in Romania (2008), Kastellos. Architettura rom in Romania (Massimo Vicinanza 2010), Roma Interiors (Carlo Gianferro. Photography project 2007-2007).
- ³⁴ For instance: http://adevarul.ro/locale/slobozia/Tandarei-orasul-palatelor-tiganesti-ridicate-mila-englezilor-1_5108bb5f4b62ed5875b7e155/index.html, <http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/primarii-ridica-din-umeri-in-fata-turnuletelor-tiganesti-951290.html>
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- ³⁶ *Situația femeilor române din România*. Centre for Research and Consultancy on Culture, 2011, p. 30. Available at http://www.incluziunefemeilorromene.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Raport_AFRR_FINAL_CCCDC.pdf (accessed 28 February 2013).
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- ³⁸ This affirmation is based on the analysis of the qualitative data I carried out, data which was collected by CCCDC in 2011 for the research commissioned by the Association of Roma Women from Romania.
- ³⁹ *Housing Rights of Roma and Travellers across Europe. A Special Housing rights Watch issue*. 2010. Available at http://www.noticiasph.org/IMG/pdf/3870_roma_issue_en.pdf (accessed 23 January 2013).
- ⁴⁰ *Situația femeilor române din România*. 2011. Centre for Research and Consultancy on Culture. Available at http://www.incluziunefemeilorromene.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Raport_AFRR_FINAL_CCCDC.pdf (accessed 28 February 2013).
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- ⁴² *Obor* and *Europa* are two trading centres in Bucharest.

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