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STUDYING ABROAD MEETS MARGINALIZATION: ROMA OF GREECE, AUTOETHNOGRAPHY, AND ACADEMIC TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

While Greece has historically hosted many minority groups in various relational statuses with the majority population, the Roma uniquely embody practical, psychological and metaphorical spaces that sets them apart from other excluded groups. This study explores the historico-social space that separates the Roma and contextualizes recent developments, including Covid-19, which further marginalizes the group. The transactional space that defines relations between Roma and non-Roma encompasses a 'gaze' that disenfranchises Gypsy cultural standing and reduces mutual understanding between mainstream and marginalized communities. This same transactional space is rife with misunderstanding that profits normative day-to-day relations between Roma and those in mainstream society. The paper explores perceptions of the Roma within the Greek social hierarchy, while suggesting study abroad programming, as part of academic tourism, can play a positive role in altering perceptions of minority groups.

Contribution/Originality: This study focuses on the little researched area of Roma within academic tourism. Studying abroad as a mobile, travel experience provides a rich context in which relations between mainstream and marginalized groups can effectively explored. Academic tourism provides the means to breaks through intractable barriers between marginalized and non-marginalized groups.

1. INTRODUCTION

As an ethnic or minority group, the Roma Gypsies (hereinafter called "Roma" or "Romani"), do not fit the normative model of a diasporic people with ties to a specific homeland or geographical space. Despite originating from northwest India, they have no attachment to the subcontinent (yet the Roma flag shares the same wheel as India's). Even as they occupy an unusual and unique diasporic space, they are situated within a specific ethnocultural and psychosocial mindset at once physically present in their geographical land of birth (in this case, Greece), yet also separate and marginalized from it. It is a paradox, as sociologist Willem Schinkel said, in which the Roma are required to fully integrate into majority society or must remain outside of it (Schinkel, 2020). Schinkel suggests the norms of integration reify existing social powers, usually in the hands of whites, and are highly racialized, helping to create and perpetuate the notion of the minority as a 'problem' since they are not 'modern' and thus perpetual outsiders (Nicolas, 2020). This is true of recent immigrants in Europe as it is for the Roma who have been on the continent for a millennium. For the Roma of Greece this paradox signifies their daily lived experience. Their mobility in and around

mainstream culture can take on exaggerated or even dramatic tones, or at the very least, foster misunderstanding and miscommunication that heighten Romani marginalization. Thus, historic relations between the two groups have been severely fraught with uncertainty, volatility, suspicion and distrust.

The nature of the paradoxical spatial differentiation takes place as an elemental product of the Greek imaginary, or the way the Roma are imagined (historically, ideationally, metaphorically and situationally) within the Greek sociocultural and ideological mainstream. 'Imaginaries possess dichotomous qualities; they are tacit and implicit, traveling backward and forward at the same time' (Bunten, 2014). While other minority groups in Greece's history, particularly Jews and Muslims, feature in one form or another within the nation's historiography and visibly constructed space (i.e., temples, mosques, etc.), the context of the Roma as part of this same historiography and lived space is trivial, or almost non-existent in comparison. There are no major recognized buildings associated with the Roma, present or past. Instead, the Roma float in and out of sociocultural awareness with varying degrees of visibility, and usually involving the most negative stereotypes and tropes. Even now, literature on Greek Roma history, for example, is scant and generally unavailable. Conversely, the Roma are generally excluded from the Greek imaginary, one burdened by the classical past that leaves little space to include discussion of excluded minorities. This sad, exclusionary and highly problematized reality is visible to casual observers, including during our two-month stays in the country as part of a study abroad (academic tourism) program.

Through interviews and participant observation, we interrogated majority-minority relations and assumed the interactions between Roma and non-Roma to be monolithic exchanges: each side operating on a set of pre-formed, pre-digested and received mindsets – all the elements that set the conditions of stereotypes and tropes – with little room for discovery or new information or more substantive interactions to penetrate. The manner in which we witnessed these exchanges was due to our privileged position as visitor-researchers to Greece as part of a study-abroad program or academic tourism.

As Rink (2017) notes, the 'aeromobile tourist gaze' which at once 'spectacularises' a foreign destination but also 'disrupts' the links between place and tourist may also provide the contextual space to break through stereotypes and tropes. Air travel itself in general, and academic tourism in particular, allows an escape from normal quotidian space suggest an increasing element of modern, even 'global' citizenship (Martin, 2011). Despite advances in remote communication via Zoom, Skype and other platforms, those associated with academia still prefer in-person rather than remote experiences (Higham, Hopkins, & Orchiston, 2019). Students feel a need to traverse the world, to break rhythmic flows and experience a different lived 'middling mobile' reality (Jankowski, 2018). They may occupy similar spaces to migrants, although under decidedly more privileged surroundings and secured environments (Campos-Delgado, 2018). These spaces are conceived as part of the 'new mobilities paradigm' that emerges with urban spaces as part of the post-modern, neo-liberal economic hierarchy (Bourlessas, 2018). Within the largely urban space that study abroad students and faculty move, as strangers to the community, they can and do (McGahern, 2019) exercise their right to traverse the city while experiencing the same 'urban nomadism' that Roma daily participate in (Inverardi-Ferri, 2018). Yet, the separation between these two groups is significant, since Roma members face different treatment than tourists that stand socially apart from their Greek surroundings (Drakakis-Smith, 2007).

Our study-abroad group served as a 'bridge' between majority and minority cultures, and in doing so was given unique access to examine the shape and contour of the 'gaze' that forms so much a part of our immersion and interaction in the world, whether 'tourist gaze' exhibited in travel, or the majority 'Greek gaze' versus the minority 'Roma gaze' witnessed during our time in Greece (all roughly following the Foucauldian notion of the 'gaze,' (Richardson, 2006)). In all manifestations these perceptions impact our daily behaviors in ways that require critical inspection. As Urry and Larsen (2011) remind us, '[p]eople gaze upon the world through a particular filter of ideas, skills, desires and expectations, framed by social class, gender, nationality, age and education.' Since '[g]azing is a performance that orders, shapes and classifies, rather than reflects the world', it begs the question whether it

imprisons our awareness and the kind of information that we allow ourselves to process internally? (Urry & Larsen, 2011).

These barriers exist within current epistemological realities, such as those that distinguish social life between 'law-like interaction of objectives' and 'people's ideas, values and perceptions' (Verweij, 2008). They call to mind other dichotomies, including differences between structure and agency, micro and macro, lifeworld and system and the reflexive self (Habermas, 1991; Hay, 1995; Mouzelis, 2000; Tsekeris & Lydaki, 2011). It may be necessary to find different ways of 'seeing' the world even if that requires more commitment (in time, energy, patience and non-judgment) than most of us are willing to give.

2. METHODOLOGICAL EXPLANATION

Qualitative interviews were conducted by university undergraduate students as part of summer and spring break study abroad programs from 2016 to 2019. Students, working in teams of three, were trained in pre-departure classes in the methods and purpose of conducting ethnographic interviews. For practical purposes, although limiting the pool of respondents, all interviews were conducted in English and took place in downtown Athens, or where such English speakers could most readily be found in the city. The interviewees themselves were randomly chosen from those in public areas (sidewalks, parks, etc.) without specific randomization sampling techniques employed. Instead, students were asked to approach individuals who were 'captive audiences,' such as those found waiting at bus stops, congregating in parks, outside kiosks and other public spaces. No interviews were recorded, and all respondents were assured of their anonymity.

Out of 902 interviews conducted, 834 were used with the remaining discarded for partial or incomprehensible answers, or more than one person answering for a single interview, etc. In the post-interviews analysis, the answers were converted into binary responses to provide greater clarity in the results. After which, coding sheets were developed and three trial runs for inter-coder reliability purposes took place. The Fleiss-Kappa intercoder reliability test and three IR Intercoder Reliability trials took place that yielded a satisfactory agreement rate of 80%. While the sampling limitations and focus only on English-speaking residents limited the pool of respondents, the interviews supplemented studies such as those of the Pew Center and European Commission discussed in this paper.

Despite concerns about autoethnography, particularly accusations that it may be 'self-serving' (Dewan, 2017) or poorly substituting the personal for the analytical (Chang, 2008), or introduces partiality and bias in social science research, it can illuminate the destructive power of bigoty. Instead of 'developing theoretical explanations' (Anderson, 2006), this work seeks to 'open up conversations and evoke emotional responses' (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008) see also Ellis and Bochner (2000). It attempts to bind the autobiographical to larger, discriminatory and systemic forces that dictate so much of daily lived experience (Ellis, 2004). 'Rather than deny or separate the researcher from the researched, and the personal from the relational, cultural and political' (Adams, Holman, & Ellis, 2015), autoethnography's 'multiple layers of consciousness' (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008) can lead us 'to certain questions about the world and certain problems related to why things are the way they are' (Adams, Holman, & Ellis, 2015).

3. ROMA OF GREECE – A BACKGROUND

The Roma entered what today constitutes Greece, but which in the 15th century represented the dying Byzantine Empire, which at that time was being overrun by Ottoman Turks. In 1453 the Byzantine Empire ceased and the Ottoman one began. It was in that entangled history that the Roma appeared in Europe, an entanglement which must be noted has never ceased. Genetic testing of 'slow-evolving polymorphisms' indicate the Roma likely originated from 'a small subset of the known genetic diversity of the Indian subcontinent' (Kalaydjieva, Gresham, & Calafell, 1999). Specifically, genetic similarities with '"Jat Sikhs, Panjabi Hindus and Rajputs"' (Bhalla, 1992) cited in Hancock (2017). Linguistics studies place the Roma exodus from the subcontinent around 1000 CE west through the Middle East and eventually through present-day Turkey into Europe proper. The exodus may have begun as a result of Muslim

military invasions of the area. As Muslim expansion overwhelmed the Byzantine Empire, the Roma followed in its wake. Even the term itself – Roma – may have originated from the original designation of Byzantine territory as heirs of the Eastern Roman Empire or *Rum*. Ironically, given the extraordinary discrimination of the Roma in Greece in the intervening centuries, Byzantines (including Greeks) originally called themselves *Romaivi*, thus sharing with the Roma the same self-designatory etymological label.

Roma historian Hancock (2017) describes some of the interactions between Ottoman Turks, Roma and local Greeks at the time that may explain the later enmity between the latter groups. After the 1453 fall of the Byzantine Empire, Ottoman Turks settled in all parts of Greece, often accompanied by Roma groups: 'as direct participants' in the Ottoman invasions, 'servants in the auxiliary detachments or as craftsmen servicing the army, or with the accompanying [Turkish] population' (Marushiakova & Popov, 1997) cited in Hancock (2017). If so, then the Roma would be regarded by local Greek communities as simply part of the Turkish invaders, setting up what has been centuries of hostility and opprobrium on the part of Greeks towards the Roma. The interaction between Greeks and Roma must have been substantial: 'There are more than 250 Greek words in the European Romani dialects taken together, second only in number to the Indian vocabulary' (Hancock, 2017). Hancock (2017) noted that 'permanent Romani military settlements' existed in Nauplion and Modon in the Greek Peloponnese by the 1300s. In 1283, a document from Constantinople, still under Byzantine control, noted the taxes collected from '"the so-called Egyptians and Tsigani"' (Hancock, 2017).

Less clear are the interactions between the Roma and Greeks once the Ottoman Empire developed and subjugated the Greek peninsula. Under Ottoman policy, the *millet* non-Muslim religious community system, a certain degree of self-government was accorded to all the various major ethnoreligious groups (in particular, Jews and Christians as members of 'religions of the book' (Aviv, 2016)) residing in the empire. According to Aviv (2016) Ottoman Turkish offered no term for the word 'minority,' thus did non-Muslims groups come to be identified with the millet system. Since the Roma did not represent a specific ethnoreligious community, but instead generally adopted the mainstream faiths of the widespread population, particularly Islam and Orthodox Christianity, their relationship to the Ottoman authorities must have been complicated. Not only were Roma attached to Turkish troops, Hancock also claims that other Roma 'found a place in the economy as metal workers, carpenters or entertainers,' or may have perhaps entered the region as slaves (Hancock, 2017). Roma slavery, although not taking place in Greek-dominated lands, but affecting large swaths of Eastern Europe, 'turned a skilled, self-sufficient people into dependent, dispirited chattel' (Hancock, 2017).

The War of Independent by Greeks against their Ottoman overloads that began in 1821 may not have initially impacted Roma (it is not certain if Roma fought on the side of the Greeks or Ottomans, or even fought at all), as the country gained independence, relations between the two communities took on a distinct negative life of its own. These relations could not have been helped when the new nation-state turned to classical Greece for its inspiration, not the cultural histories of its Byzantine or Ottoman legacies with which the Roma were associated (however negatively). The marginalization of the Roma likely expanded when Greece undertook this massive re-identification program involving a return to its classical roots. Byzantine and Ottoman edifices were demolished to make way for the reimagined 5th century BCE Athens with classical street names that replaced Ottoman ones, a massive neoclassical building program, and the socio-worship of ancient Greece that bordered on fetishization (Athanassopoulos, 2002; Gourgouris, 1996; Hamilakis, 2007; Herzfeld, 1982; Lagos et al., 2020a; Tziovas, 2014). None of this "hellenization" meant very much to the Roma, who had no historico-connective threads to ancient Athens and likely could only watch its unfolding with puzzlement and wonder.[1] Significantly, the Greek separation from the Ottoman Empire was a

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[1] Even as the Roma could not be associated with classical Athens, their immersion in Greek culture was significant. Hancock relates the story of a group of Europeans who when encountering Romanies addressed them in Egyptian Coptic and Arabic, only to be replied to Greek: Hancock, *Romani people*, 32.

dramatic shift from a "multireligious, multicultural, multinational' reality to a 'homogenizing' one. This left the Roma exposed in their 'minority-hood,' thus exacerbating their marginalization (Naar, 2016).

A semblance of Roma marginalization is captured at the time in the work of one of the country's first produced films, *The Adventures of Pillar* (1924) and reputedly the oldest Greek movie preserved. The movie involves an exuberant street urchin on an adventurous outing in Athens that at one point runs into a feast gathering of Roma on a downtown street. The antics of the Roma with their colorful costumes and ribald behavior offers stereotypes of the Roma as socially and culturally different from non-Roma seen in the rest of the film. The Roma are both far removed from mainstream society revealed in *Pillar* but also from the neoclassical heritage that hovers over the entire plot of the film.[2]

Even as the Roma emerged within popular culture in stereotypical representations, this did little to improve their actual status as citizens of Greece. The concentration of Roma in Greece is not as high as in other Balkan and Eastern European countries, particularly Romania and Hungary. Figures about the population of Roma in Greece are further complicated by the fact that since 1951 Greek censuses to not include ethnic identity. Current Greek state estimates place the total Roma population in the country at 110,000 in 371 communities while other sources cite as many as 350,000 (Kampouris, 2019). Uncertain, too, is how many Greek Roma perished during the Holocaust in the 1940s (European Romani (Gypsy) Population Map, 2020; Niewyk, 2000). If we accept that one million Roma lived in Europe prior to the start of the War in 1939, then the loss of 25% of the population means a total of 250,000 Roma killed or perished under Nazi rule or influence (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Holocaust Encyclopedia, n.d). The figures may be higher: Hancock suggests a total population of two million, with nearly 1.5 million perishing (Hancock, 2005). Even if the numbers for Greek Roma are not presently known, the impact on survivors of the Holocaust must have been severe and devastating. The rationale behind the extermination of the Roma was purely biological: 'the "criminality" associated with [the Roma] was attributed by the Nazis to a genetically transmitted and incurable disease, and was therefore ideologically *racial*,' according to Hancock (2005) which, for the Nazis, necessitated complete elimination of the Roma altogether.

Post-Holocaust relations between Roma and the dominant majority have grown more complicated. Since Greece considers itself a 'unitary' or homogenous state, from the time of its inception in 1828 to the present, the '"official ideology of the Greek state has been built almost exclusively around the concept of a single nation, with a common creed and language"' (Rozakis, 1999). As a result of this ideology, Greece recognized only two minority groups based on religious sentiment – the mostly Turkish Muslims of Thrace – forced under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne that guaranteed their rights and Greek Jews in 1929 (Naar, 2016; Rozakis, 1999). Other ethnic groups, such as Pomaks, Slavophones and Roma received no such accommodation. Even as movements in other parts of Europe, particularly in the European Union, as a whole have pushed for greater accommodation and support of the Roma, the Greek state, especially at the local level, steadfastly refused to provide assistance and in some cases has even used violence to suppress Roma individuals and groups.[3]

Because of its unitary outlook, recent Greek censuses (unlike the one in 1951) does not ask respondents to state their '"national/ethnic origin, language and religion,'"a small yet telling element that directly or indirectly '"discourage[s] discussion on issues concerning ethnic, linguistic, or religious difference in Greek society"' (Rozakis, 1999). By following this policy, the Greek government often manages to understate minority population figures on the one hand, while 'persecut[ing] and prosecut[ing]' minority identity on the other (Greek Helsinki Monitor, 1999). Some of the Muslims, perhaps between 10,000 and 15,000 are Roma, who have found themselves absorbed and perhaps even assimilated into the Muslim minority. A supposedly 'unitary' homogenous state strains under an increasingly heterogenous one: 'So, among the residents of Greece, 7% have a non-Greek national identity and

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[2] For more on the director of the film, German-Hungarian Joseph Hepp as well as early Greek cinema, please see: (Kaser, 2017).

[3] For numerous accounts of violence by Greek police officers and other authorities, with threats made against victims, please see 'Greek Helsinki Monitor,' np.

another 7% have a Greek national identity but also an ethnolinguistic and or religious specificity' (Greek Helsinki Monitor, 1999).

Former Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, to celebrate International Romani Day in April 2019, told his invited Roma guests '"[t]here are no first, second or third-class citizens"' in Greece. '"We are all children of the same God,"' he told them (Kampouris, 2019). Yet, living conditions for most Roma remain substandard, and under the economic crisis in the country beginning in 2010, unemployment rose (perhaps to as high as 60%) and Roma suffered greatly; 'they remain the most wronged and marginalized social group in Greece' (Divani, 2007). The rise of extreme right-wing elements in the country, for example Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn), increased hostility toward minority groups like the Roma. Because of social discrimination and racism (e.g., parents of students refusing to allow their children to attend schools with Roma), according to Harvard University's Center for Health and Human Rights, 'only 18% of Roma attend secondary school vs. 75% of the majority community, and less than 1% of Roma are enrolled in university' (Roma at a Glance, 2019).

The range of Roma living conditions varies from partial integration to complete outcasts, in effect, the untouchables of Greece. Roma in one section of Aghia Varvara Athens operate businesses on one end, but in another area of the city members 'live in a wretched encampment in a rubbish dump' (Divani, 2007). There are also tent or ramshackle dwellers, such as those we witnessed on the outskirts of Nafplion, without adequate electricity, water or access to chemical toilets, constituting a 'very serious problem of survival' (Divani, 2007). Such substandard living sites for local Roma often, in the minds of non-Roma, link them to criminality and represent 'incompatible cultural deviations to which the failure of the Roma to be integrated into Greek society is entirely attributed' (Divani, 2007). Numerous stories of Roma thieves and drug dealers abound; a common trope for marginalized minority groups across the globe.[4] In the case of Greece, these pre-fabricated, conspiratorial memes are used to 'excus[e] any unlawful action on the part of the police' (Divani, 2007). Stories circulated in Greek social media during the COVID-19 that the Roma were attempting to spread the virus to non-Roma, a blatantly false charge that nevertheless circulated widely (Fernández & Sánchez-Rubio, 2020; Rorke, 2020). In 1998, the Director of the European Centre for the Rights of the Roma, Dimitrina Petrova (in Divani (2007)), put the situation in simple terms: '"the Roma in Greece are not considered to be human." Knowing that 'race… is made an unmade,' can this poisonous hostility and caste system be broken? (Renan, 2018).

4. AFFECTIONS, GAZES, THE ROMA AND LIFE IN THE GREEK IMAGINARY

If it is true that Greek Roma are not considered 'human', logic dictates that this bigotry would be played out and visible in daily reality. Has this poisonous mentality seeped into Roma consciousness and if so, how can it be detected? One particular event that happened with two study abroad students may provide a clue. The two students, both female, one day went to use a public bathroom near a train station not far from downtown Athens. As they entered the restrooms, according to their accounts, two young Roma female teenagers, entered behind them. One of my students emerged from the toilet, only to be confronted by a Roma girl holding a hose and proceeding to drench her with water. She screamed, sending the second student to come out of her stall, only for herself also to be drenched. Stunned by this, the two completely soaked students ran out of the bathroom. The two young Roma girls followed them and begged for money.

In attempting to deconstruct the unexpected event, two elements emerge: the nature of the water-spraying encounter itself, as well as the agency behind the event that may serve as a counterweight to the inhumanity noted above. The encounter brings two different realities into confrontation: the touristic one for my two study abroad

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[4] The impact on this negative stereotype against the Roma may have been exacerbated from the effects of Covid-19 on Greek society, one of which involved the drastic increased use of cocaine ('67% above the 2019 daily average') and other psychostimulant drugs. Perhaps the rising drug use was blamed on the Roma. See: (Karaiskaki, 2020).

students as temporary visitors in the country and the outcast Roma experience in which normative and normalized relations with non-Roma are apparently few and far between. In neither case are the parties able to make sense of the other – my students cannot comprehend how they can be suddenly hosed emerging from the toilet, while the Roma teenagers themselves perhaps could not understand how my students could have reacted as negatively as they did (hence, why they asked for money afterwards). In more 'normal' encounters, there exists a degree of acceptable or knowable social norms in which both sides tacitly accept and in which social negotiation, if it arises, can take place. When no social norms exist, or at least when those social norms are not mutually known by either party as often is the case between Roma and non-Roma, the results can be problematical at least as so far as my students were concerned.

It's possible to explain the Roma teenagers' action as involving liminality; this incident was an attempt by two young girls at having fun with tourists (obviously not Greek since they spoke English). Perhaps these two exercised this type of play in their lives and extended it to my students out of some playful desire to engage with them. Or, going deeper, perhaps it was their girls' expression of agency, in a culture that hardly notices them, and when it does, excludes them, and the spraying was an attempt to break through the exclusion and achieve some bonding, however momentary or even 'unfriendly' it may appear to our perceptions, or gaze. If we accept the latter, then it places the young girls in a 'courageous' position who in their eyes attempted something other than a 'common' momentary encounter with two *godže* ('strangers'), in effect to break through the social barriers that exists between Roma and non-Roma. Further along the liminality track is the possibility that the event is the product of a very 'loose' Greek culture, in which rule breaking is the norm not an aberration (Gelfand, 2018). Greek society's looseness directly or indirectly promotes behavior a 'tight' culture strictly forbids, or at the very minimum, strongly discourages. If viewed in this way, a new contextualization forms that places the event in less 'sinister' terms. The actions of the two young Roma girls reflect ethnography's 'reflexivity': working with marginalized populations involving both being thrust into the front lines of their social reality, but also not measuring their behavior by our norms (Boeri & Rashi, 2019).

The motivations behind the brief but dramatic Roma teenagers' action may never be known, but I (author) spoke to the two students to gauge their reactions to the event. Their emotions ranged from shock, anger, fear, humiliation and even sadness, and all shades in between. Yet, mixed in was the disillusionment the event had on the 'dream' escape to Greece momentarily turned into physical violation, or the 'dreamworld beyond the pale becomes a nightmare' (Stewart, 2007).[5] Violence of one type or another have accompanied travel and tourism in its modern and earlier histories, and can even be an attraction for some travelers (Pizam & Mansfied, 1996). The students' mentalization of Greece, their tourist imaginaries, did not include being water-hosed. The shock of the event was in reaction to the violence of the incident itself, as well as to the rupture of their 'idealized' touristic image of the country (the 'tourist gaze'). Most students participating in foreign study programs tend to have pre-formed images of their host country as both the cultural repository of the nation's classical past as well as the idyllic, Mediterranean paradise, ('sun, sea, sand, and sex' (Apostolopoulos, 1996)), similar to other tourists who visit the country. When these images are not met, or in this case rent by violence, cognitive dissonance results which moves visitors (our students) into two possible outcomes: adapting the traditional Greek tropes of the Roma as outcasts, troublemakers, prone to crime and violence, etc., or moving into monomythical unchartered territory that tests their sense-making capacities.

Since the Roma occupy a particularly negative space within the Greek imaginary, the water-hose incident would only reify existing stereotypes by residents. For the American students, the matter complicates their interpretative abilities since it took place at the intersectionality of various cultural forces. Since stereotypes often define the 'other', negative images have historically been used to justify and undergird hostile treatment of the Roma (Mayall, 2004). Most students have very little perception of the Roma in the United States prior to the foreign study program; impressions of this ethnic group typically form during our stay in Greece as the students experience osmotically the

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[5] Little goes on to say: "No one told you about the downside, that [being abroad] could be so tense, or even downright dangerous' ('Belize Ephemera,' 236).

'processes of temporal and spatial Othering' within the Greek hierarchical imaginary (Fabian cited in Noel and Nelson (2016)). If we accept Cornelius Castoriadis (1987) notion of a national imaginary embodying 'a culture's ethos or a society's shared, unifying core conceptions', then the tentacles of these core elements are visible, whether for short-term visitors or for longer-term like study abroad participants. In this guise, students are confronted with new knowledge and awareness of social injustice that can be simultaneously educational but also jarring; their tourist gaze is liable for renegotiation.

Perhaps we should speak about the 'study abroad imaginary,' as an important yet tiny element in the broader, but 'active… directed and intentional' imaginary associated with modern tourism (Kuntz, 1946). This term is offered to better explain the development of perceptions and gazes of ethnic identity and stereotypes that have a direct bearing on students' own internalizing of the marginalization. In that regard, study abroad suggests a unique opportunity to wrestle with disturbing features of social inequity and ethnic ostracization that may lead students to experiencing change as they learn. As Hoffa (2007) reminds us in his two-volume history of study abroad, '[t] raveling to the greater "elsewhere" to pursue knowledge and perspectives unavailable at home is nothing new.' 'Many early cultures,' Hoffa (2007) adds, 'sent their young leaders on journeys of initiation and discovery'. The initiation journey, as Hoffa himself acknowledges, has overtones beyond merely leaving home for a private journey of discovery. Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with the Thousand Faces* places this trek into archetypal terms as a common thread in stories and legends he collected and studied from around the globe (Hoffa, 2007). The 'monomythical hero' leaves home for an extended period (*departure*), undergoes tests or encounters with demons (*initiation*) and having successfully overcome the demons is able to go back (*return*) to society with knowledge that is shared for the group's benefit (Lagos, 2020b). Not all students on foreign study experience this quest, or the fruits thereof, but the few that do step into a new life threshold.

I (author) will now describe my own journey within the study abroad paradigm that roughly follows Campbell's metaphorical journey of maturation. Born and raised in Greece, I mindlessly followed the traditional behaviors and reactions to the Roma of mainstream society. The Roma – 'Gyftes' in Greek, a pejorative term associated with begging, existed in a dim part of my daily consciousness. Like most Greeks, my interactions with them were insignificant, except in passing, often involving being begged for money or occasionally seeing their small trucks in city neighborhoods announcing through a small megaphone the pick-up of any unwanted metals, scraps, and other items. In their dress, in their groupings, in their manners, they remained singularly apart from majority society in my mind. Roma often appeared at special events or festivals selling flowers, or in the case of one music festival in my village of birth, sprinkling flowers petals over me then asking for a payment. I shewed them away, but that did not prevent the Roma woman from showering me with more petals.

This was the fertile ground onto which the *departure* later came, by my colleagues' invitation, related above, that changed the focus of the study abroad program research to the Roma of Greece. Consenting to this new research agenda forced me to painfully examine my own past bigotry towards the Roma, many years' worth, in an honest, uncomfortable and humbling manner. One question kept circling in my mind: was I up to the task of facing my own racism? It took several months before I finally accepted the new research challenge, and thus set into motion my own *initiation*. This acceptance translated into, among several activities, gaining access into Roma communities and settlements in Greece as part of the program's goals, speaking to Roma women, men, children, grandparents, and the like, seeing their residences, sometimes patched together from available materials, without sanitation, proper plumbing or central heating, witnessing children playing barefooted and with few toys, and hearing their deeply striking stories of inhumane marginalization. It mattered less the veracity of these stories (difficult to corroborate as they were) than to simply listen to them describe their reality and the daily challenges they faced. As my initiation continued, the students and I organized meetings between Roma and non-Roma in Napflion. At one encounter, a

student asked what each group wanted from the other. The Roma member asked for love (*agape*) from the non-Roma.[6] The non-Roma member wanted Roma to be more integrated into Greek society. The publication of this article begins my *return* that shares my experiences and knowledge with others. This is a continuing process. The greatest difficulty lies in how to change Greek minds that for many are staunchly opposed to more friendly relations with the Roma. The Greek gaze almost precludes any meaningful breakthrough in commonly held views about the Roma.

5. CHALLENGES IN INITIATING SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE OF THE ROMA

The twenty-first century thus far has not been pleasant for Greece; unofficially declaring bankruptcy in 2010, followed by an extraordinary refugee crisis, then the coronavirus that devastated its all-important tourist industry, continuous tensions with neighbor Turkey, the largest by revenue in the country, which left the nation in painful straits (Lagos et al., 2020a). Coupled with the significant rise of right-wing elements in the country in the first two decades of the century, prejudice and bigotry became growth industries. Minority groups, including refugees and the Roma, suffered. As already noted, the socioeconomic conditions of the Roma have never been good in Greece; they, along with the Jews of the country, suffered the most at the hands of the Nazis during the Holocaust. Skirting around the edges of society as they do, moving in unified groups with very little apparent integration into mainstream society, has always placed the Roma in perilous positions in society. This marginalization has fostered a distrust of non-Roma that is equaled if not greater than the one returned to them by the *godže*.

The suspicion of the Roma by the majority is significant. The Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Survey report provides a strong indication of the hostility involved. Greek respondents rated their opinion of the Roma minority in the country in unusually high unfavorable terms: 72% (an increase of 17% from 2014) and a favorable rating of 22% (falling from 38% in 2014) (Pew Research Center Spring, 2019). The negative shift is impressive, but given the severe socioeconomic circumstances at the times, it suggests the Roma likely served as scapegoats for the rest of the country. According to the same report, several European nations' attitudes towards the Roma have actually improved in the past few years, including 'double-digit' gains in France, Sweden, United Kingdom, Netherlands and Spain (Pew Research Center Spring, 2019). Yet, 'in 10 of the 16 countries polled,' the report offers, 'half or more have an unfavorable view of Roma' (Pew Research Center Spring, 2019). Greece's highly unfavorable opinion is only surpassed by Slovakia and Italy (Pew Research Center Spring, 2019). The European Barometer Survey came to the same conclusions about discrimination in the European Union: it remains the 'most widespread against the Roma (Eurobarometer, 2019). A vast majority of Greeks (82%) agree that Roma discrimination is common in their country, tied at the highest with Sweden, according to the Survey (Eurobarometer, 2019). Whether Greeks would allow their children to be in a love relationship with Roma, elect Roma to office, or simply have Roma as work colleagues, their consent in these matters falls well below EU averages. Greek parents are more accepting of a Muslim love interest than a Roma one (Eurobarometer, 2019). Yet, 73% of Greeks think society would benefit from better integration of the Roma while they consider present attempts at integration as ineffective (falling ten points from 66% in 2012) (Eurobarometer, 2019).

Our own research produced similar results. Only 11% of our respondents had a positive interaction with the Roma and only 15% of them indicated that the Roma are treated well in Greece. Interestingly, the vast majority (65%) favored more governmental intervention to improve societal treatment of the Roma. When asked to indicate who is better able to help improve the rights of minorities like the Roma, the government or the Roma themselves, 39% indicated both, while 33% preferred the government and 22% Roma groups on their own. Using correlation matrices, we noted, for example, that those respondents who had positive interactions with the Roma were significantly more supportive (83% more likely) of governmental intervention to improve the treatment of Romani.[7] Interviewees who

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[6] In Greek, 'agape' love refers to general or familial love, as opposed to 'eros' (erotic love) or 'philia' (the love for friends).

[7] Chi-squared (1, N=380) = 11.195, p = 0.00082 (alpha = 0.05).

thought that Roma were treated badly and most especially those who also had negative interactions with the Roma were more likely to vote for legislation to improve treatment of this minority group.[8] Lastly, those individuals who supported more legislative action to better the treatment of the Roma tended to place on both government and Roma the means of advancing the rights of this marginalized group. Respondents who opposed such legislation overwhelmingly put the onus on the Roma themselves to improve their own lot.[9] We found the age distribution of our interviewees affected their views: younger subjects (18-25) had more positive interactions than older ones (56 and older), while an increase in age correlated to an increase in feelings that the Roma were treated well. Clearly, there was a discrepancy between the youngest and oldest respondents; the younger our interviewee, the greater the likelihood to be in favor of laws to improve the social treatment of the Romani. Like those respondents who opposed legislation and placed more emphasis on the Roma helping themselves, older subjects believed that the Roma were responsible for improving their rights.

The totality of these reports suggests that marginalization of the Roma is alive and well in Greece, and that several factors, including the degree of positive interactions with Romani and respondents' age, affected their views of their fellow citizens, the Romani. The results indicate the difficulty of entrenched feelings within Greek society, ones that vindicate the stereotypes they feed and support, and may in sum manifest into the level of mythology – not simply myths, but their ideologicalization Barthes (2012). By normatizing beliefs, in this case, the antagonism towards the Roma, mythologizing removes the complexity of behavior in favor of simplicity ('abolishes the complexity of human acts' (Barthes, 2012)). Human beings are not required to dig deeper, and all the mental work this entails, into social interactions but instead take them at face value. It is here that mythology holds such great social power. Once the discriminatory mythology, through repeated gossip, a constant feeing of stereotypical media representations, through hearsay, through unexamined stories, etc. is established or entrenched and is difficult to change. Barthes, on the other hand, claims myths, as human-made constructs, can be altered. Our experience on the ground in participant observation attests to this difficulty, and affirms the role that academic tourism plays in penetrating social ostracization.

One instance involved our study abroad program's local coordinators who assisted our program and largely acted as our cultural informants in Nafplion; they also located and organized our interactions with local parties, Roma and non-Roma alike. In the course of the three years conducting the fieldwork in Napflion, their attitude towards our research appeared to change from being receptive to our desire to explore social ostracization, to increasingly supporting the attitudes of local non-Roma who generally held a decidedly negative attitude to the Romani. Obstacles were increasingly put in the program's paths; we were repeatedly told it was becoming more difficult to find individuals willing to speak to us or who had no interest in the research we were doing. Feeling that our students' attitudes were skewed to more favorably regard the Roma than the non-Roma, the local coordinators displayed a rising antipathy towards our students, culminating in a confrontation one local coordinator had with the entire group in which this particular local coordinator told the students that they were not sensitive to the feelings of the non-Roma but focused more on the Roma. The message sent was clear: as Americans (students and faculty) we were bigoted towards the non-Roma.

In another important event, local groups in Nafplion who had participated in our dialogues, or knew of our work, began to ask if we could offer solutions. We were repeatedly told that residents had grown tired of simply talking about Roma marginalization to our students and instead wanted practical solutions. Yet, if we did offer a fix, as tourists we would be placed into the category of 'American saviors.' We reminded them that we were simply researchers seeking a better understanding of a deep social problem, and in any case, we did not have the knowledge or the resources to offer serious assistance. Upon reflection, the call for solutions was simply the local coordinators'

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[8] Chi-squared (1, N=196) = 14.1234, p = 0.002742 (alpha = 0.05).

[9] Chi-squared (1, N=710) = 127.1738, p < 0.0001 (alpha = 0.05).

way of politely putting an end to our work. Attempts to further engage residents on Roma discrimination faded and we were forced to cancel the work we conducted in Nafplion.

The third instance is perhaps the most telling and involved an encounter the local coordinators organized in an elementary school outside of Sparta that had a few Romani children enrolled. With the help of the school principal, a meeting was arranged with mothers of both Roma and non-Roma children. The meeting took place after classes had ended in the afternoon. The purpose of the discussion was to allow the parents to express their feelings about their children interacting with their opposite number. We had no pre-set agenda, and simply wanted to determine if dialogue between the groups was possible. From the start, the non-Roma did not hesitate to share their stereotypes of the Roma, often with barely concealed disdain and ostracization. The Roma mothers remained calm and refrained from offering their own stereotypes until the end of the meeting. Matters became increasingly heated from the non-Roma side. In an attempt to diffuse the hostility, one Roma woman turned to one non-Roma mother and asked her if they could have coffee together. The non-Roma mother refused the invitation. When the question came up as to why Roma mothers remove their kids, particularly their daughters, from high school by the time they are 14 or older, one Roma mother explained that she does not wish to have her children exposed to drugs, alcohol and sex that is common in Greek high schools. This caught us observers by surprise since the comment revealed a Romani stereotype towards the non-Roma. Thus, any meaningful change in relations between the two groups must involve breaking down stereotypes on both sides, although the far more poisonous ones emanate from the majority.

Conducting work with the Roma stigmatized our program, revealing the difficulty in breaking through bigotry. Within three years of holding conversations with both groups in Nafplion, we abandoned our research there simply because no one wanted to further our research efforts on Roma exclusion. It has always been difficult to find representatives of the Roma community to speak to us and to non-Roma directly; by the end of the three years, perhaps they themselves had been stigmatized in their own communities, so they refused further cooperation with us. One incident cemented our reputation in the community as favoring the Roma over the non-Roma.

Prior to going to Greece, we explained to our participating students the need to respect their roles as researchers, and to always maintain social and emotional distance from those we study. One small group of students broke the protocol and began what we later found out may have been personal relationships involving Roma teenagers and two adult supervisors or relatives (it was not entirely clear which was the case). It seems our students wanted to show their solidarity with the Roma and go out of their way to support them financially. Our students soon came under the observation of the police in Nafplion who followed the Roma group, suspecting them of drug dealing. Soon the teenager group regularly began gathering in front of our hotel, waiting for our students to appear, with the hotel staff and owners deeply concerned about their presence. The hotel owner spoke to me personally about these worries, raising safety issues about her staff and other guests. We also spoke to the local police officers, who indicated that one of our students was in an intimate relationship with one of the adult Roma males. This same student called me frantically one day, fearing the possibility of being kidnapped by the 'lover'. The student was removed from the program and taken to another city. The episode reminded us of the challenges that our research posed (Boeri & Rashi, 2019). It is also indicative of the difficulty of normalizing relations between majority and minority. Yet, our study abroad program had broken through the barriers of social exclusion and found the separation to be less flimsy than previously assumed.

6. LOOKING AHEAD

Our experiences in conducting ethnographic work with Romani communities in Greece have been eye-opening and instructive as to the poisoned state of relations between Roma and non-Roma. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated hostilities between the two groups, with the majority accusing the Roma of deliberately spreading the virus. News reports and social media postings carried these unsavory messages to mainstream society and insure even greater social ostracization of the Roma. One outcome of this increasing hostility on the part of the majority towards

the Romani is that the latter may be less willing to seek medical help when infected with the virus, a dangerous situation given that this likely leads to greater spread of the disease. A dangerous loop is created in which victimization, either in the form of greater spread of Covid, or lack of proper medical care for the ill, takes place. This circumstance imperils both Roma and non-Roma alike.

If Barthes is right about mythologies, that they can easily be overturned, then the work we conducted in Greece suggests there are ways out of the morass of marginalization (Barthes, 2012). In our interactions with Greek Romani, we noticed their living situations do not compare favorably to other Greeks: living in ramshackle dwellings, or tents, with no access to central heating, indoor plumbing or sewage facilities and with few modern consumer conveniences (such as refrigerators), the Roma daily life is considerably more challenging than the average Greek yet with a reduced carbon footprint. Roma exist under such severe conditions, with a greatly reduced carbon footprint, yet receive not social credit for being better, if unwitting, stewards of the environment. The Roma, or anyone else, would not prefer to live under such difficult circumstances. Yet, even as they do, little recognition is given to their reduced impact on the natural environment. To publicize this case requires a concerted effort on the part of many constituencies (media, government, social groups, environmental groups, etc.), a reality which at the moment seems impossible. Perhaps such an effort might reduce the stigmatization of the Romani and their excluded 'social landscapes' in Greece (Singer & Page, 2019). Since stereotypes are 'embedded in the public imaginary,' changing them would steer and direct 'the enforcement behavior of social agents' as well as the 'policy initiatives of lawmakers' towards new images (Singer & Page, 2019).

It may also be a useful first step in spurring dialogue between majority and minority. Despite the research obstacles that came our way while studying the Roma, our small efforts at encouraging dialogue between the two groups did not come without some positive results. A Greek lawyer in Nafplion, who regularly spoke to our students about racism in Greece, participated in a dialogue with Roma that left him 'troubled,' but in a 'good' way. He had interactions with Romani, but never in open, honest discussion, and the time that he spent with us left him reflective about how the majority-minority relations could improve. Perhaps our study abroad program has had some positive effect on residents. In another instance, the police commissioner for the local area around Nafplion came to speak to us about Roma and crime, in which he indicated that Romani's illegal acts are the same as the rest of Greek society. In other words, they commit no more criminal acts than other Greeks. Such statistics, by a Greek government official no less, reveals the extent to which distorted media images of the Roma have gained currency, while truthful statistics do not make it to the same media channels. Studies of other groups, for example, Greek immigrants in the United States at the turn of the 20th century, faced similar hostile stereotypes as thieves and the like. In time, these stereotypes vanished as Greek Americans integrated further into mainstream society (Lagos, 2012). Stereotypes are not set in stone but can be altered if steps are taken to create what Elizabeth Povinelli calls 'spaces of otherwise' (Elizabeth, 2011). It is in this way that Greek Americans became 'white ethnics' and thus less mythically dangerous to the majority population (Anagnostou, 2009; Jacobson, 1999). We are reminded by those with experience in the field that '[e] thonographers engage people in conversations that have the potential to lead to positive interactions and perhaps fruitful collaborations (Singer & Page, 2019). To this may be added the notion that 'human beings, as both externally determined and internally motivated, do create (unpredictable) meaning and are inherently capable of reformulating it' Tsekeris and Lydaki (2011).

Study-abroad may be one, albeit small, a form of seeing the world differently that could offer a model of how to better approach the consequences social marginalization. There are many paths towards moral redemption; the one discussed here involves foreign study that took place within an existing institutional framework.

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