Roma in Šutka:
An ethnography of boundaries and interaction

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Abstract

Roma identity is most often framed within a monochromatic, dualistic relationship consisting of the ‘Roma’ on one side, and the ‘Majority’ on the other. This ethnographic research attempts to problematize this relationship by proposing that Roma identity is forged not in opposition to Majority non-Roma populations, but is a result of complex relations within a network of interaction among various Roma populations themselves. The individual means through which boundaries demarcating differing Roma identities are negotiated is heavily influenced by the role personal and social values play in this process. Interactions between members of disparate Roma individuals and communities through the lens of determinate values held by interlocutors illuminates how boundaries separating different, and often vying, identities are established and maintained, and the extent to which such boundaries become immutable lines of separation that enable group identities to become established across the wider societal landscape. This research was undertaken over a period of eight months in Shuto Orizari, a municipality of Macedonia’s capital city of Skopje, and was based primarily on techniques of participant observation, coupled with data collected from both structured and unstructured interviews. Shutka, as the location is often called, was chosen due to its large and diverse community of Roma, encompassing several language groups, religious affiliations and historical records, nestled in a context that could be argued to be one of the most equitable toward the Roma in Eastern Europe. The significance of this study lies in its potential to shift the discourse on Roma identity from that of a ‘Majority contingent’ perspective that is over reliant on generalized descriptive analogues to that of one which places the Roma at the nexus of inquiry and adopts a Roma-centric perspective - examining the day-to-day level of interactions in and around the numerous boundaries of what many attempt to encapsulate in the over-simplistic gloss, Roma.

Keywords: Roma, Romska Vera, Values, Identity, Shuto Orizari, Ethnicity.
Introduction

Statement of research

Roma identity is most often framed within a monochromatic, dualistic relationship consisting of the ‘Roma’ on one side, and the ‘Majority’\(^1\) on the other. The Roma in Europe live in an externally imposed dualistic reality, one where they exist as a unitary, homogenized quasi-national ethnic group in the eyes of non-Roma, and the other where they inhabit a complex terrain of categories, identities, allegiances and cultural diversity within the larger, all-encompassing gloss, Roma. This ethnographic research attempts to problematize this relationship by proposing that Roma identity is forged not exclusively in opposition to Majority non-Roma populations, but is a result of complex relations within a framework of interaction among varying Roma populations themselves.

Contextualizing Roma identity must extend beyond this dualistic approach and incorporate the complex set of interactions, circumstances and shared spaces that Roma peoples occupy. While there is no denying the importance of Roma and Non-Roma relationships in forging, maintaining and negotiating the almost innumerable identities internalized by Roma individuals, communities, societies and ethnicities, a fuller picture and understanding of what it means to be identified, or to identify oneself, as Roma can only be achieved through a nuanced and detail-oriented examination of how the Roma live their daily lives and interact amongst themselves within particular contexts. The identity-making process, however, is not an inherent force exerting pressure on humanity. Rather, it is a force that is not only constructed in our imaginations as individuals, but is collectively institutionalized and narrated across all strata of human social organization. Moreover, identity as it pertains to Roma individuals, as well as social and political institutions, is variable, contested, flexible, negotiable and tentative, while simultaneously acting as a powerful basis for social cohesion, particularly in moments of socio-economic and political strife.

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\(^1\) The term ‘Majority’ within this essay is employed as a shorthand to refer to any population that is not identified, or does not identify, as Roma within the particular context under discussion.
Even with the understanding that Roma identity goes well beyond the confines of binate constructs of competing identities, there still remains the question of just how a more problematized and complex relationship of vying identities solely within the sphere of Roma-centric identities operates. This research attempts to expand on the anthropological canon of identity studies by focusing on the individual means through which boundaries demarcating differing Roma identities are negotiated by examining the role of personal and social values in this process.

Values within the parameters of this research are understood as shared intangible ideas, beliefs and qualities supported on a societal level that aid in choosing a preferred course of action by relevant actors. Beyond this core definition, a framework will be established so as to enable the application of the concept of values as a means of analysis to identify the mechanism through which actors make individual choices when determining who, how and why they interact with one another. By closely observing interactions between members of disparate Roma individuals and communities through the lens of determinate values held by interlocutors, it becomes possible to identify not only how boundaries separating different, and often vying, identities are established and maintained, but to what extent such boundaries become immutable lines of separation that enable group identities to become established across the wider societal landscape. In order for this means of analysis to be applicable and operable, an in-depth discussion of what values are and how they exert influence over decision-making processes in the imagination and the resulting actionable reification of intangible notions will be offered in subsequent chapters. Two main arguments will be presented: first, that values must be understood specifically as stratified system of beliefs that act on people in varying ways depending on which social strata specific values are supported and from which social strata the support emanates; and second, that values are not equal in their influence or application. People prioritize their values according to specific challenges presented by environment and circumstance.

The ways in which values serve as a mechanism for determining the how, when and why individuals interact with one another will be examined in the field, and subsequently applied analytically to attempt to understand how social interactions contribute to creating, maintaining and negotiating both individual and group identity amongst the various conceptualizations of Roma identity.
It is with this aim that eight months of field research were undertaken in one of Europe’s most diverse Roma communities examining the daily activities and interactions of three Roma families, each occupying distinct and varying positions within the community. Such observations, from the mundane to the extraordinary, reveal complex social interactions that, due to the large and dense population of the area, span out of necessity across social, political, religious and ethnic divides. The contexts within which most interactions occur are too varied and diverse. Whether commercial, personal, communal, (inter)familial, or otherwise in nature, the context engulfing interactions guide, if not dictate, precepts, norms, rules and a slew of other considerations that not only serve as conduits of interaction, but limit the parameters, range and scope of what kind of communication is possible.

There is a growing ethnographic literature on Roma communities in Europe, but despite the fact that these communities are comprised of complex, culturally and linguistically diverse populations, there have been few long-term field-based studies of Roma identity that has serious challenged the existing paradigm of Roma as not only a singular, pan-continental identity - one often exoticized, marginalized and considered self-same – but as existing nearly exclusively in opposition to non-Roma identities.

The geographic reality for most Roma communities across Central Europe is characterized by segregation, either as isolated settlements, or within inner city districts, or on the periphery of towns and villages with majority non-Roma residents. The result of which tends toward restricted and limited contact between Roma and non-Roma individuals, and fosters an increase in interaction between members of the communities themselves. Coupled with economic and political processes, these communities are comprised of various Roma populations with differing languages, histories, religions and other expressed markers of identity. In his work on ethnic identity, Barth (1969) emphasized the ethereal and blurred ethnic boundary between groups of people, the continuity of ethnic groups and the interconnectedness of ethnic identities.

By shifting the focus from the boundary between Roma and Non-Roma to that between two contrasting Roma identities, this project aims to provide an ethnographic account of the complexities of Roma identities - through which interaction and border maintenance are examined, emphasizing process over description (Brubaker, 2004); relocating the analytical focus from identity to identifications, from groups as entities to group-making projects, from shared culture to categorization, and from substance to process.
**Field site**

Shuto Orizari – locally known as Shutka – a district of Macedonia’s capital, Skopje, was selected as the research site because of its unique position both historically and politically. It is the largest single Roma settlement in the whole of Europe, and more than half of Macedonia’s Roma population resides there. Shutka maintains a large and diverse community of Roma, encompassing several language groups, religious affiliations and historical records, nestled in a context that could be argued to be one of the most equitable toward the Roma in Eastern Europe. This provides an ideal opportunity to observe how varying social, economic and political factors affect negotiations and interactions between varying Roma identities occupying the same space. Furthermore, Macedonia’s progressive stance – progressive only when compared to other European nation-states – toward minority rights and Shuto Orizari’s dominant Roma demographic provide for a more open expression of identity that in other countries like Hungary and Romania may be inhibited by pressures of palpable discrimination and exclusion.

This research was undertaken over a period of eight months and was based primarily on techniques of participant observation, coupled with data collected from both structured and unstructured interviews.

The primary data collected in Shuto Orizari was done so by delving into several distinct areas of inquiry. The seminal theoretical constructs of identity, ethnicity vis-a-vie a ‘group/non-group; dichotomy, and value systems were chosen based on observable and expressed models of thought and self-conceptualization demonstrated in the streets, homes, cafes, markets, mosques and basement churches in Shuto Orizari. It is crucial to grasp the underlying

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2 The sensitive and changing situation regarding the official name of this country, and the varying (and often contentious) views surrounding this issue, create a level of complexity in choosing how to refer to this sovereign territory. At the start of this research project, the official name of the country was the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, but has subsequently been changed to North Macedonia since 2019. However, many people both nationally and internationally have strong ideas and emotions on this topic. For the sake of simplicity, the country in this work will simply be referred to as ‘Macedonia’, but it must be noted that it is not the intention of the author to offend, or to make political claims or argumentation supporting any one point of view over another.
perspectives and models of how individuals and communities construct, manipulate and maintain the innumerable boundaries that make up the multitude of identities all individuals embody.

Within the context of post-Twentieth Century reality, ethnic constructs have been promoted and sustained throughout the nationalizing process in Europe and have not escaped both the redefinition of Macedonian identity and the reimagining of what being Roma ethnicity is. As it was with most European nationalisms, ethnic affiliations served as both means and cause of nationhood and statehood; evidence, in just one instance, by the pervasiveness of ethnic identity as the primary criteria for possessing or qualifying to possess citizenship. In contrast to the civic nationalisms of contemporary multicultural nation-states, or even empires of the previous centuries, the notion that no one individual is without an ethnic, or ‘group’ identity has become prevalent to the extent that such identity constraints have been forced to fit, as a means of societal organization, situations that perhaps may not merit them. Examples of where non-ethnic based nationalisms, or even the discarding of any nationalizing force, could have been a more appropriate response to demographic and geo-political realities could include multi-ethnic states, or extremely diverse and un-delineated, state-less communities identifying as, or being identified as, Roma. Nonetheless, the idea of Roma identity has been ethnicized through processes of exoticization, romanticization, demonization and simplification.

To be an ethnicity is, to many people, equivalent to that of being a ‘group’; unitary and bound to a singular origin; reified through imagined shared characteristics; unchanging and eternal. The paradox exposed in this notion is borne out in the words and behaviour of individuals themselves. Whether ethnic identity/group membership is imposed or avowed, discreet or overt, accepted or denied, the power exerted over people’s lives through persistent and devout adherence to in-group/out-group, superior/inferior constructs is evident. The participants in this ethnographic study regularly both denied the importance of their ethnic pan-Roma identity, their specific/localized Roma identification, or nationhood in conversation as well as through their interactions with others. Making and backing up claims of accepting all

3 Communities defined in this paper as a collective of smaller societally recognized entities, ranging from the individual and couples (married or otherwise) to families (nuclear, extended, etc.) and associations (collectives, organizations, labor, unions, and so on).
regardless of economic and cultural background was common. Proclamations about how, “I don’t care if someone is [fill in the blank with any range of sentiments], I like anyone who is not a bad person” (Interview⁴). This example is employed only to illustrate the point that alongside this very sentiment comments such as, “I would not marry a Muslim”, or, “I don’t like my children playing with them […] because they are Đambazi …” (Interview), are also frequently heard. This ability to embody opposing ideas is not unique to Shutka’s Roma, but more accurately, is common to all peoples.

To attempt to understand how this paradox manifests in this particular, specific community, and how conflicting and merging identities are negotiated, assessing the role of expressed values becomes significant. Value systems have repeatedly made themselves evident throughout this investigation, most often as justification for specific decisions, thoughts, reactions and expressions. There is an argument to be made that holding opposing, dualistic ideas become possible only when the demands of reality conflict with personally and socially held belief systems. Whether belief spurs on values, or the converse is true, is an open question beyond the scope of this thesis, however the empirical data collected in this study point to a salient presence of strong value systems despite the ever-present and sometimes harsh realities of life.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to shift the discourse on Roma identity from that of a majority-contingent perspective that is over reliant on generalized descriptive analogues to that of one which places the Roma at the nexus of inquiry and adopts a Roma-centric perspective – examining the day-to-day level of interactions in and around the numerous boundaries of what many attempt to encapsulate in the over-simplistic gloss, Roma.

A core theme to be presented here that cannot be overemphasized is the need to shift the discourse from a collective Roma identity to that of the individual, families, communities and organizations, and to view the Roma possessing identities rather than being one.

⁴ When it is not pertinent, relevant or generally important which specific respondent is being quoted, the quotation will be cited simply as Interview. When the specific respondent is relevant and must be identified, it will be cited as Name of Respondent – Interview. The citation Interview, as it is used in this dissertation, can include data obtained from formal and informal interviews, structured and unstructured interviews, informal conversations as well as written sources, such as personal notes and/or letters, responses to pre-formulated questionnaires, public social media content created by the respondents, personal diaries shared by the respondents and other similar sources.
By placing emphasis from ‘is’ to ‘is becoming’, we are forced to confront the assumptions so often invoked in establishing the foundations upon which analysis and descriptions of Roma identity – if not culture, society and the individual – are conceived, penned and disseminated. The uncomfortable and inconvenient persistent state of flux identification processes appear to be in has arrested attempts to aggregate individual, or small-scale communal identities into a larger – usually regional or national in scale – and more unitary identity that can be understood as a non-territorial nationalism. The core of any nationalizing project must invent, to a large degree, a recognizable and static image of itself, optating heroes, and fictionalizing and reifying histories by erecting monuments, landmarks and buildings, as well as concentrating power into political and economic structures.

Even with a physical, territorial landscape, nationalizing projects are immense and violent undertakings requiring the support of most who purport affiliation with the ‘identity group’ attempting it. With no land to claim, nor the will or desire to do so, coupled by numerous additional obstacles – including but not limited to lacking shared histories, language, experience and cultural characteristics – pan-global attempts by some Roma populations have largely failed to create a viable political movement with enough momentum to achieve the goals set forth by the first Romani Congress in 1971 (Vermeersch, 2006). This failure did not prevent serious attempts to (re)imagine what it means to be Roma as an ethnicity; to be Roma as a nationalism; to be Roma as a minority; to be Roma as equal and empowered. Even though there is some support for the global coalescence of a Roma peoples and identity amongst segments of the Roma populations across several European countries (ibid), the conspicuous cultural, religious, linguistic and geographical differences separating Roma communities have left the project stalled in its tracks.

This study, moreover, challenges standard anthropological concepts relying on contemporary reinterpretations of a number of analytical and methodological tools employed both in the realm of academia and in popular culture. Most notably, the term ‘group’ must be challenged and re-conceptualized in order to function as a useful and meaningful mode of analysis and measurement. The underlying conceptual approach upon which this work has been built strongly incorporates Brubaker’s (2004) proposition that ‘groups’ as bounded, concrete and reified entities do not exist. Rather, what does exist and can be utilized and analysed is the notion of group-making as a continuous and ever-adapting process. By adopting this perspective, it becomes possible to identify, describe and understand how ethnic identity can
be created, and recreated, and subsequently imagined and presented as an entity that can be understood and presented to oneself, and others.

In essence, it has been crucial to embrace the idea that group boundaries are not fixed. The differences between various group affiliations and declared group characteristics as described by all of the participants in this study have indicated that the boundaries between ‘groups’ should be viewed more as a gradient, or spectrum, with many overlapping features in addition to the conflicting ones. While identifying as Muslim or Christian, it initially seemed that a clear and sharp distinction that cannot be breached or transgressed exists separating one Roma group from another, however, over time, it becomes clear that this is not the case. In the daily lives and religious practices of the members of these groups, distinctions between one religious belief compared to another is far more complex and far more permeable – not to mention negotiable – than is commonly presented to the outside world. Depending on the particular context of a particular moment in any given day, Muslim Roma and Christian Roma can emphasize this difference, but can just as easily completely erase it as well. The significance of this difference can become dominant in one situation, or can be pushed to the background in favour of another identifying feature in another.

Other concepts often taken for granted have also proven to be far more complex as well, including terms as all-encompassing as Roma to more individual based identity markers such as place of birth. In the subsequent chapter, a thorough review of the relevant social science literature on these theoretical constructs will be conducted, but with the emphasis placed on interpretation and analysis of the fundamentals.

The central significance and scholarly impact resulting from this ethnographic endeavour rests on a single major notion: anthropology and the social sciences in general, can no longer continue to make the same mistakes regarding the study of Roma identities, cultures, societies and communities, namely understanding and presenting either national, regional, or pan-national Roma societies as a monolith, as exotic, as bounded, as isolated, or as shared. In an attempt to better understand how individuals and groups of individuals negotiate what it means to be Roma amongst themselves, it has become clear to this author that we, as scholars and researchers, must problematize absolutely everything. Just as we understand that territorial, national identities are not only constructed, but also exist only in the imagination, and that it is therefore to generalize identities based on one, or several, criteria, so too must we apply this understand to Roma around the globe. Roma should not, and cannot be
romanticized, nor generalized, nor simplified. Nor, can we continue to limit the discourse of ‘Roma’ identity to the dichotomy of Roma and Non-Roma, but we must acknowledge and investigate the significance of inter-Roma relations and the role this plays in constructing, negotiating and maintaining the almost innumerable notions of what it means to be Roma. Perhaps the most significant result of this study is the acknowledgment that the way Roma negotiate their identities internally amongst competing notions, ideologies, geographies, politics, religion, class and so on plays a central role in determining the construct of Roma identity as much or more than the identity boundaries between Roma and non-Roma populations.
The theoretical framework that establishes the general parameters and guided the direction of this dissertation and the fieldwork overall rests on three layers of analysis: constructivism, nationalism and ethnicity and post-modern understandings of identity. Drawing on Fredrik Barth’s (1969) constructivist approach, and with support from contributions made by Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983), Chatterjee (1986), Dimova (2010), Llobera (1999) and Eriksen (1991, 1994), Roma identity is viewed as an ephemeral, ever-changing notion that is complicated through daily interactions, political and economic processes, media and nationalizing projects, as well as cultural practices such as language usage, customs, rituals, traditions and the like.

The label “minority” cannot be divorced from nationalist thought. The very classification of “ethnicity” is borne of European colonial expansion, as was the subsequent emphasis of ethnicity as identity the product of 19th century nationalizing projects (Gellner, 1983). Furthermore, it is only through the context of the nation-state that a designated entity (e.g., ethnic group) can be ascribed to minority/majority status (Eriksen, 1991). According to Barth (1969), identity is constructed and negotiated not through the “cultural stuff” (p. 15) that is often associated with ethnicity, but is forged at the boundaries of interaction between two different populations. However, this does not occur in a vacuum, but rather within the context of socio-economic and geopolitical realities. Dimova’s (2010) work on ethnicity and nationalism in the Balkans applies many of the aforementioned views to the specific context of the Balkans, linking the economic changes brought about by the collapse of socialist states and the war in Yugoslavia with the increased emphasis on ethnic identity. The relationship established by the author between commodities and consumption practices and ethnic identity has the potential to shed light on the particular situation in Shutka, where the once obscure Shutka Bazar has now become the main weekend shopping destination for all of Skopje. This has brought more non-Roma (Macedonians, Albanians, Turks and other ethnicities) into regular contact with the Roma community, but seems to have further entrenched ethnic-based ideas of identity and thus creating an even greater Us/Them dichotomy amongst both all populations, Roma and non-Roma.
Ethnicity is not distinctly circumscripive. Both the content of ethnic categorization and its peripheral edge are permeable, provisory and transitory sets of identity markers, notional and patent alike. Here, specifically, I refer to *Rethinking Ethnicity* (Jenkins, 2008), a seminal contribution to the anthropological and sociological cannon of ethnicity studies. Although Jenkins’ (ibid) views are insightful and merit careful consideration, if his arguments are to assist in furthering our understanding of ethnicity, it must be contextualized within existing precepts regarding ethnicity, especially when nestled within the more arching framework of identity in general, and conversely then applied to new areas of research.

Jenkins’ (ibid) major tenets on the construction of ethnic identity depart from the Barthian model that, in its simplest form, focuses on, “…ethnic boundary creation, ethnic change, ascription, and its situational character helps to emphasize ethnicity’s dynamic qualities” (Graham, 1999, p. 286). Barth (1969) failed to consider the importance of the cultural content contained within the boundaries, Jenkins (2008) argues, and places too much emphasis on the idea that ethnic boundaries constituted reified groups that could be identified and described. Conjointly, Barth’s hesitation to address the issue of race in its relation to ethnicity and his lack of discussion on power imbalance add yet more points of contention. This is especially poignant when addressing ethnicity and identity of any one of Europe’s many Roma communities.

The ethnic construct of the Roma of Central Europe has long been a thorny issue. Often viewed as a single, unitary group – albeit, spatial and cultural dissonant – by the majority non-Roma, the large numbers of differing Roma populations, in truth, possess a wide range of characteristics that are normally taken as markers of ethnic identity. Roma multiplicity encompasses a number of characteristics. Geography, religion, and language are three major factors involved in categorizing Roma identity. However, not all individuals or communities that are externally identified as Roma necessarily consider themselves as such, while, conversely, not all that identify themselves as Roma are considered to be so by both the Roma and non-Roma.

Dimitrina Petrova (2003) identifies several groups that do not consider themselves as “ethnic Roma”. They include,

“The Jevgjit in Albania; the Ashlkaliya and Egyptians in Kosovo and Macedonia; the Travelers in Britain and Ireland (also known as Tinkers in
the latter – author’s note); and the Rudari and Beyashi in Hungary, Romania and other countries. The Sinti, who live in many European countries, particularly Germany, are sometimes subsumed under the Roma category and sometimes set apart” (2003, pp. 111-112).

Michael Stewart (1997) provides a glimpse, through his ethnographic work among Hungarian Roma, into relations between Romani speaking groups and Romungro, or non-Romani speaking Roma, exemplifying the complex inter-dynamics of what it means to be Roma.
Ethnicity and identity

Ethnicity, the term, has been subject to many interpretations and manifestations. Generally speaking, it is often equated with a sense of group-ness bound together through common cultural characteristics, which at some points in the past has included ancestry and genealogy. Defining ethnicity, however, in the social sciences has been far more contentious. Until recently, ethnic studies have been dominated by several opposing views. The primordialist view holds the view that ethnicity is innate to the human experience and understands social bonds as externally defined. The perennialist approach takes a similar stance, but differs in that it sees ethnicity as mutable. Conversely, instrumentalism takes the view that ethnicity is tool used for political ends, such as creating and sustaining social hierarchies, or increasing wealth and power. These ideas were later supplanted by the constructivist position, which rejected the idea that ethnic identities are a natural part of the human species. Instead, ethnicity was viewed as a recent phenomenon, resulting from historical processes, and was therefore considered a social construct (Gellner, 1983; Brubaker, 2009; Jenkins, 2008).

Sociology and anthropology have, more recently, moved beyond this debate in an attempt to better understand what exactly comprises ethnicity; what are its boundaries; and the mechanisms that construct and maintain these identities. Ethnicity was often used synonymously with terms such as race, nation and citizen. Modern approaches to the study of ethnicity began to account for these discrepancies, and continue to attempt to reconcile and delineate the various characteristics of ethnic identity, as opposed to race, or nationalism (Brubaker, 2009). The roots of contemporary understanding of ethnicity in general, and ethnic groups specifically, lie perhaps in Max Weber’s ideas (1978), who maintained that ethnic groups are,

“…those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists” (p. 389).
Weber (Ibid) saw nothing inherent about ethnicity. To him, ethnic groups resulted from politically and economically motivated desires to consolidate, structure and maintain power balances, wealth and social status.

Fredrik Barth (1969) also shared the view that ethnicity was a social construct, but forever changed the theoretic and epistemological approach to the study of ethnicity. He argued that ethnic identity, as a feature of social organization, is constructed and maintained through interactional, historical and political circumstances. The boundaries of ethnic groups are where different groups interact and it is there that they are maintained through, “social processes of exclusion and inclusion whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories” (Ibid, p. 9).

It is not the particular cultural characteristics of a group that define it, but rather what the Other group is and is not in comparison to oneself. These characteristics are not fixed and frequently change, but the constructed identity remains unchanged. Barth (ibid) also stressed that ethnic identity depends on both continuous self-ascription and external ascription, which occurs at the point of interaction between differing groups.

This seminal work has become the foundation for ethnic studies across scholastic disciplines, from which others have gone on to further deconstruct and elaborate. Jenkins (2008), in Rethinking Ethnicity, begins with the same conceptual premise that identities are, “being formed in processes and rituals of ethnic boundary maintenance. Recognizing such boundaries to be fluid and emergent…” (Haggerty, 1999, p. 310). He goes on to argue that post-Barthian research into ethnicity has been too focused on group self-identification, and has paid less attention to external classifications of ethnic groups. In a review of his book, Graham (1999) points out that, “this reflects the anthropological focus on ethnicity as a resource within a transactional model of social life at the expense of attention to power differentials” (p. 286).

Jenkins (2008) stresses the need to incorporate the role that categorization plays into understanding ethnicity. The view that ethnic groups are distinct entities, comprised of relatively homogenized constituents, Jenkins (ibid) argues, is false, and that ethnicity is, in fact, about diversity resulting from the overlapping nature of human interaction in society.

Where the author perhaps makes his most intriguing insights that pertain to the rethinking of Roma identity is in his discussion on the need to shift focus onto the external definitions of
the Other, the role that power relations play in this process and relationship between race and ethnicity. Jenkins draws attention to how continual negotiations concerning identities play out in people’s everyday lives. He begins by analysing identity as a combination of the nominal (labels used to describe groups) and the virtual (the experience of possessing a particular label). Because social groups define themselves, while social categories are defined by others, it is important to focus attention on the role of power dynamics between the nominal and the virtual in the reification of ethnic identities. Categorization takes place across several intertwined levels, from the individual to the institutional, and begins with primary socialization at a young age and is reinforced throughout life in public interactions, employment, kinship, politics, and other societal realms.

If this understanding to the Macedonian Roma living in Skopje is applied, a sharp distinctions emerges between what it means to be ethnically Roma among members of the community – understanding of course that Skopje’s Roma population is extremely heterogeneous, and made up of many social groups and communities – and what defines the category Roma. Much like in other Central European countries, Roma in Skopje are most often associated with negative, derisive and racist imagery – ranging from notions of natural criminality to simple laziness, or as extreme as a culture of disorder and poverty. As a Roma, however, to be Roma takes on a very different set of definitions, which may include a wide range of social and cultural characteristics.

The interaction between Roma and non-Roma Macedonians partly alters and helps construct the social and ethnic identities of all parties, influencing people’s own perceptions of themselves imposed by the Other. It is precisely at this point where power is an important consideration. Without going into descriptions of Roma persecution and second-class citizenship status in Central European counties – much of which has been extensively covered in existing literature –some real effects of this power dynamic become evident. Macedonian Roma generally have greater rates of poverty, have significantly lower school completion rates, and very high unemployment rates; they are the target of extremist and racist attacks, face discrimination in hiring policy, housing policy and welfare policy; the lack significant political voice, and are often at the receiving end of police misconduct and abuse (State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, 2021). Furthermore, the “Gypsy/Roma” construct as a social/ethnic/racial category is often employed for political ends and, as a result, are commonly victims of scapegoating.
Applying a broader perspective, correlations can be drawn between the use of ethnic categories in the subjugation of the Roma minority and the use of racial categories in countries with legacies of slavery and colonialism. This suggests not only a universality to Jenkins’ (2008) emphasis on the importance of power relations in constructing ethnic identities, but also draw attention to the discrete differentiations between ethnicity and race. Schlottner (1998) writes about Jenkins, “Ethnic identity is referred to the more basic, ubiquitous quality embedded in everyday contexts. In contrast, the identifications of race are rooted in external categorizations and ascriptions rather than in internal group identifications and subscriptions” (p. 620).

Ethnicity, race and nationality are inextricably intertwined in Macedonian society. While Roma – individually and as a social/communal population(s) – do not think of themselves as a race, non-Roma Macedonians perceive those who they identify as Roma on a basis of typically race-oriented features (e.g., skin colour and hair texture). Although race terminology is not used, and individuals may not even consider anything but the term ethnicity, they nevertheless use phenotypic and behavioural markers in their identification of others as Roma. Jenkins disagrees with the prevalent view that race is a subset of ethnicity. He stresses the importance of paying, “sufficient attention to the important differences between deployment and imposition of racial as opposed to ethnic, and also national categorisations” (Graham, 1999, p. 287).

This point of view can prove useful in identifying particular mechanisms through which externally defined categorizations of Roma are exacted and the role they occupy in transforming the conceptual with the reified. In other words, how images of identity, which include notions of the social and economic worthiness of individuals and groups, become manifest in reality, resulting in discriminatory and exclusionary practices, both formal and informal.

Finally, the re-shifting of emphasis onto what Barth (1969) called the “cultural stuff” (p. 15) – the attributes used to define the unique characteristics of a particular ethnic identity – is necessary, Jenkins (2008) argues, because this “stuff”, like language, religion, customs and other identity markers, is important to people. “It is not simply a boundary marker devoid of emotional significance” (Graham, 1999, p. 287). Although seemingly obvious, understanding that the daily lived experiences of people drive decisions and determines the course of social action and interaction. It is at this nexus – where people and ideas and decisions meet – create
and shape the identities, formal and informal, as well as individual and categorical, of others and ourselves. I believe that this is often not accounted for in the current literature on Macedonian Roma. Instead, the focus has largely been influenced by the tendency to understand Roma ethnicity as a bounded, isolate; an entity unto itself, rather than a complex array of socially nestle interchanges.

The concept of ethnicity is notoriously vague, with some scholars even arguing for its abolishment as a categorical term (Graham, 1999). If one contribution by Jenkins had to be singled out, it would be his argument that ethnicity does matter, and that the understanding of the term must be rooted not in the ephemeral, but in the day-to-day lives of people, and, “it needs constant critical and theoretical attention…” (Ibid, p. 288).
Ethnicity, nationalism and the Roma

Dispersed across Central and Eastern Europe, the continents largest ethnic minority, the Roma, have lived in a sprawling Diaspora for centuries. Once partly itinerant peoples, Europe’s Roma have long been sedentary, settling not only in small towns and villages, but also in cities among the majority population of their nation-state. The Roma have been, over time, the focus of enslavement, political persecution, economic exploitation and targets of ethnic and racial prejudices. To that extent, the Roma today live largely on the fringes of society, residing in small clusters of low-quality home, and with generally high unemployment rates. Despite these harsh and oppressive conditions, the image of the “traditional” Roma continues to feed the imaginations of the public at large, and constructs a distinct ethnic and cultural identity among the Roma themselves.

The Roma, also referred to as Gypsies, Cigani and other derivatives of the word, live throughout Central and Eastern Europe, both in their own communities, as well as in Cities, towns and villages. The Roma themselves are not a homogenized Diaspora, with a single language or a unified identity, nor culture. Although this is the prevailing image of “Gypsies” (Csepeli & Simon, 2004) held by most European citizenry, the Roma actually consist of many disparate communities, each with their own characteristics that – while still recognizable and mutually intelligible to other Roma – are far from sharing any profound national consciousness and have, “never conceived of themselves as belonging collectively to a single cultural, let alone ‘national’, group” (Pogany, 1999, p. 154).

Istvan Pogany (1999), in his essay, Accommodating an Emergent National Identity: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe, brings further attention to the understanding that Roma identity is maintained not by the similarities of differing Roma communities. Primarily, he argues, because they do not share attributes like customs, incomes, and life-styles that could be used to draw parallels between one another, rather the, “fact that they ‘looked the same’.

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5 Traditional is used in this work as an umbrella term for not only the highly exoticized and romanticized image of the Roma, or “Gypsy” in Western imaginations – one most commonly portrayed in popular media – but also of biased and prejudicially held views, such as criminality, dependency, etc.
Or ‘seemed the same’, to those who were labelling them. But they did not seem the same to one another” (Ibid, p. 155).

Both Pogany (1999) and Csepeli and Simon (2004) suggest that Roma have never seen themselves as a unified group, instead the imagined group “Gypsy” originates among the majority population as both myth and stereotype. Roma identity can therefore be partially understood as a construction of the dialectic relationship between Roma and non-Roma, often referred to by some derivative of the term, gadžé (Pogany, 1999). The Roma consequently often bear the brunt of social and systematic discrimination. As a means of survival and resistance to the dominant powers of any a particular moment in time, the Roma have developed a series of social mechanisms that allow them to set firm boundaries between themselves and the majority population. The following examples only serve to illustrate some of the better-documented mechanisms. It should be understood that these examples will not withstand any comparative analysis of one Roma community with another, nor do these examples hold true outside of specific circumstances as well as both place and time.

With the immense diversity within the global Roma population, comes an equal diversity of responses to social, economic and political pressures. However, one of the more evident means at their disposal is a code of conduct called marimé (Ibid). This “pollution code” (Ibid), which governs, “every aspect of Rom life… It includes a set of strictures concerning everyday behaviour and procedures for rejection of an individual from the Rom community” (Vogel and Elsasser, 1981, p. 70) has also been documented among Roma living in various places, including the United States (Ibid) and Serbia (Zlatanović, 2006). According to Pogany (1999),

“Gypsies were separated from the non-Gypsy world not merely by their comparative poverty and illiteracy but also by feelings of innate difference. These feelings were reinforced by the marimé, or pollution code which Gypsy communities observed. Compliance with these rules ensured the virtual – and self-imposed – segregation of the Roma” (p. 154).

Additionally, in The Time of the Gypsies, Michael Stewart (1997) raises the practice of “ethnic and communal solidarity… buttressed by the moral idiom, an idiom of brotherhood” (p. 91). Not only does this notion of brotherhood encompass a sense of solidarity and imagined egalitarianism – imagined because it excludes the role of women – but created a
common cultural standard (Ibid). “Romanes, the Gypsy way, is an exacting regime but by demanding that the Gypsies all face in one direction, as it were, it created the conditions in which Gypsies resisted a society far more powerful than their own” (Stewart, 1997, p. 91).

Other social elements sometimes include strict adherence to endogamous nuptial practices that make up Roma kinship structures, which form the fundamental basis of all other types of social relations – e.g., economic, political social and legal (Jakoubek and Budilová, 2006). Marek Jakoubek and Lenka Budilová’s (2006) work in Slovakia offers a clear theoretical basis conceived from their ethnographic study conducted in Gypsy osadas. In Kinship, Social Organization and Genealogical Manipulations in Gypsy osadas in Eastern Slovakia, the authors central thesis is that kinship acts as the, “…dominant organizational principle in Gypsy osadas, and therefore it is in terms of kinship that political and economic functions are carried out” (p. 63). By illustrating essential facets of Roma social organization, they deconstruct communities to reveal a kinship system that serves nearly every organizational, economic, social and political necessity, and accordingly provides isolation, independence and self-sufficiency apart from the majority populations.

An osada is comprised of several consanguine kin groups, wherein each house is located in a cluster of houses called a dvorečeky, inhabited by parts of a, “cognatic kin group” (Ibid, p. 64). Relationships between family members are kept up through frequent visits, and membership to, what the authors call an, “actual kin group” (Ibid, p. 65) is determined by various factors, including marriage, economic pressures, personal attachments and antagonisms (Ibid). As was mentioned earlier, the two preferred marriage arrangements among the Roma are between two members belonging to the same kin group, and the other, called pre čeranki, being when, “two or more siblings marry two or more siblings” (Ibid, p. 66). The result of these endogamous tendencies is that Roma kin groups began to close in on themselves, and as a result, the Roma only keep track of common ancestry to four or five generations back (Ibid). By doing so, the character of a Roma kin group becomes flexible and accommodating toward what Jakoubek and Budilová (2006) call, “genealogical manipulation”, of which, they identified two types. The first being when a person is accepted into the family because they have been declared as a cousin, an aunt, uncle, or another immediate family member. This is accomplished by linking the individual to the family beyond the fourth or fifth generation so that no one would know for sure if there were a true familial link. The other genealogical manipulation is, rather, an act of exclusion.
“Someone can be excluded from the family for inappropriate behaviour or for gross violation of the moral rule (i.e., they do not follow rules of ritual (im)purity or rules of reciprocity within the family circle)” (Ibid, p. 69).

The necessity of establishing such codes of conduct, and having the kin group as the core of Roma communities - serving both as a system for social organization as well as the mechanism through which all social interactions are conducted – is to maintain control over Roma and non-Roma interactions, to demarcate group boundaries between not only the majority population, but also between disparate Roma communities. According to Jakoubek and Budilová (Ibid), “Genealogical manipulation in Gypsy osadas thus functions as a kind of (proto)political strategy and as a means of legitimizing given states of affairs” (p. 63).

Other perspectives, defined by Michael Stewart (1997) and William Guy (2001), take into account economic forces and inter-group relations, and an overall historical narrative, situating the Roma both in place and time. In reference to the former thesis, Will Guy (2001) citing another scholar, states, “Nicolae Gheorghe, a leading Roma theoretician and sociologist, recognized the significance of Roma labour power and inter-group relations involved in its utilization as a crucial factor in defining the nature of Romani identity” (p. 5). Michael Stewart (1997) observed in his work among Hungarian Roma that, “It is not only in matters of communal organization that Gypsies have asserted their autonomy from surrounding non-Gypsy society. As important has been their distinctive approach to the matter of gaining a livelihood” (p. 93). Stewart (Ibid) gives several examples of how Roma, even living in dire situations, carefully choose their means of generating income, including horse-trading, begging, small-scale agriculture and even begging. It is through trade, however, that Roma attempt to, “assert a degree of control over the outside world, or at least a rejection of the control which outside forces exert over the Gypsies” (Ibid, p. 94).

As to the latter point, Will Guy (2001) continues on to say that major changes throughout history and changes in Roma experience are closely linked together, and identifies three principle shifts during the twentieth century: the Second World War, the era of Communist rule and the subsequent transition to a market economy and a liberal democracy. The first shift marked a period of systematic annihilation as Hitler’s Germany set out to purge occupied territories of what they deemed were inferior races of people, including a half million Roma among the Jewish and Slavic people in the region (Ibid).
The next shift followed immediately after the Second World War, as the Soviet Union defeated the Nazis and established its influence over what came to be known as the Eastern Bloc (Ibid). The Communist era for most Roma was a period of increasing proletarianisation and in spite of continuing discrimination they were able to benefit from regular wages to improve their social situation. However, the Roma were seen by the socialist state as their responsibility to assimilate the group in order to minimize expression of ethnic identity, which was seen as a threat to the state (Csepeli and Simon, 2004). Forced assimilation policies had disastrous effects on the Roma economically, by setting the Roma in opposition to the majority population as the Other, and thereby increasing public stereotypes and reinforcing extant prejudices and discrimination (Ibid), and psychologically by, “strengthening feelings of inferiority and self-hatred” (Guy, 2001, p. 11).

The third stage, in comparison with the last, proved to have an even more profound effect on Roma life, and has cast doubt on their future. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the massive restructuring of economic systems from a command economy to that of a market economy, the Roma found themselves facing almost universal unemployment because the new market economies had little need for unskilled Roma labour, and displaced the need for their crafts and services (Ibid). Consequently, Roma in their struggle for survival turned to state benefits and black markets for an income, further exasperating resentment against Roma among the majority nationals (Ibid).
Prior to the last century, the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe date back to the as early as the ninth century, establishing large settlements in the Balkan Peninsula between the eleventh and thirteenth century (Maraushiakova and Popov, 2001). Their dispersion across the region was greatly affected by mass migrations identified by Maraushiakova and Popov (2001), three being the most important in modern times: “from the second half of the nineteenth century to the first half of twentieth… 1960s and 1970s… 1990 onwards” (p. 35). The first mass migration, known as the great Kelderara invasion, occurred with the end of slavery in Moldavia and Wallachia; the second Yugoslav wave was a result of Josip Broz Tito’s rule, and the opening of Yugoslavia’s borders; and the third period saw large numbers of Roma leaving the former Yugoslavia (as a result of the onset of civil war) for Western Europe, Canada and the United States (Ibid). These migrations ultimately shaped a multitude of characteristics found among the Roma today, some of which include, “…language, lifestyle, boundaries of endogamy, professional specialization, duration of settlement in their respective countries, and so on” (Ibid, p. 36).

In the last two decades, the Roma of Central Europe have become a central focus of the European Union, a growing number of non-governmental organizations and international bodies, like the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and The Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe. Being the largest ethnic minority in Europe and the continent’s only non-territorial, nomadic people, currently spread across the region in varying numbers, the Roma have long been considered either a threat or a nuisance throughout much of history. The threats faced today by all Roma groups are as serious as any other time in history. One difference being the exception; unlike in the past, Roma today may find both a political and a civic route to voicing their needs and concerns, and, perhaps, negotiate a position of leverage among established nation-states.

Several political and governmental institutions have taken the first steps toward recognizing the Roma as a minority, and/or ethnic group, deserving of protection accorded by international law. One such development is the establishment of the First World Romani Congress and the founding of the International Romani Union in 1971. Today, there have been a total of five World Romani Congresses, the last one having been held in Prague in July, 2000 (Acton and Klímová, 2001). The major achievements of behalf of these and other
organizations taking up the Roma cause (whatever that may be can be accorded to the way in which these organizations define perceived needs and desires of Roma people) include expanding a sense of Roma nationalism, furthering the political representation of the Roma in European and Global affairs, reducing misconceptions and stereotypes widely held by the European citizenry at large, and amassing public and political support for declaring the Roma as the world’s first non-territorial nation.

In an attempt to address issues of discrimination, oppression and ethnic hatred regarding Central European Roma, a text entitled the Copenhagen Document, adopted in 1990 by participating states in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (Pogany, 1999). The document condemned xenophobia, anti-Semitism, ethnic and racial hatred and other forms of prejudice, and provided great support to issues and initiatives related to the Roma (Ibid). The most prominent of which is the push for the recognition of the Roma as a viable ethnic, or national minority, group, thus securing the, “…rights and entitlements that follow from this status” (Ibid, p. 164).

The fact of the matter is, however, the Roma themselves do not much care for the establishment of national, international, and non-governmental organizations and are far from able to conceive of themselves as comprising a single cultural, social or national entity. And for all the achievements mentioned above, the reality is that millions of Roma across Europe still live under grave and oppressive conditions, both marginalized and alienated, all the while struggling to maintain their particular values and cultural character. From education to employment to housing, serious problems abound Roma communities; coupled with systematic sedentarisation programs and discriminatory practices, as well as their social stigmatization, the recognition of the Roma as a people and culture equal to all others is paramount if Roma are to improve their condition.

“When we think of our national identity or that of other European peoples (with or without states) we imagine a near mystic assimilation of territory, language and people” (Stewart, 1997, p. 85).

In his research on Komachi pastoralists, Bradburd (1998) applies a Marxist theoretical approach to shed light on the inequality and exploitation faced by this identity group, and to expose how this influences their relationships and daily interactions with other populations in the region (Tavakolian, 2003). Bradburd’s main statement concerns how the distortion or
misrepresentation of cultural practice and way of life are to be understood more accurately, and suggests that an ethnographic approach in the study of nomadic peoples can reify cultural symbols. Direct parallels can be drawn between Bradburd’s theoretical interpretation of Komachi reality and that of the Roma. His statement can be applied to the situation in which stereotypes, prejudices and misunderstanding inform the mainstream publics image of the Roma, and ultimately contributes to the construction of a Roma identity that reinforces myths, labels and cultural distortions.

Aparna Rao’s (1998) ethnography of Bakkarwal Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir, India, draws attention to how contemporary issues in the study of power relationships, agency, and individuality inform social flexibility and self-sufficiency found among itinerant societies (Tavakolian, 2003). Rao (1998) examined the organizational structure attributed to the Bakkarwal to identify elements of autonomy and individuality with a collective and communal context. Although the Bakkarwal adhere to principles and ideas, such as moral responsibility and selfhood, it is the cooperative nature and collective identity (Ibid) that enable agency within society (Rao, 1998). Once again, a direct correlation between Central European Roma can be proposed in terms of the mechanisms of collective and communal organization employed as a means of negotiating political and social relationships in an overt in-group/out-group dichotomy.

Lastly, Salzman’s major contribution was his portrayal of the Yarahmadzai of Baluchistan and an analysis of, “patterns of interpersonal and structural equality among the Yarahmadzai Baruch” (Tavakolian, p. 299). The author argues that qualities like social diversity, conflict and adaptation are a central part of the Yarahmadzai’s concept of reality, and that it is through these characteristics that the maintenance of social order could be understood. “…Salzman demonstrates that apparent inequalities in social relationships may be offset both by ideologies of solidarity and by social obligations of collective identity and mutual assistance” (Ibid, p. .311).

As was alluded to earlier, while most Roma today live in a state of chronic unemployment and all degrees of poverty, any number of individuals and families can be found occupying all economic classes. Whether they own the biggest home in town, or they manage international organizations, or they live on a day-by-day basis, Michael Stewarts (1997) account of brotherhood crucially reinforces the example of ideology not only in group cohesion and solidarity, but as an image of self-hood as egalitarian, sovereign and self-sufficient, thus
providing further support to Salzman’s explanation of identity and intra-group dynamics among peoples who live across geo-political boundaries.

As Istvan Pogany (1999) argued in his essay, *Accommodating an Emergent National Identity: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*, “acknowledging that the Roma constitute a European national minority is not the same as accommodating them. The latter would require states to take proper account of the cultural, social and economic features which distinguish the Roma from most ‘traditional’ national minorities” (p. 163).

By demonstrating that an anthropological conceptualization of social organization and intra- and inter-group interactions correlate with empirical data observed in the field, the aim was to add to the validity of Roma identity and culture as a viable entity, and thus worthy of serious consideration and accommodation on behalf of the European nation-states and relevant international bodies.

Because the recognition of the Roma, as a people and culture equal to all others, is paramount if Roma are to improve their condition, to have a clear picture of Roma life, and an accurate understanding of their needs, both social and economic, is to strengthen their position on the international stage. Organizational strategies aiming to first establish a cohesive and agreed upon definition of Roma identity, and second, to elevate this identity, and thus all who identify with the identity, to an equal level politically and socially with those of other recognized minorities as well as the majority of the nation-states wherein any Roma reside, or are citizens have been attempted by Roma elites many times over the last century. In spite of this effort, little success has been achieved. Although it is not possible to represent the entirety of Europe’s Roma communities here, the data collected in Shutka during this project seems to point to a palpable disconnect between the Roma elite and the average person – which in terms of this project simply refers to those without significant political or social power. Moreover, the state of local affairs and politics in Shutka alone seem to most living there as insurmountable. As one of the participants put it in his own words in a passing comment, “What good are they [other Roma], when ours [Roma in Shutka, or the Eastern Balkans in general] are creatins” (Interview).

The Roma across the region are faced with numerous difficulties in an increasingly politicized world dominated by nation-states. For people living outside the contemporary geographic constructs of global polities (e.g., non-nationals, indigenous peoples, nomads, refugees and

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non-territorial ethnic groups) forced assimilation, widespread poverty and cultural denigration are facts of daily existence (Kende, 2000). Yet, while humanity has witnessed the near annihilation of the native peoples in the Americas, the Ainu in Japan and the aborigines in Australia, the increasing incorporation of tribal societies into urban and village life, and the forced sedentarisation of non-territorial ethnic groups, the Roma have perhaps not managed to thrive, but they have without a doubt managed to survive.

Although there is no shortage of scholarly, non-governmental and popular publications focusing on Roma from Europe in general, there is a surprising deficit in the literature pertaining specifically to the Roma in Macedonia, and the Balkans writ large. Some notable exceptions include linguistic research by Eric Friedman (2002), Victor Friedman (1999, 2005) and Matras Yaron (1997, 2004). These authors collectively have, in great detail, described not only the historical development of Romani dialects, but have analysed and compared the variation in the dialectical continuum both in Macedonia and across the Balkans. While their work does not directly speak to this research directly, the more socio-linguistic insights into language usage in the private and public spheres, the struggles to codify and standardize Romani language(s) and how politics and identity come into play offer informative perspectives. For example, Friedman’s (2002) analysis of the Romani press in Macedonia depicts a fragile situation wherein the two most commonly spoken Romani dialects both struggle for prominence as well as merge on occasion, not because of grammatical necessity, but due to careful political and social consideration. Specifically, he shows the importance of individual decisions made by members of the press and the pressures put upon them to favour one or another dialect.
Roma in Macedonia

Other important areas of discursive research include ethnographic studies conducted by Demirovski (2000) on the Sredorek Settlement in Macedonia, Trubeta (2005) on the Balkan “Egyptians”, Zajc (2007) on the Bayash Roma in Croatia and Zlatanovic (2006) on the Đorgovci Roma in southern Serbia. Although I have yet to find an ethnographic study specifically on the Roma living in Shutka, this research provides detailed descriptions of other communities that, while very different in most respects, share certain attributes with the Roma in Macedonia. It is this author’s assumption that this may help in understanding what can and will be encountered in the field in Shutka, and can thus assist in both comprehending and analysing the collected data.

Authors such as Ilienski (2007), Le Bas & Acton (2010), Thelen (2005), and Wolf (1982) offer a more global view of Roma life, particularly pertaining to discrimination, racism, poverty, education and policy making. By most accounts (Koinova, 2002; Friedman, 2005; Barany, 1995), Macedonia is perhaps the most progressive states in Europe in regard to their policies toward the country’s Roma population. However, the situation is far from ideal and comparisons with other European states is warranted. These works primarily do just that; outlining the historical and contemporary political, economic and social circumstances of Macedonia’s Roma, as well draw comparisons to the wider context of European Roma communities in general.

The articles and books in this section (Courbage & Wilkens, 2003; Demirovski, 2001; Dimova, 2006; Ilievski, 2007; Koinova, 2002; Pinnock, 2001; Ram, 2012; Rossos, 2008) provide a basic overview of the history, demographics and other issues, ranging from education to minority governance in Macedonia. Although these authors do not address issues of identity, nationalism, nor do they engage in fieldwork or ethnographic investigations, they do provide the general landscape of contemporary Roma reality and the conditions under which individuals and communities must operate. Courbage & Wilken’s (2003), and Koinova’s (2002) work is based on the 2002 Census of the population conducted by the Republic of Macedonia State Statistical Office, while Ram (2012) and Ilievski (2007) discuss EU politics and ethnic mobilization and its effects on the Roma in Macedonia. Pinnock (2001) addresses the question of the right to education for the Roma in Macedonia, and Rossos (2008) provides a comprehensive history of Macedonia.
Methodology

An overview of Shuto Orizari and Macedonia’s Roma population

The complex structure of Roma populations in Europe is fortunately not entirely lost on the academic community. Linguist — along with anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists — have all contributed to this understanding to some degree. In contrast to academic perspectives, overwhelmingly pervasive assumptions among the general public, the media and among various governmental institutions is that the Roma are a homogenized group speaking the Romany language and unified — if not by territory — by a shared culture. Perhaps due to the seeming ease with which the Roma are simply written off as incapable of possessing a complex social structure in the public sphere, this supposition continues to stubbornly taint scholarly research.

As a critical point of departure from this point of view, the approach adopted in the methodology utilized in this ethnographic study was to assume the converse position; one which postulates that Central European Roma are, based on socio-historic developments across the approximate six centuries of Roma presence in Europe, heterogeneous and differentiate radically in terms of ascribed and achieved identities. Upon this basis, it becomes imperative to pose further questions as to what degree and through which mechanisms these intra-ethnic differences — both perceived/actual and historical/societal — reify themselves in people’s lives on both micro and macro scales.

Shuto Orizari is a small municipality of Macedonia’s capital city, Skopje, straddling a portion of the city’s northern border. By stripping away tendencies to romanticize, caricaturize and conflate the city’s Roma population, an attempt will be made to understand all shades of the actual demographic and ethnographic realities as experienced by the municipality’s denizens. The underlying purpose is to create a detailed picture of the complexities of Roma society in Skopje into the nuanced relationships between various communities living side by side. The research site was chosen for its unique characteristics as one of Europe’s largest Roma communities, its status as a recognized municipal district as well as the relatively high level of participation in local and national politics. These features all contribute to creating a physical space in which the inhabitants are able to make their own political and cultural choices, and where societal and cultural processes can play out with fewer stresses emanating from outside
interference as compared with neighbouring countries - namely forms of repression including race-motivate attacks, excessive targeting of Roma by state actors, and the constant threat of, and attempts at, exclusion and hostility perpetrated by non-Roma institutions and individuals.

Also known as Shutka – a local moniker meaning “garbage” – this outlying municipality is home to roughly half of Macedonia’s Roma population (Demirovski, 2000). According to the Macedonian government’s 2002 census⁶, the population of Shutka was approximately 22,000, out of which 80% percent declared themselves Roma. Other major ethnic groups include Albanians (12%) and Macedonians (7%). The major religions include Islam and Christian Orthodoxy, along Jehovah Witnesses, Catholics and Evangelicals. The district’s two official languages include Arliski (the majority local dialect; generally referred to as Romani) and Macedonian – the only municipality in Skopje to have two official languages. It is also the only official municipal district in Europe with a Roma mayor.

The following chapter will outline major demographic elements as they pertain to minorities, their distribution and relevant characteristics on the national, municipal and district levels. A historical overview will also be incorporated as to paint as complete a picture as is possible within the limits of this paper in order to contextualize the current environment within which Shutka’s Roma find themselves today. Subsequently, we will take a close look at Shutka itself, focusing on the individual character of the varying Roma communities that make up the local population. Although little to no analysis is on offer here, this section will nonetheless serve as a useful tool to those interested in this topic by offering a consolidated

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Fig. 1: Ethnic minorities of Skopje

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⁶ This is the latest reliable census data available in Macedonia due to the failure of subsequent attempts at conducting a national census in 2010. See Vrgova, R (2015) for more information on the failed 2010 Macedonian census count.
ROMA IN ŠUTKA

source of information that otherwise can only be found in fragments scattered across a variety of primary and secondary sources.
Macedonia: the national composition

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Macedonia retained much of its multi-ethnic composition due, largely, to the absence of military aggression following the republics declaration of independence in 1991. Macedonia is a small country with a population of just over two million. The major ethnic groups include Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Roma, Serbs and many others in small numbers.

Table 1 shows official census data from 1994 and 2002 - the latest available governmental statistics, showing the ethnic make-up of national minority populations, while figure 2 provides a visual approximation of the distribution of ethnic minorities in Macedonia. While Albanians are by far the largest ethnic group in the country, the Roma make up the third largest minority after Turks. It is worth mentioning that official statistics such as these rarely depict the actual number of Roma inhabitants. The reasons behind this fact have been well established by other researchers (Koinova, 2002; Courbage & Wilkens, 2002) and include the reluctance of individuals to identify themselves as Roma out of fear of being target by discriminatory policies and other racial, or nationalistic motives that all too commonly result in great hardships.

Macedonia’ conducted its latest census in 2021, and published the first dataset in 2022 (State Statistical Office). This census, however, has been extremely controversial and therefore was not included in this research. The main opposition party in Macedonia refuses to recognize the census, claiming it was rigged and incomplete. Additionally, many important organizations in the country and the Orthodox church have called the census invalid (Tetovo, 2022). In order to maintain the highest degree of reliability possible, this research will continue to use the data from the 2002 census; keeping in mind that the 2022 census suggests that the overall population of Macedonia decreased by 9.2% over the last twenty years, which corresponds to a similar rate of decrease for the major national ethnic groups (Ibid).
Table 1: Census data of national ethnic groups from 1994 and 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic groups</th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonian</td>
<td>1,378,687</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanians</td>
<td>478,967</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turks</td>
<td>81,615</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>43,707</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbs</td>
<td>39,865</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Croats, Vlachs, Bosniaks, etc.)</td>
<td>46,910</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Distribution of ethnic minorities in Macedonia
Another contributing factor of importance is the process of self-identification through which various groups see themselves as Roma, or not, regardless of what external classifications, or perhaps even shared genetic, cultural, political or social markers may suggest. In the case of Macedonia, the claims made by the self-identified “Egyptians” and “Vlachs” are known to insist that they belong to their own, separate ethnic groups. Similarly, those living in the eastern part of the country claim Turkish identities in favour of a Roma one. Although non-Roma, and in many instances those who consider themselves to be Roma, tend to regard these groups as sub-sects belonging to the larger, more general classification of Roma.

Others (Koinova, 2002; Pinnock, 2001) have also pointed to the difficulty that many Roma have had in attaining citizenship as Macedonians. Because many do not possess the necessary documents to prove their identity, birth, or even address, as well as the hostile and heavily reluctant stance by the government to grant citizenship to Roma individuals, many people since the breakup of Yugoslavia till today have not been successful in gaining any official recognition.

Additionally, beginning with the 1994 census, residents living abroad on a permanent, or semi-permanent basis were no longer included in the official statistics. Although there is no data estimating how many Roma work, or live abroad, but continue to retain their official residence/permanent address in Macedonia, anecdotal accounts according to various travel sites, online forums and reports issued by non-governmental organizations (Koinova, 2002) claim that large Roma settlements like Shutka double in population over summer months when many people return home from abroad. This annual trend was also evident through the observations of this ethnographic study. I found my own rental accommodation because an entire family was leaving the country for Germany to join a family member already living there. On three sides of my new home, the homes were empty during the winter months because the families who owned them were in Italy and Germany working; all returned back to their homes during the spring. Street after street throughout Shutka were documented showing this same pattern of residency. Upon the return of many, the spring and summer months were often a time of making home improvements or continuing the construction of new homes by those families who had earned enough money to make such investments.

According to some Roma leaders and organizations, the actual Roma population nationally is estimated to be as high as 250,000, making up 12.5 percent of the population (Pinnock, 2001).
larger discussion is not within the scope of this article (see Demirovski, 2001; Koulish, 2005; Ioviţă, 2004).

The largest concentrations of Roma are found in Skopje (primarily in Shuto Orizari), Prilep, Tetovo and Kumanovo. Roma, generally, live in settlements on the edge of towns and cities, and are usually segregated from the rest of the population (Pinnock, 2001).
Historical divergence: the shaping of Macedonian Roma

The Roma living in Macedonia today can be traced back to the first arrival of various Roma groups into the continent. Although there is much debate on this topic, it is generally put forth by regional scholars that the Roma arrived in a number of waves. Koinova (2002) argues that the Roma first settled in Persia upon leaving India, but left for Armenia in the mid-seventh century in tandem with Arab expansion. Linguistic evidence (Bakker, P. & Monrad, A., 2011) suggests that these early Roma groups settled in Armenia until the Seljuk attacks of the mid-eleventh century drove the Roma towards the west. As a result, the population spread throughout the Balkan Peninsula. In the 14th century, Macedonia fell under Ottoman rule, the author (Ibid) continues, which had a lasting effect on the Roma population. In contrast to the West, where the Roma were heavily and violently discriminated against, the Ottomans proved to be far more tolerant and lenient, and “…discriminated against the Roma mainly in terms of taxes and public orders” (Ibid, p. 6). Throughout the subsequent six centuries, a large majority of Roma became Muslims, but were able to retain many of their linguistic and cultural features; partly due to the less hostile environment under Ottoman rule, and partly to the fact that the Roma remained marginalized and largely lived on the outskirts of population centres.

During the first half of the 20th century, the Macedonian Roma lived in a general state of extreme poverty and were actively persecuted as a result of numerous wars. Koinova (Ibid) claims that unlike the Jewish population, the Roma were mostly not sent to concentration camps during World War Two. She credits this to the, “…Roma’s adherence to Islam, as well as their general trend of declaring themselves as other minorities” (Ibid, p. 6).

After the formation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Roma’s situation began to change for the better. Authorities took a liberal stance on the Roma, and did not issue and enforce policies of assimilation, or forced settlement. In 1974, the Roma were granted the status of an “ethnic group” under the Macedonian constitution, and then in 1981, they were recognized as a “nationality” on the federal level (Rossos, 2008).

Although the Roma in Yugoslavia fared better economically and socially than in neighbouring socialist states, they suffered a similar fate as other Roma across the region when the shift to a market economy occurred in 1989. Unemployment rates skyrocketed, rates
of education plummeted, and their overall economic status worsened, leading to an increase in criminal activity and thus fuelling the flames of prejudice and ethnic-based scapegoating.

The Macedonian Roma in many respects followed a substantially different course historically. Like with all people, these historical forces shaped who the Roma are today, and helped to differentiate them from other Roma populations in the greater region. To the north and west, the Roma first lived under Habsburg regimes and later under the rigid socialist states behind the Iron Curtain. The Macedonian experience, on the other hand, was discernibly different. Even as a republic in the Yugoslav Federation, Macedonia had the largest population of Roma in the country, respective to the other republics, and, “…in an atmosphere of relative cultural freedom, standardized the Macedonian language, created a vibrant national culture, and facilitated national integration” (Ibid, p. 258). This was not limited to only ethnic Macedonians, but laid the groundwork for a future independent, multi-ethnic state that would enshrine equal status under the law in its constitution.
In the same manner that Roma living in different territories developed unique social, religious, linguistic and cultural attributes, Macedonian Roma too are a diverse, heterogeneous population. Demirovski (2000; 2001) identifies some of the more significant groups, in terms of population size, as the Arli (sometimes called Erli) Roma, the Dambazi (or Gurbeti) Roma, Kovači (also known as Arabadjie) Roma, Maljoci Roma and Gavutne Roma. He identifies religion, language, social and economic status as the foundations of the differences between these groups (Ibid).

In his sociolinguist study into the Romani language, its status and usage in Macedonia, Victor Friedman (1999) adds support to the importance of language in demarking differences between intra-communal sub-divisions among the Roma (see Table 2). The Arli (from the Turkish yerli, meaning “local”) dialect is the most predominant language used in Shuto Orizari, Skopje. Considering that roughly half of all the Roma in Macedonia reside in Shutka, Arli speaking Roma make up the dominant linguistic group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialect</th>
<th>work</th>
<th>bread</th>
<th>water</th>
<th>I gave</th>
<th>thus</th>
<th>with God</th>
<th>they</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arli</td>
<td>buti</td>
<td>maro</td>
<td>pani</td>
<td>dindjum</td>
<td>agjar</td>
<td>devlca</td>
<td>on, ola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Džambaz</td>
<td>buki</td>
<td>manro</td>
<td>pai</td>
<td>diyem</td>
<td>gëja</td>
<td>devlesa</td>
<td>von</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burgudži</td>
<td>buci</td>
<td>maro</td>
<td>pani</td>
<td>diyom</td>
<td>kidjal</td>
<td>devlesa</td>
<td>on, ol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurbet</td>
<td>buči</td>
<td>marno</td>
<td>pai</td>
<td>diyem</td>
<td>gaja</td>
<td>devlcha</td>
<td>von</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Examples of Romani dialectal differences (Source: Friedman, 1999)

In the 1970s, when Šaip Jusuf, a graduate of the University of Belgrade, and Krume Kepeski, a professor at the Skopje Pedagogical Academy, began to compile a standardized Romani grammar, they chose Arli as the basis for the new standardized language. Arlie (or Arliski) belongs to what linguists identify as a non-Vlax dialect of Romani. The next most prevalent dialect in Macedonia is Dambazi (from the Turkish cambaz, meaning “horse-trader”, or “Acrobat”). The dialect is also known as Gurbet, and is related to Lovari, Kalderaš, Ćurari
ROMA IN ŠUTKA

and Mačvano (Ibid). It is considered to belong to the Vlax dialect of Romani, albeit one that has been very influenced by non-Vlax dialects in the case of Macedonia. Another dialect spoken widely includes the non-Vlax dialect known as Burgudži/Bugurdži (from the Turkish burgucu, meaning “gimlet-maker”). It is also referred to as Rabadži (from the Turkish arabacı, meaning “drayman”), or Kovačja (from the word Kovač, meaning “blacksmith”). The latter names also refer to non-Romani speaking populations, such as the Gupci in southwestern Macedonia (Ibid).

The complicated realities of the linguistic variety among the Roma is not the only source of difference. Ethnic groups like the Vlach and the Egyptians are two opposing examples that illustrate this complexity. Both groups won official recognition as national minorities in Macedonia and have been very vocal in pronouncing their individual identities. In the case of the Egyptians, many believe that they are actually of Roma descent, but have assumed a new identity over the course of history in order to evade persecution and to raise their social and economic standing.

One author, Sevasti Trubeta (2005) makes the case that in fact there is a serious lack of archival documentation proving one way or the other that the Egyptians are, or are not Roma. Trubeta (Ibid) maintains that although the Egyptian identity and its origins are shrouded in myth-making processes, there is a viable possibility that the Egyptians did originate from Egypt, and that they are the descendants of the first to have migrated to Macedonia. The Vlach, on the other hand, are regarded as distinctly not of Roma descent. Hugh Poulton (1995), in his book Who are the Macedonians? gives a detailed description of Vlach history as separate than that of other ethnic groups. Even though scholars largely agree that the Vlach are a distinct group with their own language, they are often lumped together with the Roma in terms of both public perception and state statistics (e.g., census data). These two examples are a clear illustration of how ascribed and achieved identities are at play in the overall demographic landscape of Macedonia.

A final point of differentiation, albeit a less significant one than those just discussed, is religion. Here, the heterogeneity among the various Roma groups is less vast. As stated earlier, the majority of Roma adhere to Islam, with a significantly smaller percentage belonging to the Orthodox Christian faith, and even fewer who claim to be Catholic, Protestant, or Evangelical. Table 3 shows that after Islam, Orthodoxy is the second largest religious affiliation for the Roma.
According to Demirovski (2000), “the relationship between these two religious groups is marked by mutual distrust and a lack of respect. In the opinion of Muslim Roma, Orthodox Christian Roma are not true Roma at all” (p. 154). Other minor religious movements, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses have not yet found much support from Roma in Macedonia. If Demirovski’s claims are found to be true and generally applicable to the larger populations of religious groups, further research into the topic would not only be warranted, but essential to improving people’s understanding of such critical factors in constructing various Roma identities.
### Table 3: Population of Macedonian by ethnic group and religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>Orthodox</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Protestant</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Atheist</th>
<th>Non-reported</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macedonians</td>
<td>27,104</td>
<td>1,229,147</td>
<td>4,144</td>
<td>1,081</td>
<td>15,139</td>
<td>1,411</td>
<td>4,330</td>
<td>12,560</td>
<td>1,048</td>
<td>1,295,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanians</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>877</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>425,376</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>5,459</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>433,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turks</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>73,632</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1,063</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>75,205</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>40,040</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1,722</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>43,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlachs</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>7,964</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8,591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbs</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>38,449</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>40,220</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnians</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6,686</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgarians</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1,580</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptians</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,947</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15,105</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>15,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croats</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>1,564</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegrin</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1,798</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1,721</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1,521</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>4,852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-reported</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>974</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28,398</td>
<td>1,283,688</td>
<td>7,389</td>
<td>1,186</td>
<td>581,196</td>
<td>2,769</td>
<td>5,634</td>
<td>22,891</td>
<td>1,779</td>
<td>1,934,930</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A closer look at Shutka

Thus far, a picture of the Macedonian Roma as a multi-faceted, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, if not multi-national conglomeration of various ethnic identities has been presented. If there were one place in the country that embodied the plurality of Roma society, reflecting macro-demographic traits on a micro scale, it would undoubtedly be Shuto Orizari. Modern-day Shutka was a product of the 1963 earthquake that shook Skopje to its foundations, leaving over a thousand dead and two hundred thousand homeless – many of whom were the city’s Roma inhabitants (Koinova, 2002). With the assistance of emergency international aid, the city government decided to create a temporary settlement in what was then a small town on the outskirts of the city. Over the next several decades, as more and more families and communities sought to reunite, Shutka experienced an influx of people, creating in the process one of the largest Roma concentrations on the continent. In 1996, Shuto Orizari was granted municipality status by the Macedonian government, and with their new status represented by a new flag (see figure 3), the majority Roma population elected their first Roma mayor. Since then, Shutka has become the cultural, political, and economic centre for Macedonia’s Roma. Today, it boasts an official population of about 35,000 inhabitants and has declared both Romani and Macedonian as its official languages. The municipality was also successful in electing Roma candidates to the parliament; two schools using Romani as the language of instruction have been established, as well as two private Roma television stations (TV Shutel and BTR-Nacional, which broadcasts in Macedonian and Serbian); and three Roma political parties were established in the district.
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They include the PRM, *Partija na Romite* (The Roma Party in Macedonia), whose president was the mayor of Shutka at the turn of the millennia; the PCERM, *Partija za Celosna Emancipacija na Romite* (The Party for the Full Emancipation of the Roma in Macedonia) – the oldest Roma party in Macedonia, established by Shutka’s first elected mayor; and SRM, *Sojuz na Romite* (The Union of Roma in Macedonia), the president of which, Amdi Bajram, was also a deputy in the parliament (for a greater discussion on Roma political parties, see Koinova, 2002).

Observers and researchers must be careful, however, not to paint too rosy of a picture of Shutka. Although its people enjoy many significant privileges, and are able to exercise rights not afforded to Roma living in other Central European states, Shutka does share other common features of Roma communities across Europe. The unemployment rate, for example, has been estimated to be as high as 70%. Unemployment and lack of investment into the local economy, the education system and infrastructure, for example, have all contributed to the high poverty rates in the district. Further conflating the issue, poor housing and the absence of basic amenities are commonplace. According to the report, *Strategy for Roma in the Republic of Macedonia*, published by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy Republic of Macedonia in December, 2004,

“more than half of the families live with another family in a community, 2 to 5 square meters of space for one member of the family, situation found in 40% of the interviewed; over half of the interviewed did not have conditions to maintain personal hygiene (bathing); around 60% use water in their homes, whereas the other 40% have pumps in their yards or public places; around 15% use improvised toilettes, while around 1.5% of the families do not have water at all” (p. 24).

Life on the ground in Shutka is also made more difficult by any number of human rights violations, discriminatory practices, abuses by the police and other forms of maltreatment. These are largely fuelled by interethnic problems between the Roma community and the two main majority communities, the Macedonians and the Albanians. This kind of tension between different ethnic groups may not be unique to Macedonia, nor to the Roma, but Shutka presents a rare opportunity to diverge from the status quo among researchers in this field, and to look inward at the huge array of networks and complex social arrangements
influenced not by Roma/non-Roma relations, but, for instance, by Roma/Roma interactions, for example, *Arli/Maljoci*.

Scholars have managed to identify, characterize, and enumerate the diverse attributes of Roma in general, and in Macedonia specifically. But, this in and of itself is no more than a standard-bearer of classical ethnology, reminiscent of the early days of ethnographic fieldwork. What is lacking is the meaning behind this list of demographic, cultural and linguistic features. No work to date has taken a serious look at how the difference among Roma sub-groups intersect with one another, how and when various parts of these features are selected and expressed, or if they play a role in shaping social, economic and communicative dynamics. Furthermore, it becomes imperative to also not exaggerate differences in favour of observable similarities; the importance of either of which is hitherto greatly not understood.

Unfortunately, little, if any, scholarship exploring the rich diversity present in the lives of those who are so quickly glossed over as the ‘Roma’ exists. Even within this essay, the term ‘Roma’ was employed not only as a term of convenience, but mainly because the language necessary to accurately depict Roma society is simply not available. It is the goal of this paper to attempt to establish the basic, ground level introduction to bring about the possibility of taking a new approach to the question of Roma identity and Roma community by heeding more attention to the actual lived experiences of the Roma, and doing away with the general concepts and notions that have come to dominate the discourse on everything Roma in both Western and Central Europe.
Data Collection

The ethnographic fieldwork portion of this research was designed to maximize the resources available to me, as primary researcher. Having had little or no access to funding sources, sponsors, institutional connections or backing, the fieldwork itself was doomed to be of limited scope, and minimal efficiency. Large-scale methods of data collection that are not traditionally a part of ethnography, but are standard approaches used in the social sciences, such as surveys, statistical analysis and direct interviews with large numbers of participants, were not possible due to the severe lack of financial resources available – albeit such data would have been valuable and contributed greatly to this study. In response to the logistic realities, this study relied heavily on the use of participant observation, a review of available literature, establishing inter-personal relations and networks in order to gain access to local institutions, procuring personal amenities, such as housing, as well as locating individuals who could assist in the project as interpreters, informants and assistants.

Additional difficulties also arose due to several facts on the ground in Shutka. Even though this is a community of twenty to eighty thousand inhabitants7, it is not a place that tourists go, and, as such, renting a flat or a house was (and is) not something within the normal economic practices of the district. Along a similar vein, the internet proved to be completely useless in terms of identifying, locating and contacting people or institution. As a result, it became clear early on that I would not be able to establish any relationships with people, find participants, informants and arrange interviews. The only practical manner in which I could achieve any of these goals was to simply arrive and employ a snowball sampling approach. This approach, as described by Bernard and Gravlee (2015), “…utilizes participants’ social networks to identify other participants” (p. 236). The problem still remained, however, of how to make initial inroads into the community and establish a first point of contact.

To clear this hurdle, it became necessary to find someone with already existing contacts with an individual from the community. The approach here was to first establish contact with the

7 Population estimates for Shuto Orizari fluctuate wildly depending on the source, with the lowest estimate being around 17,000 (according to the 2002 Macedonian census), and the highest estimate being approximately 80,000 according to government officials I interviewed at the municipal government office.
anthropology department at the university of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje. Let us take a look, to help illustrate the use of networks, how I came about my housing in Shutka, which subsequently led to establishing a relationship with the three families that would become the focal point of the fieldwork.

The initial step was to establish a working relationship with an appropriate professor of anthropology, particularly someone with knowledge of, and experience working in, Shutka. This was easily achieved through a brief but fruitful email exchange with Ljupčo, the head of the anthropology department at the time. This exchange resulted in an invitation to stay with Ljupčo and his family in his home until I was able to make alternative arrangements. What was not expected, but manifested after my arrival was that Ljupčo arrange not only a private office for me at his department, but also for an undergraduate student to assist me in my research. This young student proved to be very useful in future attempts to conduct limited archival research at the National Archives in Skopje, but also as an interpreter.

As it happened, I faced little to no language related problems in Shutka due to the fact that most individuals to whom I spoke throughout my time there spoke Serbian either fluently or had a working knowledge of the language. Ironically, many spoke Serbian better than Macedonian, with a surprising number of people openly admitting that they knew very little Macedonian and preferred to speak Serbian. To be clear, this was applicable primarily to the Roma in Macedonia, and, to a slightly lesser extent, the Albanian communities. As it pertained to non-Roma and non-Albanian Macedonians, the Serbian language was useful mostly with people over the age of thirty or forty, and even then, most spoke an interesting mixture of Serbian and Macedonian. This presented little problems for me and the research. As a native speaker of both Croatian and the Dalmatian dialect, I was able to communicate fully without the assistance of an interpreter. It would have been preferable to use one of the many Romani dialects as my primary language in Shutka, but this was not possible due to financial limitations, as well as the difficulty involved in finding a proper avenue to learn the language(s).

For the first two to three weeks after my arrival, the majority of my time was used to get to know my host, his colleagues at the department, as well as to familiarize myself with Skopje as a whole, and to pay almost daily visits to Shutka. These visits cannot be described as impactful. Without any local connections, my time was filled with walking around the streets, examining the wide array of products for sale at the central market, and being stared at
intensely. After reporting my regular failures to establish any form of communication with people in Shutka, and expressing my concern that finding a place to live seemed extremely difficult, Ljupčo offered his assistance. As per common relational dynamics between minority/majority, haves/have nots, powerful/powerless, poor/rich, and so on, the Roma in Macedonia are employed in the informal economic service sector (e.g., physical labour, house painting, cleaning, childcare). As such, Ljupčo had for years employed a young Roma woman as a house cleaner, as well as her husband from time to time when yard work, or other physically laborious work was needed around his house. This young married couple are called Fikrije and Emran – who will be discussed in further detail in the subsequent chapter.

One afternoon, as we sat in his office at the university discussing my housing issues, Ljupčo placed a call to this young man he employed from time to time. Perhaps it was luck, perhaps it can chalked it up to serendipity, but whatever the coincidence, it just so happened that as Ljupčo placed the call, Emran was at his friends’ house saying goodbye to him and his family because they were leaving the next day on a one-way ticket to Germany. I will come back to this story once again later because the details of this story are extremely insightful and indicative of the precarious and difficult nature of social and political realities that Macedonian Roma must navigate. However, for the purposes of this story, I will continue with what is relevant. Ljupčo explained that I was looking for a place to rent, and so he hung up the phone, spoke to the family, and five minutes later called back and told us to come to the house immediately. We then got in the car and went to Shutka to meet with the family. After a brief negotiation, I handed sixty Euro to the mother of this family for the first month’s rent and was told to come by in the morning the next day to get the keys just before they leave for the airport, and by that evening I had moved into the house.

This sequence of events not only illustrates the crucial importance of building and nurturing a network of associations in order to secure the practical needs of gaining access to the field, but it was a significant turning point that led to first contact, exemplifying the effectiveness of snowball sampling. Searching for a rental began with Ljupčo, which led to meeting Emran. Through the negotiation process, Emran and I began speaking and ended with a plan to meet the next day for a coffee. In the interest of prolonging this relationship, and knowing that Fikrije worked off the books as a house cleaner, I had proposed that idea of hiring her on a once weekly basis to clean the newly acquired rental. Personally, I did not need someone to clean the house, but I knew that it was a practical means to keeping our budding
acquaintanceship going. At the time, there were many concerns to be considered…. Was this manipulation? Was I exploiting these two individuals? Was I creating a power dynamic that would make building a relationship between equals more difficult, if not impossible? While all of these possibilities were real concerns, the reality of abject poverty trumped all my apprehensions. This family was truly poor and, as our relationship grew, the desperation and the sheer will of all in the family to improve their financial situation was extremely palpable.

In the beginning, it was impossible to predict the outcome of my decision, but by the end of my stay in Shutka the best analysis of the consequences of this decision can be described as murky. From one perspective, an argument can be made that our relationship had been to some extent reduced to a financial one. Our financial dealings did not end with the house cleaning proposal, but it created the foundation of our interactions and perhaps acted as the fuel for the majority of future reciprocal action. As time went on, I also found a way to employ Emran as an online moderator for the video game company I was working for on a part-time basis. I also invested countless days and hours helping the family prepare and sell the homemade chocolate donuts they made in their home and sold in the streets from a cart. On multiple occasions, I also accompanied Emran on his random jobs as a physical labourer (house painting, brick laying, cement mixing); and several cash gifts were given to the family from my limited finances reserved for fieldwork expenses, usually upon request from the father of the family. While all of this was happening, and although it could be levied against me that any data collected from my experiences with this family, there is another side of the coin to be considered.

First, the recognition that this family was living on the fiscal edge of survivability became obvious very early on; perhaps from our very first interaction. Second, it also became quickly apparent that every member of this family was primarily concerned with, and had put great and persistent efforts toward, alleviating their precarious financial circumstances. This observation is best exemplified by reviewing the roles played by every individual in the family. The grandmother worked daily as the primary caregiver for her grandson’s (Emran) children. Emran’s parents baked chocolate pastries six days a week beginning at five am, while three cousins sold them throughout the entire day in shifts pushing a cart around the various neighbourhoods of Shutka. Fikrije took odd jobs whenever she could get them, namely cleaning houses and caring for other people’s children. Emran, similarly, would do any job offered to him. During my entire time in the field, I had never documented a single
instance where he turned down a job. Lastly, the children were expected to not only go to school, but were expected to excel.

Furthermore, Emran’s father held weekly Christian masses in people’s homes as the unofficial priest for the entire Christian community in Shutka, through which he also met several times a year with church leaders outside of Shutka – including leaders of churches in Skopje, throughout Macedonia, and from outside the country – trying to gain access to funds to achieve his many goals. These goals included primarily to secure funding to build the first, and what would be the only church in Shutka, but also personal loans to improve the physical condition of their house and to try and grow their pastry business. In fact, it was through church donations that they got an oven, a dough mixer and the cart that enabled them to start this informal business.

The concern that the financial undertone of these interactions is without a doubt not unfounded. There was real potential that this could have rendered any findings corrupted, or not ‘authentic’. However, the emotional and intellectual bond forged between myself and Emran can also not be denied. The memories of receiving a heartfelt hug and being called, “my brother” (Interview) after a day of toiling together, or the trust placed in me to go off with their children for a walk around town, or the innumerable times I was invited to their house for a meal, or coffee, or just to hang out. It is not difficult to admit that I cannot be sure of the motivations behind my own actions, as well as their actions – after all, would I have ever bothered to invest all this time and energy into this family if I was not conducting fieldwork and if my future career as an anthropologist and professor did not hang in the balance – but after reflecting deeply on the foundations of my other relationships outside the field, such as with my friends in Budapest, my colleagues at the university and my family, it became difficult to see how money, need, dependency and opportunism did not form the foundation of most, if not all, of my interactions, and the motivation thereof.

In addition to meeting Emran, and by extension, his family, I had also met the next two families within the next twenty four hours. Once I had moved into the rental, I had barely unpacked my bags before my neighbour living in the house directly across the street from mine, approached the front gate with an extended hand and a welcoming smile. Senad was somewhat muscular, stocky man in his early thirties with a relaxed demeanour about him. Of all the neighbours, Senad was the only one to make this kind of an effort. To the left of my new home was an empty house, whose owners lived in Germany, followed by another home
occupied by a family I never met. They seemed disinterested in me completely and so I simply kept my distance, only giving a quick smile and nod when I would walk by them on the street. To my right lived a family who split their time between Rome, Italy and Shutka spending six months roughly in each location. When I first moved in, they were still in Italy, but had returned around the third month of the fieldwork. Our relationship never quite developed into something more than simply friendly neighbours. We would talk over the fence between the two houses whenever we saw each other, but never anything more than that. The husband, Damir, explained one afternoon that, like many other Đambazi Roma – one of the more predominant Romska vera after Arli Roma albeit much smaller in terms of population size – they lived and worked in Italy half the year. He vaguely mentioned that he was in the car business, but never went into more detail than that.

That day when Senad introduced himself and offered to help if I ever needed anything, I told him that I was trying to find a way to get internet access in the house. He then invited me to his home for a coffee where we discussed how I could use his internet connection, only we had to find a way to get the signal to my house. He offered to run a cable from his house to mine either by digging up the street and laying the cable in the ground (without permission of any kind), or by running it suspended above the street from existing poles. In the end we found a way of doing it by using wireless routers. We managed to borrow and buy the necessary equipment, and although Senad did not ask for any help, I insisted on paying half the monthly internet bill, which he reluctantly agreed to.

This story is important because it illustrates a point that Joy Hendry (1999) emphasizes in discussing the difficulties related to making first contact and establishing relationships in the field. Namely, that the needs and complications of everyday life are the vehicle through which communication and bonds can be established between individuals. If the rental was already equipped with an internet connection my first conversation with Senad could have been a simple introduction and not much else. Not only because the rental did not have internet access, but because sharing Senad’s WI-FI was complicated by the distance between our two houses, and the street separating us, we needed to sit over coffee to figure out a solution to the problem. This coffee proved to be significant for several reasons. When Senad suggested the coffee, we did not go to a café, but to his home. There I met his wife, Sevda, and their three children, Fatma (age eight), Riza (age five) and manijak (whose name I never learned because everyone only called him “maniac” due to the fact that he was three years old and in that
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phase of life often referred to as the terrible threes). What I did not know at the time was how I would end up spending time daily with Sevda and the children throughout the duration of my time in Shutka, and how valuable that would be in terms of the sheer amount of insight and knowledge I would gain.

Additionally, this was also when I met the third – and final – person/family that would become the focus of this ethnography, Burim. He and his family arrived to Shutka in the year 2000 as refugees from Kosovo during the war with Serbia and bombing campaign by the United States of America. For fifteen years, they have lived in a rented house next to Senad as stateless refugees, unable to secure safe passage back to Kosovo or any kind of permanent, or semi-permanent status in Macedonia. When Burim first arrived, he quickly formed a friendship with Senad and his family. At the start of this fieldwork, there friendship was already fifteen years in the making. It was through this relationship that Burim, who arrived only speaking Albanian, learned to speak Arliski, and found a place for himself in Shutka. As he explained to me over a cool glass of blueberry boza (a popular fermented wheat drink) at the pastry/cake shop and café down the street from our homes, he struggled for years to find his place in the community and that if not for Senad, he would have faced even greater difficulties adjusting to his new circumstances. Not knowing the language and not having friends or acquaintances would have been extremely difficult to overcome. Burim was acutely aware that, being an Ashkali Roma (Albanian speaking Roma from Kosovo) translated into being branded an outsider and “not a real Roma” (Interview) by many in the community. Over the last fifteen years, Senad was also the primary means through which Burim found many of his employment opportunities, the latest of which included working for a carwash in the centre of Skopje. A series of events that will be discussed in the following chapter in greater detail.

Finally, there is a need to address word choice and language usage in this dissertation. There are many problems concerning nomenclature and narrative particularly when researching vulnerable communities who face racism, discrimination, ostracization, bias, violence and oppression from virtually all directions. From fieldwork and other experiences in New York,
Budapest and eastern Hungary, Croatia, India and now Macedonia\(^8\), there are several statements I have come to expect to hear from people and institutions I inevitably must interact with – including, but not limited to, university departments, non-profit and non-governmental organizations, governmental organizations, academics, and social warriors. Sentiment communicated to me can be broken down into two categories: racism-fuelled comments regarding my safety, confusion and distrust.

The former often took the form of concern over decisions I had, or will have, made. On more than one occasion, professors and students had warned me not to move into Shutka; that it was “good enough” (Interview) if I lived in a neighbouring district and just spent my days there; that it was dangerous. There was a level of expectation to hear something like this from the kindly, older gentleman I purchased my vegetables from in the downtown market with whom I would chat with for a half hour each visit, but I was uncomfortably taken aback when it came from those that either worked with, or wrote about Roma culture, politics, poverty, discrimination or similar topics. This exemplified to me what I had long grown up with as a child in New York and in Zadar, Croatia regarding, respectively, Black Americans and Serbs (to just give one example per location). Put colloquially, the message could be paraphrased as, ‘we do not hate them so long as they do not become our equals; we can visit each other’s neighbourhoods, but do not move in; enjoy each other’s food, but not every day; our kids can marry, but I am not going to like it; I can employ you, but you should never be able to employ me.

The latter sentiment I would usually experience when I move in to a Roma community. Without fail, my presence is deservedly met with an initial suspicion and distrust. Roma communities throughout Central Europe have unfortunately grown accustomed to non-Roma coming into their communities under the veil of NGOs, to name one example, and with self-stated intentions to help. But, as I learned from countless conversations with Roma from the communities mentioned above, these encounters are often seen as outsiders coming in promising the world and leaving once they have fulfilled their own agendas. In an honest assessment, I too embodied this characterization. After all, after eight months in the field, I

\(^8\) These places were locations of field research conducted throughout my academic and scholarly life, both as a student and as a paid researcher. Not all of these resulted in publications, but several have - see Mavra, M. (2017, 2015, 2009, 2007).
too would be gone and, on my way to being awarded a doctoral degree. I knew there was little I could do to break this mould, but after many long nights of rumination, I concluded that the best I could do was to simply be honest with myself and others; not hide behind pleasant sounding rhetoric, or self-delusion that I am somehow different.

Furthermore, I planned to approach the relationships I was about to form with Emran, Senad and Burim, and their families with responsibility and to stay committed to forming lasting friendships that would continue their natural course well after my time in Shutka came to an end.

At this juncture, a word should be said as to why I have until now and will continue to refer to entire extended families through three individuals, Emran, Senad and Burim. The primary issue I faced and quickly realized was a major limitation to my ability to conduct research in this Roma community – as I have similarly faced in the past – was my lack of access to freely meeting and befriending women, be they single or married; with or without children. Understanding that there are always exceptions, generally in Shutka, it would have gone against local norms if I had made efforts to meet women first. However, once I had met any one of the adult males in a family first, and was then subsequently introduced to their families, I was able to not only speak freely and interact with the women and children in the family, as well as the older adults, but it was seen as perfectly normal to pay a visit and have a coffee with anyone in the household. An interesting event occurred with Sevda about one month into the fieldwork when my wife came to visit me and stayed for a week in Shutka.

Prior to her visit, my primary point of contact was Sevda’s husband, Senad. If, and when, I spoke with Sevda it was because I was passing by the house and she was in the front courtyard of their home. She would come to the locked gate of the courtyard, but would not open it or invite me in. After my wife’s visit, Sevda saw not only that I was not lying about being married, but that we were expecting our first child. Almost immediately thereafter, I was invited in with increased frequency for a coffee by Sevda regardless of whether her husband was there or not. It got to the point after some weeks that I did not even have to wait for an invite, but could come to pay a visit and just walk inside at will. Although it was never expressed directly by Sevda, she lowered her guard once my wife validated me as a family man. I can only speculate that this perhaps allowed Sevda to categorize me in a way that made her comfortable with my presence.
This series of events were coupled by other occurrences that ultimately widened my access to various individuals related to these families with whom I was trying to develop a relationship. Around this time, I also began going to work with Emran almost daily. He had landed a house painting job for one of his neighbours, which introduced me to the female head of the home we were painting. That in turn led to drinking coffee with her and her sister and another neighbour. After a hard day’s work, I was regularly invited back to Emran’s home for dinner, giving me hours to get to know his wife, mother, father, aunt, and many cousins, nieces and nephews. This also drew the attention of even more neighbours to ask about me and to come by to introduce themselves. It was much the same story with Burim as well, only under different circumstances. Burim and I had developed a relationship of equals – much more so than with Senad, who was older and often acted toward me as an uncle-type figure, and Emran who took to calling me “brother” (Interview) and saw me more as a part of the overall family. Burim was different. He became a real friend over time and treated me accordingly, as did his extended family.

Eventually, access to various members of each of these families increased over time, especially with Sevda, Fikrije (Emran’s spouse) and Burim’s mother. There were major limitations however. Certain activities, such as drinking coffee together, playing with the children, going for a walk to the local shop or pastry shop and similar types of interaction became normal and occurred with regular frequency. After some weeks, these women felt comfortable asking me to drive their son to the dentist, or to run some errands in other parts of the city, or even to pick them up from a relative’s house. Usually, I was asked for such favours when their husbands were at work and unable to take them themselves. Even though this opened the door for us to further develop our relationship, to speak less superficially about a wide array of topics and slowly broke down existing barriers between us, it quickly became obvious that we could take our burgeoning friendships only so far. There were many things that were still off limits; including, but not limited to, exchanging phone numbers, drinking alcohol together, going out just to hang out (e.g., disco, pub, cinema), staying at their respective houses past what would be considered a ‘reasonable’ hour at night (unless other adults are present) and many more similar behaviours. As I tested the waters trying to understand what was or was not acceptable, the limitations before me became ever-more crystalized, leading to the realization that this research, particularly concerning the employment of participant observation methodologies, would best be limited to those participants in the field – and their daily activities – with whom the greatest access to their
private and public lives could be realized. This, ultimately, meant that I would spend most of my time with the male members of the three participant families, heretofore referred to as Emran, Senad and Burim.
Results

A typical day in Shuto Orizari

A typical day in Shuto Orizari is a concept that is simply impossible to conjure up or describe, even with the greatest stretch of the imagination. Without any of the usually daily obligations that give people a sense of structure in terms of time management, tasks to be completed, or places to go, being a ‘full-time’ anthropologist in Shuto Orizari presented, on the very first day after arriving to the field, an opportunity full of possibilities. Seemingly limitless paths of inquiry, experience, relationships, and even dangers began to open up and sprawl in every direction. Much like standing at the foot of the toilet paper aisle in an enormous supermarket, the excitement and enthusiasm of perceived infinite opportunity soon gave way to crippling anxiety, resulting in an inability to make decisions, or commitments, nor to come up with even simple questions to ask.

What soon became clear was the realization that decisions needed to be made and some sort of structure needed to be imposed. Although different approaches were necessary depending on with whom I was spending the day with, the primary focus of this research was oriented toward three aspects of the participants’ interactions with their community and physical environment: (1) economic, (2) social and (3) political. All three of these spheres of interaction are very broad and can include a vast number of behaviours, and extend far beyond the realistic scope of this research. To prevent myself from going down a rabbit hole, of sorts, the imposition of further limitations was needed. Keeping with the central aims of this research, my observation of, and participation in, particular behaviours were restricted to the boundaries where disparate identities come into contact.

The economic sphere was limited to particular modes of economic behaviour within the confines of this research; namely taking into account how the participants earned money and how their level of income (i.e., class) impacted the ways in which, and with whom the participants interacted at the intersection of their social and political spheres. In practice, this meant that I spent several days a week accompanying the participants to their place(s) of employment / job site(s), as well as paying particular attention to their household and individual finances and how their incomes were managed. Additionally, an attempt was made to try and understand the justifications the participants expressed to frame their expenditures.
and why they prioritized certain forms of consumption over others. Put simply, while one family found it important to own a large LCD screen television, another family poured their money into home renovations, while the third family spent the little disposable income on going to the café or venturing to the city centre to have a drink or eat in a restaurant.

While it was easy to observe specific economic behaviours by simply being physically present in their lives, understanding the motivations behind specific patterns of consumption and consciousness of class and status internalized by each individual and their families required intensive and consistent dialogue between myself and the participants. This was best achieved through maintaining an on-going conversation over months in a mostly casual and non-interrogative style, rather than the more formal approach of conducting interviews of any sort. Being curious and employing a soft-touch approach allowed my participants to instigate conversations ranging from the cost of living to family earning to specific purchases at a pace and level of detail of their own choosing. With time and patience, every one of the participants in this study increasingly spoke more openly about these topics as they began to feel more comfortable with me as not only a researcher but as a neighbour and in some instances, a friend.

The second locus of observable interaction among the participants was nested in the social sphere. Taking into account the enormity of what could be considered social observations and participation, the scope of this work was restricted to specific types of interactions, particularly limited to interlocutors with differing religious and Roma ethnicity (Roma ethnicity) affiliations. Moreover, the position of the participants in the local social hierarchy was also taken into account due to the observed impact power dynamics had in determining who could interact with one another, to what extent and in what ways. Each of the three families that participated in this research were selected because of they were all of varying religious, ethnic and social positions. While the religious and ethnic identities are generally ascribed at birth, social position is determined by a complex array of variables, not only including religious and ethnic identity, but political allegiances (e.g., apolitical, party membership), wealth (e.g., poor, rich, employed out of country, assets), social standing (e.g., law abiding, criminal, kind, aggressive) and legal status (e.g., resident, refugee, expat).

The third factor considered in this research was politics. The approach to what constitutes politics was severely restricted. A systematic study of political organizations, parties, affiliations, parliamentary politics and the like are far beyond the scope and interest of this
research. However, Roma identity in Shuto Orizari would be impossible to divorce completely from any consideration of politics in general. The political sphere was taken into account in very specific situations and only as it became clear that some or any aspect of politics impacted, influenced, or dictated behaviour and interactions across identity boundaries.

As was discussed in previous chapters, Shuto Orizari is one of the few municipalities in Europe, if not the only one, that not only has a majority Roma population, but is also governed and administrated by the Roma living there with full or partial autonomy and sovereignty. Consequently, all things political – especially in the local context – is a part of many people’s lives. At a minimum, people would have a general idea of current political events and would hold some sort of opinion of the local government and associated institutions, while others more actively participate in the political going-on’s in Shuto Orizari. This variation in the degree to which individuals participate politically, both locally and nationally, is also evident in the participants of this research, and have been chosen, in part, because of this.

This chapter is structured to showcase the most outstanding and significant moments, events, conversations and interactions observed during the many months spent in Shuto Orizari. The following sections of the chapter will focus on the three main spheres outlined above (economic, social and political) in reference to the researcher’s experience living alongside the three primary participants – Senad, Burim and Emran – and their families, friends and neighbours.
Making Friends and Keeping Distance

Referring to the story of my arrival in Shutka recounted earlier, a brief retelling of the narrative will now be presented but for the purpose of examining the interactions of the actors involved in detail – as opposed to the methodological perspective offered earlier. I first met Emran with the help of my fieldwork advisor, Ljupčo. The real estate market in Shuto Orizari functions very differently than other parts of the city. Outside of the weekend visitors who come from all parts of Skopje to purchase cheap food, clothes and other goods at the municipal outdoor market (bazaar), not many tourists come to Shuto Orizari. There are also few people looking to rent apartments or houses on a long-term and short-term basis. Together, this all means that finding a place to live in Shuto Orizari was not an easy or straightforward task; no real estate agents operate in the area, Airbnb literally had zero offers on their app, and hotels were few and far between. Ljupčo was kind enough to let me stay with him and his family until I found a place to stay. After several weeks spent walking the streets of Shuto Orizari trying to meet people in hopes of finding somewhere to live, I started to despair. Desperation eventually morphed into complaining, which, in turn ushered in climacteric action in the form of pleading with everyone I knew in the city for assistance. As my options dwindled dramatically, Ljupčo decided to ask a young Roma couple from Shuto Orizari that worked for him; Emran, who he hired from time to time to do work around the house, namely light construction and yardwork, and Fikrije, who cleaned their house twice a week.

We were sitting in Ljupčo’s office at the university when he picked up the phone and called Emran and asked if he knew of anyone with a house, apartment or room for rent. Emran told us that at that very moment he was visiting his friend to say goodbye to him and his family because tomorrow they were leaving for Germany. After a brief moment, Emran called us back and told us to come to his friend’s house right away. Twenty minutes later, Ljupčo and I were at the house and I began negotiating the rental terms with the family. Initially, the situation was rather awkward, especially because this family seemed confused by me and what I was doing in their town. Nevertheless, we spent almost two hours talking, not only about how long I planned on staying and how much I would pay, but also about my studies, interests, family background, and so on, as well as the family’s current situation, why they were leaving for Germany and similar such topics. Although this family’s story is not directly pertinent to the central focus of this research, it is worth discussing for the sake of context.
The member of this family that I got to know the best during my time in Shuto Orizari was the eldest child, Sain – who was not there on this day, but who I met later when he would come up from Lake Ohrid once a month to see his friends and to collect the rent from me. In order to facilitate this discussion, I will refer to the family from the perspective of my relationship with Sain. As I spoke with Sain’s mother, I learned that her daughter has been living in Germany for years, and managed to sponsor her family (mother, younger brother and sister) to come to Germany to live with her and her husband and children. When I probed further, they mainly lamented about the lack of jobs, not having financial security and spoke at length about the many trials of daily life in Skopje, including discrimination, lack of health care and access to social services, poor housing, biased policing practices and a litany of social ailments plaguing their neighborhood and city in general.

Their plan was to move permanently, but they were unsure whether they would be successful. The “wiretapping affair” (Coalson, R., Kuka, Z. and Kjuka, D., 2016) in 2015 had just come to light exposing and validating years of reports of how Macedonian border police were ethnic profiling Roma citizens of Macedonia and illegally preventing them from leaving the country (Lee, J., 2018). A common refrain amongst the many denizens of Shuto Orizari that I spoke with about the issue was that the government was trying to prevent Roma from leaving in order to keep their population numbers up in order to continue receiving funds under the initiative Decade of Roma Inclusion (Regional Cooperation Council, 2017) launched in 2005 and similar funding sources usually expressed as “EU funds” (Interview). Although multiple attempts were made, I was never able to uncover or confirm the motives behind the government’s actions, but it was nevertheless a real concern for Sain’s family. They were sufficiently worried about being allowed to leave the country by Macedonian authorities that they purposefully purchased and packed two suitcases with nothing but stereotypical looking “Gypsy dresses” (according to the mother) as material evidence to bolster their pre-planned excuse that they were going to Germany for a wedding and would return to Macedonia.

We left that day with an arrangement that I would pay my rent upfront and that Emran would take the keys for the house home with him that evening. If the family manages to get on their plane the next day, I would meet up with Emran to get the keys and could then move in immediately; if not, then I would get my rent money back and my search would continue. The very next morning I went to see Emran and he handed me the keys. I never again spoke with anyone from that family except for Sain, who I would only meet almost two months into my
stay, but with whom I would become rather friendly. Over the subsequent few days, I packed my things and moved into my new home, and began the settling in process: buying food, pots and pans, learning where to throw away my thrash, how the windows open and close and all the other little quirks associated with getting to know a house. Interestingly, I did not have any bills to pay. The electricity was “free” according to the family – I was never given a reason why it was free even though I had asked, but instead just got a coy smile in return – and the city did not provide any sanitation services, the house was not connected to any gas lines, and did not have a landline internet connection – instead the family used their phones with mobile data plans to access the internet.

I was more than happy not to have any monthly bills to pay, but not having internet access was a bigger problem for me. I spent days trying to figure out a solution, but to no avail. However, this turned out to be the relational wedge needed to initiate a relationship with my neighbour, Senad, from across the street from my house. There is nothing additional to be gained from the details of this story that have not already been told earlier, but Senad and his family are nevertheless important in exemplifying the diversity of relationships and interactions amongst the people already mentioned.

All the people that I met over the several days it took for me to transition from my field advisor’s home to my place in Shutka – Emran, Sain, Senad, Ljupčo and their relatives – occupy a shared space that both requires, to some extent, and facilitates that they interact with one another. The space is shared due to proximity in terms of measurable physical distance, but also in terms of attitude and will. The way each individual perceives and interprets the world around them informs how they choose to interact with (and within) their environment, albeit not to the exclusion of other pressures and circumstances that can limit, expand, curb, or enhances how and with whom people interact with in and around one’s social context. Based on observations documented in Shutka and on conversations had with the individuals involved, an expression of what I would call value judgements – understood here as the way in which individuals understand, evaluate and prioritize any range of values in how they navigate interactions with others – often served as the basis for providing a justification for the choices made by each individual.

In the case of Ljupčo, he is a university professor, an ethnic Macedonian, and middle-class with an above average salary, however, he is also not wealthy, nor part of the political or corporate elite. At the risk of incorrectly characterizing Ljupčo, I would personally
characterise him as a socially liberal, just and responsible person. The social, economic and professional position that Ljupčo occupies in the Macedonian context predisposes him to live largely separate from minority populations in the city, such as the Roma and ethnic Albanians, but also allows him to be fully aware of the realities faced by these populations and to be empathetic to them, and, in many cases, to actively participate in the struggle for equality for all Macedonian peoples. Nevertheless, his contact with the Roma communities around him is constrained and limited. Having gotten to know Ljupčo rather well over the many months we spent together, he is an intelligent and caring person, but it would be very difficult for him to simply have friends and acquaintances in Shutka.

The imbalance in power, privilege, status, and access to resources and services are powerful barriers erected between himself and the average Roma denizen of Shuto Orizari. I have witnessed that he does try and maintain contact and relationships with the various Roma individuals and families he has met and known over time, but the deference exhibited toward him by these people does not suggest a relationship of equals. In contrast, when Ljupčo interacts with Roma university students, professors, career professionals, or politicians, the de facto exhibition of deference is not detectable. These interactions were respectful, polite and cordial, but they were also familiar and light-hearted, indicative of relationships between equals.

Concerning the relationship between Emran and Ljupčo, it cannot be described as the latter. The relationship between Emran, Fikrije and the professor was one of concern, caring, and respect, but at its heart was transactional; something needed to be offered and something needed to be exchanged in order to sustain contact and interaction. Without the offer of work in exchange for a daily wage, there was no basis or reason for any of the parties to continue to interact. So long as there was the possibility of an unspoken future promise of work, and, conversely, the chance to make some money, many of the boundaries that would otherwise keep this relationship difficult, if even possible, to maintain could be breached. This was evident through the varying types of interactions between the parties witnessed in the field; it became possible to speak about each other’s families, their jobs, interesting events, current affair, and to some limited degree even politics and religion.

So why bother to maintain such a relationship at all? The transactional nature of this relationship – the chance for one party to get cheap(er) labour and for the other party to make some desperately needed cash – did not seem to provide enough incentive and motivation to
sustain the relationship for years. The Roma in the city are often employed as cheap day-labourers and yet none that I was able to observe went beyond business. I accompanied Emran on almost two dozen jobs, including brick laying, transporting grain from one truck to another, house painting (both interior and exterior), selling pastries and various other smaller gigs. The way Emran would interact and behave on these job sites depended very much on who the person hiring him was. For example, when the work was for Ljupčo, or when we painted his aunt’s house, or build a stone wall in front of his neighbour’s house, Emran would exhibit almost no inhibition and would speak and act freely. This would include not only engaging in various topics of discussion, but he would also use the person’s bathroom, accept food and drink, and reduce the size of his personal space. However, if the person hiring him was a wealthy individual, a politician, an Albanian or an ethnic Macedonian that was more typically either racist toward, or afraid of, Roma people, the defining characteristics of their interactions were – as could be expected – the opposite of what was just described.

After each job, I would revisit those who employed Emran and engage them in a conversation, usually under the pretence of coming by to ensure that they were satisfied with the work we did. This would usually result in sitting together with these individuals over a drink and we would converse. Through these conversations people would invariably begin to justify their satisfaction, or the lack thereof, by appealing to expressions of values, beliefs and personal perspectives. When the conversation would shift focus from the job to the person’s relationship with Emran, value expression would also be employed when elucidating how their association (e.g., friendship, acquaintanceship) with one another began and the current status of their relationship. There were several common themes that would come up repeatedly, usually referring to class, religious affiliation and ethnic identities, as well as personal character and reputation. Some of the most common comments ranged from, “He is a good worker”, to, “It doesn’t matter if he is Gurbeti [Roma]”, to, “I’m a Muslim, but I don’t care if he is a Christian” (Interview).

Although sometimes expressed verbally, value judgements were more often left unspoken, and performed through action and inaction instead. I first began to notice this phenomenon after several weeks in Shutka, after I had already met and established burgeoning relationships with my participants. On one occasion, I had asked Emran to come by my place to meet me so we could go for some cake and coffee at the local bakery. As I was waiting for him, I saw Senad and Burim out in the street in front of my house, so I went outside to say
The conversation was mostly about an old car that Senad had gotten from a friend and brought home. After twenty minutes or so, Emran started approaching the house and saw me speaking to Senad and Burim when he suddenly stopped walking and stood roughly fifty meters from us and would not come any closer. I waved to him motioning for him to come over, but he just stood there looking uncomfortable. Burim simply paid no attention to Emran and continued to examine the interior of the car, while I noticed Senad give a little nod of the head to Emran. A few awkward minutes passed as I said good bye to the guys, and headed over to Emran and proceeded to walk to the bakery located several streets away. During the walk, I asked Emran why he did not come over to say hello. He dodged the question with a shrug looking down at the ground.

Through a series of indirect statements and nonquitters, I learned that Emran knows who Senad and Burim are, but has little no contact with them. He knows them mostly because his good friend lived across the street from them – in the house I was currently living occupying – but clearly has no interest in interacting with them. Trying to get as much information out of Emran as possible, I probed him with a series of questions eventually coming to learn that while there was no personal animosity between them, Emran understood that they did not occupy the similar positions in the community and that, according to his perspective, his values were not in-line with theirs. He did not outline one defining characteristic or belief, but hinted at many differences between himself and Senad and Burim.

In terms of religion, Emran is a devote Christian, while Senad and Burim are non-practicing Muslims. In terms of social status, Emran is a Gurbeti Roma, placing him outside the sphere of advantages that would be available to him if he belonged to the dominant Arli speaking Roma – making him a minority not only in contrast to ethnic Macedonians, but also a minority in his own community of Shutka. In contrast, Senad, as an Arli Roma, is both wealthier and more politically connected, and Burim is simply seen as an outsider due to the fact that he is a refugee from Kosovo. These social and political realities are reinforced through correlating value constructs, wherein competing perspectives are employed in justifying one person’s sense of superiority over the other. Emran, for example, spoke about the corrupting nature of Senad’s connections to local politicians and the “unfair” (Interview) access to employment he has at his disposal as a result, while Senad regularly downplays the privileges he enjoys as a result of ethnic affiliation and political support, and instead frames the differences between him and others belonging to different Romska vera as an issue of
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classical and modern, claiming that Arli Roma are better workers and more responsible citizens than others in the community.
Work, wealth and status

During the entirety of my time on the field, I have observed and documented the stark differences between my participants’ as it pertains to opportunities available to each of them in employment, education and economic assistance through political networks. Emran, whose situation I have already touched upon, is limited to being a physical labourer. He is also a high school dropout as is his spouse, Fikrije, who is also limited to working as a labourer; mainly cleaning homes. Senad and his family, in contrast, occupied a more ‘middle class’ position financially within local context. The family still lived precariously and did not have stable income, but they also possessed more material wealth and experienced less stress over the family’s finances.

Being Arli Roma, Senad’s and Sevda’s network of friends, kin, and acquaintances conferred onto them many more employment opportunities. Senad had changed jobs three times during my time in the field. His first job, one that predated my arrival, was that of a driver for his cousin who was the acting deputy mayor in Shuto Orizari. He subsequently left that job, claiming that he did not like it, and quickly found a new source of income selling flat screen televisions from his home. Every attempt made to learn more about his work was met with vague statements and general statements that revealed little to no information. I ultimately did not learn where he was getting the televisions from, or who he was working with, but I come to know that he was selling them primarily to family and friends and at very discounted prices. The little I learned was due to Senad trying to sell me one of the televisions. Whether the supply of televisions ran out, or he no longer had anyone left to sell them to, Senad ended this stint after several weeks, when the mayor of Shutka, Elvis Bajram – along with other family members – purchased a large car wash located in an underground car park in the centre of Skopje. Senad was asked to manage the daily operations of the car wash.

Senad held this job for the rest of my stay in the field and for almost a year after that. This was a full-time job and required Senad to work forty or more hours a week. I accompanied Senad to work twice a week for more than five months, helping him with whatever he needed. This included cleaning cars, parking them once they were cleaned, balancing the till at the end of the work week, and all other types of small tasks that he would assign me. However, most of my time was spent sitting around with Senad and the other employees – of which there
were only three – drinking tea and talking. Often Sevda would come by with the children as did Burim, especially when he himself was not employed.

On average, roughly a dozen or so cars a day would come to the car wash, and a portion of those seemed to be people that Senad knew in one way or another. Whenever I would ask who he was just speaking to, the usually responses would be, “that’s my cousin”, or, “that’s my nephew’s son”, or, “he’s from Shutka” (Interview) and so on. If a customer came in that Senad did not know, he would show no interest in them, and would yell at one the two young men employed as car washers to greet the customer and to clean the car. It should be noted that the employees were also related to the owner of the car wash – one was his sister’s second oldest son, and the other was his cousin’s son. If Senad recognized the customer, he would personally greet them, and even clean their car if it was someone with a higher social status than his own, for example, if it was a friend that Elvis Bajram sent to get a free car wash.

In most cases, Senad would spend his time talking with his friends and would often disappear with them for hours at a time, accompanying them while they shopped in the shopping mall above the car park, or sitting with them in a cafe. Based on the conversations that I was privy to, nothing of grave importance was ever discussed, such as business, finances, future plans or anything overtly financial or political. Rather, there was a lot of gossip about other people and events going on in town, and sometimes lighter topics like sports and movies. The third employee was a teenage girl, the niece of one of the mayor’s relatives, who was in charge of running the cash register; taking payments, providing change and opening and closing the car wash in the mornings and evenings.

One evening, Senad asked me to accompany him to the car wash to help him learn how to access the cameras installed around the car wash so that he could review some previously recorded footage. He explained, as we drove to the city centre, that money was missing from the cash register and he suspected that his employee was stealing. The security system was not complicated in any way, consisting of digital cameras connected to a hard drive where the footage is recorded and stored. The server was in turn connected to the computer in the office and the footage could be accessed through propriety software. Regardless of the simplicity of the setup, Senad asked me to help him figure how to review the footage, explaining that he had already tried but was not able to use the software. We spend several hours going over
several weeks of recordings and documenting all the times the teenage employee stole money from the cash register by taking screenshots. We found a total of four instances.

While we were doing this somewhat monotonous task, we were also talking about this issue. I asked Senad many questions wondering why he suspected his employee, how he was going to handle the situation; I asked about the employee’s performance, personality and about their relationship. His responses were a mix of conflicting notions and emotions. Senad was primarily concerned with his own self interests. He stated multiple times that he was upset that his employee was stealing, but mainly because she had put him in danger of either being accused of stealing himself, or of being held responsible for the actions of the employee. However, he had also defended his employee by clearling arguing on her behalf as to how he understands why she would steal and did not show or comment in any way that he had a fundamental issue with the theft on moral, ethical or legal grounds. This is best exemplified in Senad’s own words, “She is taking from those who have more than they need, while she herself has very little” (Interview).

When asked as to what he plans to do about this situation, specifically when I asked him if he would report her to his boss, call the cops or fire her, the look he gave me surprised me so much that it has been seared into my mind. The emotions he expressed in his face I can only describe as shock, disgust, surprise and disapproval. This was a moment of stark cultural difference between the two of us. Senad responded first by completely dismissing my question as absurd with an accentuated puff of derision commonly expressed throughout south Slavic languages with the sounds, “pa” or “ma”, immediately followed by “no way” (Interview). This latter statement, however, was said with specific tonality and pitch that it would be more accurate to translate it as, ‘the thought never even crossed my mind’.

As we discussed the issue further, Senad, without making overtly direct statements, but rather indirectly and emotively made it clear that his intention was not only to not cause any harm or bring about any punishment to this young woman, but was actually more concerned with getting her to stop stealing and to protect her from any potential consequences of her actions. Senad was not behaving entirely altruistically. While he displayed no noticeable pressure being exerted upon him either internally emanating from his personal values, nor externally rooted in social strata value systems to take any specific course of action (e.g., call the police), his comments clearly implied a need for self-preservation.
The string of events of this evening – the after-hours visit to his office at the car-wash; the careful and thorough search of the video footage and the following conversation Senad had with his employee confronting her actions the next day – were not self-justifying. Each action taken was qualified with one or several statements of purpose and intent and respectively justified by drawing on various elements of system of values within which the actors are embedded. The values underpinning Senad’s decisions and actions are not rooted in one particular source, such as religious texts, or social norms, but are dynamic and context-dependent. Stealing was not understood instantaneously and without contemplation as simply wrong, immoral or unethical is a reflection of the awareness that he too, along with many others from Shutka, sometimes also rely on similar behaviours, particularly during certain periods in life, like youth, difficult economic times, or when benefits to yourself can be incurred with little to no cost and/or risk. Not wanting to cause pain or bring about punishment was similarly rooted in values held by Senad – as well as almost everyone else close to this particular situation to whom I had spoken – referring to the reluctance Macedonian Roma have on relying on state systems of law and justice that I have witnessed many times during this study.

To quickly qualify this point, I bore witness to a case of domestic violence involving one of Burim’s sisters and her husband, an accusation of real-estate theft, and an instance where my neighbours down the street stole a puppy from another neighbour and then allowed his children to effectively torture the animal by tossing it in the air, tugging on its limbs violently and dumping a bucket of blue house paint on it. In every case, state authorities, both local and municipal, were never involved, but were handled first privately, and then, if the conflict could not be resolved, on a communal level by involving close by neighbours, friends and relatives. In the latter instance, I became personally involved because I found the puppy hiding in the corner of my front yard, shaking and covered in paint.

As a strong advocate of the humane treatment of all living creatures and a proud non-speciest, I spent the better part of the day trying to befriend and gain the trust of this few-week-old puppy by feeding it and giving it water, and by offering it a blanket on which it could sit and find some comfort. Eventually I was able to hold the puppy and took it inside and gave it a bath, removing the paint from its coat. The next day, I took the puppy and went to a local veterinarian and asked them to examine the puppy and to give me any and all necessary medicines. I also schedule an appoint for the following week for the puppy to get vaccinated.
and to get a rabies shot. The puppy then stayed with me for several more days when the neighbour whose children were abusing the animal came to my house and angrily demanding that I return the puppy to him. I had refused and slowly the entire family started to come to my house all yelling at me at least three languages that I could make out. In perhaps not my finest moment, I also started yelling back at the man who initially came to demand his dog back, and pretty soon the insults and cursing started to fly. In all honesty, I was enraged by this point and could have easily been drawing into a fist fight if it would have come to that point.

The level of commotion caused by this incident brought what looked to me like the entire neighbourhood to my front door. Very quickly thereafter the focus of the argument shifted from me at the centre and the man and his family began arguing with all the other people from our street who came to see what was happening. For the twenty or thirty minutes, I was ignored as if I did not exist and so I stood there holding the puppy in my arms and tried to understand everything that was being said as all my neighbours yelled at each other. In the chaos I was not able to record or write down much of what I had heard in the moment, but I documented everything I could remember later that evening. A wide range of arguments and retorts were hurled by my neighbours at one another. These included statements like, “He stole the dog from you just like you stole it from Nasar”, and, “What kind of children did you raise” (Interview), and many other similar commentaries followed expressing ethical stances on either the what was just in terms of ownership claims over the dog, or value judgements directed at the assumed character and reputation of the interlocutor.

The point of similarity between these two events was the emphasis placed on the identity of the actors involved, and all of the considerations that involves. However, the way one individual perceives another is not rooted in fact or experience, but is much more likely to be based on assumptions and stereotypes commonly held and supported in a particular context. Credibility of any one point of view is not taken as a given and must thusly be propped up with supporting claims. These claims are almost exclusively take the form of value laden justifications, chosen selectively according to the specific contextual realities. When I once asked Emran and Fikrije if their families caused any problems for them when they decided to get married on the basis of the different Romska vera they belonged to, I was presented with emphatic statements of denial, claiming that no one really cares about each other’s vera. Even religion, wealth, and status, they claimed, were not important when people want to get
married. Similar claims could be made for most interactions between people, both big and small. Romska vera, religion and other associations and affiliations were rarely mentioned or even considered when choosing a barber to cut your hair, or where you will buy your food, as well as choosing who you will marry, what part of town you will live in, or where and with whom your children would go to school with. In such cases, my participants, when pressed, would refer to a more general appeal to a larger, vaguer, conceptualization of a macro-Roma identity rather than to more specific and localized identities, such as Romska vera.

In contrast, when issues of graver consequence were at stake, appeals to difference in identity increased in frequency and intensity. Referencing identity markers most frequently occurs when threats to livelihood, power or safety, for example, come into question. Senad, dealing with his employee stealing money from his boss’s business, required that he walk a tight rope where he was trying to protect himself from being held responsible for the missing money, and while simultaneously trying to not alienate or insult his employer by protecting the young woman who was stealing due to her familial relationship with the owner of the car wash. In Emran’s case, he would regularly rely on his social network based on a shared identity via Romska vera to find and secure work opportunities, but would tamp down or evade any mention of such identities with those he was working for if they were affiliated with a different vera – especially if there are tensions between the two communities.

Being a Albanian-speaking, Kosovo Roma refugee, Burim was seen by the community as an outsider and was accepted and tolerated in so much as he had built a social network of friends and family. Burim’s legal status was extremely tentative and subject to change on short notice according to the whims of various state institutions. Considering these realities, Burim never seemed overly concerned about being employed, nor about participating in local politics; but he was rather preoccupied with securing his social status in the community as someone who belonged where he was. For months, Burim lied to me in direct and indirect ways, and, as I would later learn, to almost everyone. This is not to say that Burim is a person I would label a ‘liar’ or ‘dishonest’. Rather, Burim lied strategically and often through omission whenever he thought that his own identity as an Albanian speaker, or a Kosovar, or a refugee could be weaponized against him and threaten the tenuous position he and his family found themselves in.

Events like these are not always so straightforward or simple. Individual actors do possess agency and exercise judgement in assessing the various contexts of interaction encountered on
a daily basis. The values individuals prioritize in specific circumstances however must be justified and are often done so by emphasizing and deemphasizing the root source of expressed value judgements. In order to maximise one’s ability to do requires more than just a single attribute associated with individual and group identity. Beyond ethnicity and class, religion is another such attribute drawn upon as a source of value systems and the thusly provide credibility to the expression of value judgements.
Choosing gods and keeping faith

Religious identity, like all other identities, is performed selectively and is given preference according to context, and is justified according to value judgements given priority at particular moments in time and in specific locations in space. This statement is based on observations recorded amongst the participants in this study. Religiosity, and religious practice and observance, can be uniquely studied in the context of Roma populations that otherwise would prove somewhat more difficult with other European cultures and identities. Religion is no less important for the Roma in Shutka than it is for any other European, but in a very different way and for very different reasons – although it is important to note that this notion is not being made to the exclusion of the easily observable variability of religious identity and observance in other European populations. Religious belief and practice amongst the Roma in Shutka take on many forms and spans the entire spectrum of commitment and adherence. It also tends to be fluid and open to interpretation, incorporating elements of any or all other systems of belief that exert a sphere of influence within the regions Roma communities are located.

This was brought to my attention one day when Sevda asked me if I could take her around town in my car so that she could run some errands. We spent the better part of the day together driving around the city. We went to the Bit-Pazar, the main bazaar in the city centre, where Sevda stocked up on fruits, vegetables and meats. Nearby, we stopped at several shops located on a central avenue packed with shops selling household goods, such as cleaning supplies, pots and pans, carpets and curtains. We then went to her sister’s house to enjoy a cup of tea and some cakes, and so that Sevda could drop off a few bags of baby clothes that Sevda no longer needed, but that her sister could use. Following this visit, we slowly made our way back to Shutka, stopping a few times along the way to a bakery, a supermarket and a shop selling home improvement items like light bulbs and batteries.

This little shopping excursion was a rather run-of-the-mill activity and would have not stood out in any way if it were not for Sevda making what, at the time, seemed like random requests for me to pull the car over at seemingly odd spots as we drove from shop to shop. Initially, I did not give these little stops a second thought, even though they seemed to be very arbitrary. Two of the three places we stopped were in residential neighbourhoods, while the third was along an empty expanse on a small road lined with rock faces about five meters tall. Sevda
did not tell me in advance that she wanted to make these stops, but just asked me to pull the car over as we approached each spot. She also offered no explanation, but simply got out of the car each time and after five minutes returned to the car and we continued onward.

It did not occur to me to ask her what she was doing the first two times we stopped because they were residential neighbourhoods and I assumed she was dropping something off or paying a quick visit to a friend or family member. However, after she got back in the car when we stopped the third time, I asked her why we were stopping and what was she doing. Sevdja explains that we were stopping at small shrines dedicated to various Orthodox Christian saints, and that even though she is a Muslim, she acknowledges all religions and likes to leave offerings and pray at these sites from time to time. She explained that she believes all faiths and all saints are legitimate in her eyes. She continued, “I don’t go to mosque much, and I only stop to pray at these statues when I am nearby and have some time. It’s better to pray to everyone… why not” (Interview). Over time and numerous conversations with the participants in this research, as well as with several neighbours, my barber and the security guard at the local town hall, I began to realize that Sevd’s approach to religion and religious belief were not unique to her. There were, however, some notable differences, particularly involving the small number of Evangelical Christians in Shutka, such as Emran and his family.

As was mentioned earlier, Emran’s father, Nasar, is an unofficial minister and leads prayer groups and holds masses hosted in peoples’ homes. I attended eight of these meetings during my stay in Shutka, which usually took up the better part of an entire day. During each of these events, my day began by going to Emran’s family’s home and spent time with them drinking coffee and sometimes cooking together. Cousins, neighbours, and friends would come in and out of the house all morning and early afternoon, some just dropping by to say hello, or to hang out, or to grabs something or drop something off; usually cigarettes or food. I would then follow the family to the house that was hosting the service that day, and would sit quietly with Emran and Fikrije and their children, and watch Nasar lead a mass.

To be completely straightforward and honest, I found it very difficult to focus during these services, and felt very uncomfortable being there, and as a result felt that I couldn’t engage with the events unfolding around me with my fullest attention. As a self-proclaimed anti-theist, taking part in someone else’s religious rituals, ceremonies and practices felt disingenuous of me, and made my skin crawl with disgust and disdain listening to what
sounds to me like the rantings of a delusional cult. But, because I was invited and because this gave me an opportunity to meet and speak with many people that I would otherwise most likely not have the chance to meet, I did my best to be respectful. I mainly achieved this by staying silent, being non-disruptive by trying to become invisible in the corner of the room, and day dreamed my way through the services, mainly thinking about what I would like to speak to people about during the little after parties following the masses and/or prayer meetings. My main objective during the pre- and post-gatherings was to allow others to lead the conversations and to observe interactions between the attendees.

In comparison to the more flexible and arbitrary approach toward religious belief and practice expressed by Sevda and other mainly Arlie speaking Muslim Roma, the prevailing attitude and perspective amongst the Evangelical community was a bit more defensive and exclusionary. Although I have not recorded any comments or ideas that could be classified as prejudicial or discriminatory, and while on the whole the individuals I have interacted with were very accepting of Islam, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Orthodoxy and other religious faiths, it was not uncommon for people to also express sentiments using terms such as, “they”, and, “those people”, as well as, “they don’t like us”, and, “we are not like them” (Interview). There was an acute understanding that the Evangelical community in Shutka is small and that they belong to a minority religion, and felt to varying degrees marginalized. It was often pointed out to me that, “We don’t even have a single church” (Nasar), and that, “the government won’t help us; they only help their own” (Emran and his cousin, Rafi). During these conversations, the speakers would attempt to frame themselves as victims and outcasts of the community, while simultaneously positioning themselves on a moral high ground, effectively constructing an Us–Them binary demarcated by a value-driven ideology of difference.

Vera, language, religion and class are not determining factors in governing relations between disparate Roma identities, but are employed in a highly selective manner depending on circumstance, the actor’s involved and what is at stake within the context of the interaction. However, these factors do influence the assumptions, prejudices, generalizations and motives underlying any one actor’s decisions and behaviours aimed at opposing interlocutors. Through this lens, value judgements are exercised by prioritizing specific beliefs about the Other, and are then subsequently justified by drawing upon the very same factors informing the actor’s original value judgements.
Analysis

Values Systems and Meaning

Values, as pertains to any social group, exhibit a wide range of differing characteristics that, while diverse in the individual elements and characteristics that make up the large system of values, function principally in similar ways. That is, values – intended here to be used as a umbrella term that encompasses all manifestations of value systems and their relative expression through thought, speech and behaviour – exist only in relation to the specific environment and historicity of a specific social community. The Roma pan-global community must first and foremost be understood not as a singular id/entity, nor as a monolith, nor as definitive. Rather, it is crucial that Roma communities are understood on a more localized level, placing emphasis on the particular historical course of that community, the environment in which it currently exists, the geo-physical as well as the geo-political spheres with which the community is intertwined and the influences exerted by these pressures on the community and its relation to other ‘group’ identities it is in association with.

Many cultural, social, economic and political values are shared amongst both Roma and non-Roma communities. The aim here is not to examine the differences between value systems and social norms embodied in different Romska vera, but to portray how value systems serve a boundary maintenance function (Barth, 1969) in re/creating, sustaining and adapting internal Roma (sub)group identities. Romska vera is a term describing the cultural, social, and historical identifiers general associated with particular ‘groups’ of Roma. A brief example of Romska vera in Shutka specifically, and in Macedonia more broadly, include Dambazi, Arli, Gurbeti, Mađuri, Gautne and many other categories. Although primarily discursive, one driving principle is to emphasize the valuable, albeit now standard, example of how value systems can enforce the boundaries of Barthian (1969) group identity maintenance and reassert the necessity to vigilantly guard against generalizing and exoticizing Roma communities, culture and economic and political life. As many before have warned (Acton, 1997; Stewart, 1998), Roma societies, communities and individuals are polymorphic, dynamic, heterogeneous and modern – no more and no less than any other community, be it identities based in perceived ethnic belonging, institutional affiliations, personal expression or the like.
Assuming the above stated position, a further extension of the notion that Roma communities should be viewed and treated no different in manner or approach than any other under the scrutiny of the social sciences can be applied to the examination of social, cultural, political, economic and personal values. A basic definition of the way in which values are understood generally in the social sciences will be adhered to here, wherein values refer to qualities or beliefs, both intangible and unobservable, that act as an idealized state of being for the individual, and thus the community on the whole. In one on-going interview conducted as part of the eight-month ethnographic field research project upon which this work is based, illustrated this point early on in the process.

Burim – a Kosovo refugee who came to Macedonia in 1999 with the mass migration of refugees fleeing the conflict with Serbia – does not tend to put on airs, nor worry about how he is perceived by others. In the first month of our relationship, he had not exhibited any behaviours indicating he cared much for what others thought about him. Often, his manner was brash, but friendly. When, however, we met for our first semi-formal interview and he realized that it was going to be recorded, a transformation took place that could only be equated to that of a politician at the height of a campaign trail. Suddenly, he spoke as if he were representing the whole of Roma people a he understood them. He shied away from anything political in nature during the interview and presented his view in response to virtual all questions with great care and precision. Behind most of his comments was a singular message that the Roma were essentially good, with the caveat that of course, like any other group of people, there were “bad” (Interview) individuals. The fact that his words would be recorded and his expressed uncertainty to exactly how this information will be used or published exactly, led to Burim assessing that consequences could be had from this activity. In a much later conversation, we spoke about this and he, in somewhat vague terms, said that he felt “unsure” (Interview) adding statements like, “how do I know who will hear this” (Interview) and addendums to many conversations about his participation, and to a certain extent, his loyalty to his friends and neighbours, who are for the most part associated with the currently ruling political party in Shuto Orizari, Sojuz na Romite na Makedonija (Unity of Roma in Macedonia). In light of his social circle and his very tentative status as a refugee in Macedonia, he answered every question of mine as if from rote, citing a non-existent pamphlet of an idealized, Roma-supported list of socially accepted values.
Before turning to examples from the ethnographic data collected in Shuto Orizari, I will address two brief overviews explaining the various contours of the ideas and places at the core of this work. As concepts, values allow people to conceive of and define what behaviours are to be seen as desired, appropriate, ethical and these values, once identified, must have associated mechanisms of enforcement. There are innumerable examples of values shared amongst the denizens of Shuto Orizari as they are with great commonality around the world; values such as freedom, justice, equality, and so on. Much like a cliff side exposing the layers of strata manifested over millennia, values too can be seen as a stratified system where grand notions reside at the top, acting as a larger notion influencing all other values and norms. Such can be visualized through placing the nation-state as arbiter of what could be called umbrella values. Other values that are not specifically or necessarily endorsed by state institutions, but rooted in non-state institutions like ethnic identity and affiliation, racial, gender, sexual and age categories or religious institutions as the next layer.

These values are often espoused through categories of belonging that exist in the larger sense, such as a sexual orientation or an organized religion, but simultaneously function through a complex series of interconnected localized networks made up of individuals who often reside in the same community and experience regular or semi-regular interaction. This provides a means of enforcement, outside of the use of the rule of law – as would be the case primarily for nation-states - through any variety of social pressures and means. When looking beyond societal-level value systems, closer to the individual, structures like peer groups, family, local churches, schools and other institutions people interact with regularly and interpersonally, value systems can exhibit great variety and are argued here that in the case of Shuto Orizari, possess the greatest potential to manage, regulate and adjudicate individual behaviour.

Value systems in Shutka become further sub-divided into more precise categories. As has been well established by scholars (Marushiakova, Heuss, Boev, et al., 2001), “the Gypsies are not the homogeneous community that they often seem to be in the eyes of surrounding populations. They are divided into separate more or less endogamous groups, differing sometimes significantly in their way of life… in their religion… as well as in a number of their ethnic and cultural characteristics” (p. 4). This multitude of varying endogamous groups are, in the Macedonian context, are often in selective opposition to one another.

Two influencing factors determining which Romska vera and the veracity with which they are opposed include existing power structures and demographics. The largest vera in Shutka
generally identifies under the rubric Arli. This refers mainly to a number of vera, such as the Gautne, Madjuri, Gurbeti to name a few, who speak Arliski – the majority Romani dialect of the region – but is often presented and treated itself as a vera. Arli Roma in Shutka share a tense, albeit peaceful, coexistence with the second largest vera, Dambazi Roma. The Dambazi dialect is a subset of Arli, but is in fierce competition with its counterpart. Rates of intermarriage between Arli speakers and Dambazi Roma is the lowest between any two vera. Mistrust and stereotypical negative generalization about each other dominate almost any conversation on the topic. Through various interviews conducted, several common themes and portrayals of the Other kept resurfacing. Dambazi were poorer, (too) proud, violent, highly endogamous and were often associated with horse ownership and/or breeding. Arli Roma, from the Dambazi perspective, were corrupt, immoral – in the sense of having abandoned conservative traditional Roma values, such as adhering to purity codes, premarital sex, loss of traditional practices, observances, etc. – and nepotistic.

The conceptualization, expression and maintenance of social and cultural values among Shutka’s Roma along vera-identity lines serves not only to control behaviour amongst those who adhere to a particular value set, but also to maintain and manipulate borders of group identity. Different strata of values have a range of influence and are invoked depending on context, circumstance and perceived benefit to the actors involved.

**Nation-State Strata**

Throughout the eight months spent living in Shutka, I participated in the lives of four families; an Arli speaking, mixed-vera Christian family living well below official poverty lines and in an extended family (Emran and his family); a young, non-practicing Muslim Dambazi family who lived six months at a time between Sicily and Shutka, with an income slightly higher than the average in the municipality (Farud and his family); a middle class (relative to local living standards) semi-observant Muslim family, Arli speaking, and politically connected via familial ties (Senad and his family); and a predominantly Albanian speaking (also speaking Serbian, Macedonian and Arli outside the home), observant Muslim family living for more than sixteen years as refugees with no permanent legal standing in the country (Burim and his family).

Through my relationship with them, my contact with the larger community was greatly increased. Every one of these families and those in their social and family circles were heavily
dependent on regular contact and interaction with the city and the national state. The level, type and frequency of interaction with Albanians and Macedonians outside Shutka varied from family to family. Every adult person in Emran’s family worked for the city from time to time and collected social benefits from the state, while Farud and his family largely avoided any contact (except perhaps at border crossings) with state institutions – working exclusively in Italy and being happily unemployed in Skopje.

In contrast, Senad’s entire livelihood was due to family connects and some political participation via party membership and informal engagement with local political actors. The patriarch of the family, Senad, was employed by his wife’s first cousin, who was the brother of the mayor of Shutka and the youngest son of a prominent political family, to manage a newly opened, modern carwash located in the parking lot of the main shopping mall in the heart of Skopje’s centre. Having accompanied Senad many times to work, a pattern of behavioural changes and a shift in how he communicated and presented himself slowly became evident. There were the obvious routines of switching from use of Arli to Macedonian, putting on his seat belt in the car once we crossed over Shutka’s borders, making sure he is dressed appropriately and clean shaven among many other examples. This routine should seem familiar to most urban denizens.

As a New Yorker and a Dalmatian, the displacement of my local dialect and speech patterns in favour of a more standardized linguistic form (either national or regional) is a daily occurrence. This example only serves to illustrate and to reaffirm the necessity of not exaggerating this behavioural shift as specifically based in the daily reality of Roma as a characteristic or trait. It is better understood in the sense that being outwardly presentable, communicating in the dominant national language, and obeying and respecting the law are held as highly regarded values; values that are largely promoted by nation-state institutions.

This was not lost on Senad. He understood that to earn a living that would satisfy his and his family’s needs and modest living standard required that he negotiated the expression of specific sets of social values to avoid verbal and even physical conflict, employment discrimination, to face-down widespread anti-Roma stereotypes and to secure a network with non-Roma Macedonians and Albanians that he otherwise would not have access to. Nation-state strata values are not merely ideas that Senad pretended to adhere to. Like most people, Senad had taken them to heart. It is difficult to not do so when the indoctrination of these values begins early in life and permeates throughout society on all levels. They act as guiding
principles; ones where people often state they follow, but are quick to abandon when they conflict with the reality of survival (or even desire). To not lie or steal is near impossible when hungry, as is being loyal and law-abiding when those seeking your loyalty are the source of your repressions and disenfranchisement.

**Society Strata Values**

For the purpose of this study and essay, society is defined as any collection of communities that identify with one another as belonging to the same collective identity with shared cultural norms and values, but differ from nation-states in that they form the familiar physical space that encapsulates the institutions and the people with which interaction is possible. To briefly demonstrate this point, Shutka can be understood as a society separate than that of Čair (an Albanian dominated municipality of Skopje) or that of the Centre (a Macedonian municipality). Simultaneously, Skopje as a whole could also be defined as a society, wherein a different set of values and norms apply compared to those of local municipalities, but are nevertheless accepted to some degree by all who live in the city. Some of the more prominent societal level values in Shutka include education, trustworthiness, keeping promises, hospitality and active participation in family and community life and neighbourliness. Like nation-state strata values, these values and their reified norms are expressed in many ways and to varying degrees, but unlike the former, they are more difficult to skirt, avoid, manipulate or ignore.

Pressure to conform can be exerted more immediately and directly, and often come with consequences that are not abstract (e.g., going to prison), but very tangible. Farud, along with his wife and three children, did not have a good year in Sicily financially, and while back in Shutka could not afford to connect their home to the Internet. The problem was that their house, and mine, were not connected to street cables. The cost to bring the wires to the house was considerable and is the responsibility of the home owner rather than the local or city government. He asked me if I could share my connection with him, but I was connected using Senad’s Wi-Fi (which we boosted so it would reach across the street), but I did not want to reveal the password without permission. Farud and his wife then began to bad mouth Senad, saying that he would not help them, that he was cheap and selfish. Sometime later, I asked Senad what he thought about Farud and he (slowly and reluctantly) said that they were not trustworthy. That once he lent them money and helped them around the house, and they never returned the favour or repaid the loan. He qualified this by stating that this was common of
Dambazi and that overall, they were not good people and that is why he refused to allow me to give them the Wi-Fi password.

Societal strata values appear to have more bearing on people’s lives because they set the limits of acceptable behaviour that people encounter every day. They govern people’s social lives and take on great importance in places like Shutka, where the reach of the local government is restricted and most residence do not rely on state institutions to resolve problems, or conflicts. Social order, in other words, is maintained largely through the vigilant guard and transmission of value systems, and enforced expectations that the relevant norms be followed.

Individual Strata Values

The last and personal of value sets reside in individuals themselves. These values are regarded here as those toward which individuals have the greatest convictions. Those that help people make decisions even in the absence of social pressures and when no one is looking. In many ways, it can be argued that people’s most personally held values constitute a part of and help (re)create identities and personalities. This value set is intricately linked with the other strata values, from where individuals learn and adopt those social values that ultimately become individual values and, in turn, manifest through the associated social norms. Examples can include any range of values from patriotism to the state, as an individual value to not using profane language in daily communications.

In Shutka, individual values can vary dramatically. Personal values as practiced through both action and verbal expression, almost always conformed to the values upheld in the national and societal strata, and rarely strayed beyond the boundaries of what was/was not acceptable within the cultural context of the Roma community. For example, Emran personally viewed education as a major priority for his three sons, and expressed his wish on several occasions how he hopes they do not marry young or have children early in life, and instead complete secondary school and even university if possible. The value of education for Emran was not an anomaly in Shutka, nor in wider Skopje. It is a value imparted to him through his church, his own education and his father. Nevertheless, economic and social pressures from twenty years ago led Emran to marry and have children at the age of sixteen, and he himself never finished school. Emran has been and currently is employed across several economic sectors. Seasonally, he works for the city cleaning roads, repairing asphalt, and a variety of
construction jobs. Additionally, he works to unload sacks of concrete for a local business in Shutka, he works for himself painting houses and doing drywall in town, among many other jobs. His experiences and familiarity with the economic realities his children will face and the social (what I would call) brutality of being Roma in Macedonia, he knows that education, while not enough on its own, is a stepping stone to a more secure economic future.

What this example illustrates is the complexity of individually held values. Not only are they an outcrop of large values strata, but are shaped by the realities of our surroundings. The poverty, marginalization, discrimination, violence, exclusion and desperation associated with being a targeted minority group exerted pressures on the limitations and nature of people’s values. While it may not be as important regarding national or societal values that those values get expressed through behaviour, but individual values become meaningless (i.e. without value) if they cannot be enacted and upheld on a day-to-day basis. If sheer hunger drives an individual who abhors stealing to take bread from a store without paying, this behaviour over time tends to erode, if only temporarily, the importance the value of honesty.

The fieldwork conducted in Shutka in 2015 over an eight-month period has shed light on interesting interpretations and reifications of values as practiced by individuals and groups. One of the most poignant attributes of values is that they are fungible, interpretable, flexible, even editable. The families and individuals at the centre of the study demonstrated with even consistency their ability to adjust, even minutely, the values they wished to express depending on the pressure and circumstance of the current moment. Simultaneously, individual strata values did not diminish in importance in the eyes of the beholder even when temporarily pushed aside or adjusted. Rather, the value could be reasserted in different context where it was more appropriate and would not be challenged by enormous pressures, like an opportunity to make money when it is badly needed.

How the study participants negotiated their immediate and greater environment and the people they would meet across various contexts depended in part to how they chose to conform to or violate specific value sets. In order to do this, intimate knowledge of values and the ability to prioritize and identify values with the different cultural/ethnic groups around you is crucial. Implicit knowledge of where values are fostered is a must to know where they apply and to whom. Furthermore, knowing what values you are expected to illustrate and in what context is necessary in order to either conform or flout said values. Burim’s mother had a kidney stone, which was causing her a lot of pain and many problems. During the eight-
month field project, I personally drove her to the hospital on five separate occasions. In addition to this, an ambulance was called on two occasions, and neighbours were called to drive her to the hospital on an additional three occasions. Each time, she was treated with an IV, given painkillers and sent home. Prior to my arrival, she had already had two operations on her kidney.

By this point, Burim was extremely frustrated and angry. Proper medical service was being denied to his mother due to their refugee status. They were ineligible for state medical insurance and they were barred from finding employment. This made paying for private care impossible as well as scheduling an operation. The only medical care she could get was by going to the emergency room whenever her kidneys flared up. Each time we went to the hospital, after Burim’s mother was emitted, we would get a coffee from the vending machine, go outside and sit on a bench and have a cigarette and kill time by talking. This is where Burim’s frustrations would come out. It was an outlet for his feeling of helplessness and the state-imposed inability to work, travel and be healthy. Burim would begin by launching into one diatribe after another scolding the Macedonian state, their culture and mostly their values – claiming they were immoral, corrupt, liars, masochists and other such characterizations. He would also derail Albanians and Serbs. He would compare what was happening to them here in Macedonia with Germany, stating that this would never occur in the “West” (Interview). In quieter moments, he would begin justifying and qualifying his previous statements. Sometimes, peddling back the more outrageous ones. His loud rant was a theatre piece. He was flaunting and denouncing social convention and Macedonian values in light of his circumstance. It was a way to regain some power. To elevate himself above the humiliating situation he was in.

By situating social values within a tri-strata perspective and placing the governance of the norms, or behavioural expressions, of relevant values in the context of a wider view of social and economic realities, as well as the interactions the individual has regularly, an understanding of the role values play in negotiating individual and ethnic group identity and existing differentials in power structures as the third largest minority in Macedonia begins to arise. Because it is more common that other minority groups will and do face marginalization and discrimination than not, further opportunities to expand on this thesis would be to examine – in communities around the region and across the globe – the role and influence that
forces such as poverty exert on the shaping and expression of value systems on both micro and macro scales.

*Kosovo Roma Refugees*

One of the four core families who participated in this ethnographic study – who were briefly introduced in the preceding discussion on value systems – are a family of seven members who came to Shuto Orizari as Roma refugees from Kosovo in the late 1990s. They are one of a large number of such families and individuals who now call Shuto Orizari home. Because of the high level of participation in the study by this family and the nature of their circumstances that introduce an additional level of complexity to the understanding the central thesis of this project, the following review is meant to shed light on the specifics of what this population is facing and what they have contributed to life in Shuto Orizari.

In 1999, the Kosovo War of Independence between ethnic Albanian Kosovars and the Serbian state drove approximately one hundred thousand Roma refugees from their homes and into neighbouring countries. The UNHCR, national government agencies, the European Union and Roma organizations estimate that anywhere between one thousand five hundred and five thousand people sought refuge in Macedonia (Haliti, 2011). Of these, the vast majority was settled in the Roma-dominated municipality of Skopje, Shuto Orizari - in addition to several other cities with significant Roma populations.

The Macedonian and Kosovo states, the European Union and the international community at large have failed in sufficiently dealing with the key issues surrounding Roma refugees; namely, education, employment, social services, permanent settlement, citizenship/permanent residency, language acquisition and other programs of social and economic integration. More than a decade and a half since the arrival of Kosovo Roma refugees in Macedonia, all but a few of the refugees’ have been successfully employed, housed and registered as residents. With such relatively small numbers in comparison to the huge wave of people arriving in Europe today, the question must be asked, how could the state have failed to adequately meet the needs of this community for so long? What motives and strategies has the state employed? Why has there been such a lack of international concern?

The main contention being proposed by this analysis is that refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) - much like immigrants, economic migrants and domestic minority groups –
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share many of the goals and life ambitions as nationals/majority population of any host nation. In accordance to the 2012 Immigrant Citizens Survey (ICS), *How Immigrants Experience Integration in 15 European Surveys*, the key findings of the ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Shuto Orizari were also found to be true among refugee populations as well. In the major areas covered by the ICS survey - employment, languages, civic and political participation, family reunion, long-term residence and citizenship - Roma refugees from Kosovo also expressed similar desires, thoughts and sentiments as the immigrants surveyed across Europe.

Roma refugees fled Kosovo in 1999, spreading in all directions to safety; some through familial ties, others through personal connection, but many were left defenceless, homeless and penniless by the conflict and found themselves at the mercy of international organization and the state institutions of neighbouring countries. Those who arrived in Macedonia were given Temporary Humanitarian Assisted Person (THAP) status. This meant individuals with THAP were not allowed to find employment; they were ineligible for social welfare programs and they were barred from being able to apply for asylum (Halite, 2011). This status was later changed in 2003 from THAP to persons under temporary protection in line with a new law on asylum and temporary protection passed earlier that year.

All refugees from Kosovo now had one month to apply for asylum or risk deportation. With less than half of all refugees having met the deadline it was extended, with a total about two thousand three hundred individuals successfully applying by late 2014 (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Subsequently, the asylum application process was regularly tampered with to prevent as many applications as possible from being processed completely. During my fieldwork in Shutka in 2015, more than twenty families that I had interviewed were still waiting for their application to be processed. One participant in the study had her passport and an airplane ticket to Germany taken from her by an office clerk at a local government ministry when she went to apply for permission to travel. The clerk claimed that she did not have the money to travel and therefore the ticket could not be hers and that the passport she was carrying could not be hers because she was refugee. Stories similar to this were repeated in interview after interview.

As a result of persistent harassment, today less than one hundred individuals have been granted official refugee status by the Macedonian authorities. Burim arrived via humanitarian organizations to Skopje in 1999. He and his family – consisting of his mother, father, a
brother, two sisters, an aunt, uncle, and two cousins – arrived in Tetovo (a city approximately one hundred kilometres from Skopje) and were housed in old barracks dating back to the earthquake of 1963. Years later, his father secured a house in Shutka and moved the family there. Burim is a native speaker of Albanian, the language spoken at home and outside, and Serbian, used officially in school, government and in the streets. He spoke no Romani aside from a couple of dozen words and phrases. The predominate language spoken inside and outside of the home and across all institutions Arlī Romani, known locally as Arliski. Within a week, Burim found himself with no money, barely a home, no job and unable to communicate and interact with his surroundings. He did in a few short years learn the language, and he found – as I did during my stay – that Serbian could go a long way in Macedonia, particularly in Shutka, where it acts as a de facto lingua franca for the region. Despite this, Burim over the last fifteen years has managed to find temporary, part-time and seasonal employment randomly, but always off the books, and always under paid.

During interviews, Burim would often burst into monologues that bordered on tirades about the state of his life and that of his family. His criticisms and frustration always pointed back to the same thing: unnecessary and demanding bureaucracy, lack of employment and education opportunities and the lack of citizenship. Every six months, Burim has to go for an interview at the central police station in the city centre to get his registration reapproved. When I met him, he was so fed up with going and answering the same questions, such as when will you return home, why do you want to stay here, why should we let you stay here, and other such questions. (taken from interviews with Burim), he began cursing the interviewers, giving nonsense answers, and even outright propositioning the female officers for a date or sometimes for sex. In short, he has become purposefully belligerent to illustrate his frustration over his ‘non’ personhood. As it stands today, Serbia has rejected his claim for citizenship on the basis that his home is no longer a part of Serbia and Albania – eager to expel their Roma population (Marushiakova, 2001) – claim he has no right to citizenship in the new Kosovo state and should seek residency in Serbia.

Burim, and his family (particularly his younger cousins) have been hit hard in the areas of education, health and employment, as half hundreds more. According to Haliti (2011), 44.3% of adult Roma refugees from Kosovo report having no education, with 28% having some, but not completed primary school, and only 20% report finishing school along with 7% who completed their secondary education. As a result, illiteracy among adults is common. About
half of the members of Burim’s family were literate. The problems associated with completing primary and secondary school amongst Roma communities across Europe are a known and widely discussed issue. This already extant state of affairs was further complicated, albeit completely disrupted, with the onset of war in Kosovo. This disruption was prolonged in Macedonia due to language barriers, lack of educational services for adults, and a general lack of resources in the public schools to care and educate the children of Shutka. In the case of Burim’s younger cousin, Basi, he rarely went to school. The family, largely uneducated themselves, did not see how ensuring that Basi go to school would help him or them improve their lot. The schools and teachers too did not have the resources available to keep Basi in school. Rather, the family had an alternative strategy in mind: to use family and social networks to leave Macedonia permanently. By the end of my stay, Basi and his mother did manage to leave for the United States, and he has since enrolled into school there.

Burim and I often visited his relatives in a nearby refugee camp – which was a basic four-story block of flats, sparsely furnished and located just next to a more classic refugee camp with barbed wire fencing and armed guards used exclusively for the Syrian refugees beginning to flood through Macedonia’s borders. This building housed several dozen families and about twenty or twenty five children – none of which were going to school and none of which spoke either Macedonian or Romani. When asked on their views of school, most acknowledged that school was important, but almost no one saw the point. Without enough food, without work or money and after fifteen years of waiting for a resolution to their residency/citizenship status, education would have no added value in these circumstances.

Unemployment in Macedonia is around an average of 30% nationwide (State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, 2015), but the statistics regarding unemployment among the Roma are range between eighty and ninety percent – depending on the region and where the estimates come from. For the Kosovo Roma refugees, chronic unemployment is a state-sanctioned feature of their unresolved legal status. There are no training or employment services provided for by the state and unabashed discrimination in the labour market. Shutka in particular poses an interesting, but devastating set of additional barriers to employment. This community is unique in Macedonia, if not the world, in that Roma politicians dominate the municipal government and the vast majority of the residents are Roma. This also gives them control over the local government’s finances. This has brought economic opportunities
to Shutka that are glaringly absent from other Roma communities in Macedonia. Most of the local businesses are Roma-owned and operated, the district is home to arguably the most popular bazaar in the city and it even has its fair share of millionaires.

These benefits however are not available to those Roma from Kosovo. Often referred to as Ashkali, many of the Arli-speaking Roma that make up the dominant identity-group in Shutka, regard them as unwelcome outsiders. The standard view is that Ashkali are not real Roma. They are considered to be Albanians. This translates into yet another layer of discrimination and exclusion levied at the refugee community, thus further erecting obstacles to finding any kind of employment. In many cases, as it was with Burim and his immediate circle of friends and relatives, there were more possibilities of networking and finding some kind of sporadic employment via Skopje’s sizable Albanian minority than compared to the Ashkali’s Arli counterpart. The end result being that if employment could be found, it was often working as seasonal fruit pickers, part-time factory workers, unloading fifty-kilo bags of flour, painting and sheetrock work, working in a shop in the bazaar, or if an individual is very lucky, doing farm or landscaping-related work for middle class Macedonians. This cash-for-work model ultimately results in people being massively underpaid, overworked and a hand-to-mouth existence that makes saving money or paying legal fees virtually impossible.

Finally, the expected result of such conditions taken together is that there would be an overwhelming effect on the health and wellbeing of the refugees. The reality of disease (asthma and cancer) was being borne out everywhere I looked during the eight months of fieldwork. Preventative care is non-existent and the only medical service the refugees can access is the emergency room at the city hospitals. Although patients cannot be refused, emergency care is not free for refugees, which further contributes to a desperate situation by piling on additional bills that cannot be paid. Haliti (2011) points out that the poor health conditions among Roma refugees is due to a variety of causes, including,

“their poor socio-economic situation, substandard housing conditions, a lack of health insurance, insufficient primary healthcare, weak preventative care (e.g., irregular response from the parents for the immunization of their children and a lack of systematic examinations of children and women), a low level of health education among the Roma population, expensive health services and medications, a mentality and tradition in which a cure is most frequently looked for in holistic medicine, early marriages, gender
inequality, undervalued female children, discrimination in healthcare by medical personnel, insufficient information about healthcare rights, heavy physical work, a polluted environment, and so on” (p. 46).

There is too much to unpack here within the confines of this work, but the picture it paints is clear: the combination of poor health care, lack of work, low or no educational opportunities, discrimination, unresolved legal status and with no way to return home or to move on to other countries, the Roma refugees in Macedonia have been facing a humanitarian crisis for over a decade with ramifications for not only the refugees themselves, but for the communities they live in and the country of Macedonia as a whole.
Conclusion

Fundamentally, this research is meant to challenge and impugn prevailing narratives, both popular and academic, depicting Roma identity as a monochromatic and dualistic relationship contingent of non-Roma perspectives. The dominant assumption that Roma peoples around the world comprise a homogenized, quasi-national ethnic group in the eyes of non-Roma has been contested throughout this work, arguing that Roma identity is forged not exclusively in opposition to Majority non-Roma populations, but is a result of complex relations within a framework of interaction among varying Roma populations themselves. This stance did not call for a replete reconceptualization of extent theoretical models. Rather, the Barthian (1969) model of group identity formation was adopted as the primary theoretical framework of analysis. Breaking from the standard approach repeatedly established in the current academic literature on the topic, a shift in the focus from the boundary between Roma and Non-Roma to that between two contrasting Roma identities was employed.

One of the aims of this research was to reposition the analytical focus from identity to identifications, from groups as entities to group-making projects, from shared culture to categorization, and from substance to process. Barth’s (1969) notion of “stuff” (p. 15) that makes up identity is undeniably true in that it is malleable, ever-changing and not all that significant in the larger sense of what and how identity(ies) can be defined, maintained and adapted. However, individual people in the current context of time and space that they occupy require a tangible, concrete and definable characteristics that can be identified and tested in both real interactions as well as in imagined scenarios. (e.g.: assumptions, expectations). This ability to imagine identity and assigned characteristics to it extends this need of ascribing and utilizing non-abstract attributes to a particular identity beyond just the moment of interaction – both with In- and Out-groups, centre and periphery, individual and communal – but also extends it indefinitely into the past and projects it to an unspecified time in the future. Giving the sense that the current identity being expressed and imagined in a particular space and in a particular time is permanent and steadfast, which in turn acts as a source of legitimacy for the claims of identity and its associated characteristics. Such attributes do not need to come from only one source (i.e., one’s own ‘identity’) but can be borrowed from the larger context to the extent that the actor(s) are knowledgeable of other ideologies, systems of thought, cultural traits, and other cognitive conceptualizations.
Identity is performative – both to self and to the outside world; identity is performed through discourse in addition to symbolic representations, such as clothing, etiquette, economic behaviour, projections of self to the Other. Identity is temporarily bounded... people will perform, defend and justify identities of self, but can and will change if there is sufficient reason to do so. In this sense, identity can be seen as ‘a la carte’ – people pick and choose; people enhance and diminish identities as is needed.

For minority populations who are disenfranchised, impoverished, under attack, discriminated against, and generally alienated from society, identity is strongly linked to survival strategies. Identity cannot exist separate from the basic requirement of meeting a person’s fundamental needs, such as money, food, security, employment and dignity. This becomes evident if how Macedonians perceive the Roma is taken into account, and how this eventually emerges as institutionalized discrimination, thus resulting in higher numbers of incarceration, unequal distribution of wealth, lack of infrastructure and services offered, unequal employment and educational opportunities as well as any number of additional unjust and unequal treatment. This phenomenon is not limited to interactions and experiences at the boundary of Roma and non-Roma populations occupying the same space, but becomes manifest within the Roma communities on the whole and within their own societal and cultural institutions.

Data collected during this research strongly suggested that specific constructs for the performance of identity dominate the economic, political and social milieu. Within the contemporary social and cultural realities in Shutka, these constructs include, namely, class, religious affiliation and Romska vera. Initially, this research was primarily geared toward investigating the role Romska vera plays in constructing and negotiating the group identities of disparate Roma communities in Shutka. Yet over time, it became clearer that these notions appeared to be more central than they actually were to people’s identity. Romska vera are not bounded, rigid and clearly demarcated groups. Nor are all vera are equal to one another. Relationships between vera identifications are correlated to power, money, wealth, business, demographics and social status. Gurbeti and Arli my easily inter-marry, while Đambazi and Arli would be less likely to do so, but, when it does occur, more social tension is created.

Shutka is cosmopolitan, multi-cultural, and heterogeneous. Romska vera originated within populations when communities were geographically separated from one another, but in Shutka these designations serve the purpose of constructing social roles, establishing power hierarchies and other relations – delimiting boundaries, establishing values – Đambazi, for
example, see themselves as strong, industrious, and clever, while Arli Roma attribute characteristics such as, “shifty”, “distrustful”, and “uncultured” (Interview) to them, and maintain norms, such as marriage, friendship, partnerships, and political alliances.

While substantially salient in and of themselves, class, religion and Romska vera do not in themselves create identity boundaries, but can be better understood as broad categories through which individuals can make decisions in negotiating their identities through performative means, justified and sanctioned through the expression of value judgements grounded in a shared system of values.

The greatest contribution that can be ascribed to this research is in the potential of advancing knowledge regarding how values are organized, prioritized and employed. Future research must still address the limitations inherent to this research, most notably unveiling how values themselves are constructed, prioritized and negotiated across all value system strata. Perhaps future inquiry can then illuminate the boundaries of group identity and the role individuals play in re/creating the permeable and malleable confines of segregation and difference that are weak enough to be a mere object of the imagination, while simultaneously powerful enough to shape the face of humanity.
References


Summary

Roma identity is most often framed within a monochromatic, dualistic relationship consisting of the ‘Roma’ on one side, and the ‘Majority’ on the other. This ethnographic research attempts to problematize this relationship by proposing that Roma identity is forged not in opposition to Majority non-Roma populations, but is a result of complex relations within a network of interaction among various Roma populations themselves. The individual means through which boundaries demarcating differing Roma identities are negotiated is heavily influenced by the role personal and social values play in this process. Interactions between members of disparate Roma individuals and communities through the lens of determinate values held by interlocutors illuminates how boundaries separating different, and often vying, identities are established and maintained, and the extend to which such boundaries become immutable lines of separation that enable group identities to become established across the wider societal landscape. This research was undertaken over a period of eight months in Shuto Orizari, a municipality of Macedonia’s capital city of Skopje, and was based primarily on techniques of participant observation, coupled with data collected from both structured and unstructured interviews. Shutka, as the location is often called, was chosen due to its large and diverse community of Roma, encompassing several language groups, religious affiliations and historical records, nestled in a context that could be argued to be one of the most equitable toward the Roma in Eastern Europe. The conclusions drawn from this research highlight the central role that personal and social values play in establishing the foundation upon which identity boundaries can be constructed. Employing value judgements can justify, negotiate, reinforce or dismantle identity boundaries by effectively manipulating processes of exclusion/inclusion on the basis of particular value systems. The significance of this study lies in its potential to shift the discourse on Roma identity from that of a ‘Majority contingent’ perspective that is over reliant on generalized descriptive analogues to that of one which places the Roma at the nexus of inquiry and adopts a Roma-centric perspective - examining the day-to-day level of interactions in and around the numerous boundaries of what many attempt to encapsulate in the over-simplistic gloss, Roma.
Összefoglaló

A roma identitást leggyakrabban egy monokromatikus, dualisztikus viszonyrendszerként említik, amelyben az egyik oldalon a "romák", a másikon a "többség" áll. Ez a néprajzi kutatás ezt a viszonyt veszi görsező alá azzal a feltételezéssel, hogy a roma identitás nem a többségi (nem roma) népességgel szemben alakul ki, hanem a különbőző roma csoportok közötti interakciók hálózatán belüli összetett kapcsolatok eredménye. A különfélé roma identitásokat elhatároló mezsgyék egyéni meghatározásának eszközeit nagymértékben befolyásolják a személyes és társadalmi értékek szerepe ebben a folyamatban. A különbőző roma egyének és közösségek tagjai közötti interakciók a beszélgető partnerek által vallott, meghatározott értékek tükrében megvilágítják, hogy miként alakulnak ki és maradnak fenn a különbőző, gyakran egymással versengő identitásokat elválasztó határok, és hogy ezek a határok milyen mértékben válannak megváltoztathatóan elválasztó vonalakká, amelyek lehetővé teszik a csoportidentitások kialakulását a szélesebb társadalmi környezetben. A kutatás nyolc hónapon keresztül zajlott Macedónia fővárosának, Szkopjénak egy kerületében, Shuto Orizariban, és elsősorban a résztvevői megfigyelés technikáján, valamint struktúralt és struktúraltalan interjúkból gyűjtött adatokon alapult. Shutkát - ahogy a helyszínt gyakran nevezik - azért választottam, mert itt él a romák egyik legnagyobb és legsokszínűbb, több nyelvi csoportot, vallási hovatartozást felölelő és történelmi feljegyzésekkel rendelkező közössége olyan környezetben, amely a romákkal szemben Kelet-Európában az egyik legigazságosabbnak mondható. A kutatásból levont következtetések rávilágítanak arra a központi szerepre, amelyet a személyes és társadalmi értékek játszanak az identitás határainak megteremtésében. Az értékítéletek alkalmazása igazolhatja, tárgyalhatja, megerősítheti vagy lebonthatja az identitás-határokat azáltal, hogy a kirekesztés/befogadás folyamatát hatékonyan fenntartja bizonyos értékrendszerek alapján. E tanulmány jelentősége abban rejlik, hogy a roma identitásról szóló diskurzust az általánosító leíró analógiákra túlzottan támaszkodó, "többségi kontingens" perspektívából elmozdithatja a romákat a vizsgálat középpontjába állító, roma-központú nézőpontra, amely a mindennapi interakciók szintjét vizsgálja annak számos határán belül és kívül, amit sokan a túlságosan leegyszerűsítő "roma" kifejezéssel próbálnak összefoglalni.
ROMA IN ŠUTKA

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