Education as a field of conflict with the cultural identity of the Roma. A study on Roma graduates from Greek universities

Adamopoulou Charoula
PhD Candidate in D.E.S.E.C.E., University of Patras
up1049574@ac.upatras.gr

Balias Stathis
Professor at D.E.S.E.C.E., University of Patras
balias@upatras.gr

Abstract

The Roma, constitute the largest minority in Europe. The percentage of young Roma who have graduated from university, ranges from 1% to 4% in the member states of the European Union, resulting that the majority is being categorized as NEETs (not in education, employment, or training). The purpose of the article is to explore the identity conflicts, experienced by Roma university graduates with their traditional identity, through their educational journey, from preschool to university, as well as their relationships with the Roma Community. The sample of the qualitative research, consisted of ten Roma graduates from Greek universities. The majority of the graduates declared they were proud of their origin, although they confirmed the concealment of their cultural identity, mainly during their university studies, but also after that, for reasons related to their integration into the labor market and their social acceptance.

Keywords: Roma, education, higher education, cultural identity, cultural loss.

Introduction

By 2030, one of the 17 goals of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development is equal access for all students to Higher Education (HE), including those from minority groups, and the elimination of inequalities regardless of race, origin, nationality, and vulnerability (Flecha et al., 2022). Members of national minorities are often underrepresented in Tertiary Education due to their socio-economic status, the cost of services, and insufficient school attendance (Council of Europe, 1997). One of the biggest challenges that EU member states are called to include in their educational agenda is how Vulnerable Social Groups, such as minorities, can achieve successful access to Higher Education as well as vocational training and subsequently graduate successfully from it, claiming the right to live, work, and, by extension, to social integration.

The access of Roma to HE is a challenge for that small percentage of Roma who seek access and graduation from the university. School dropout, partial attendance, and school abandonment of Roma children in the member states of Eastern and Central Europe (World Bank, 2019) are linked in numerous studies to the cultural barriers they encounter on their educational journey (Skourtou et al., 2020) (Sime et al., 2018), (Kyuchukov, 2000) (Parthenis & Fragoulis, 2016), at all levels of Education, from preschool to Higher Education, in order to maintain their traditions (FRA, 2014, p.19). Education as an institution is considered a threat to the identity of the Roma and specifically to their morals, customs, and traditions. The school abandonment of the Roma is primarily related to factors associated with their culture and lifestyle (Brüggemann, 2014). On the other hand, Roma parents express their fears related with their children, about the risk of losing part of their cultural identity during their schooling (Zachos & Panagiotidou, 2019). One of the prevailing assumptions regarding the educational marginalization of the Roma is that it is partly due to their lack of ambition, while HE is something to be avoided, according to the Roma themselves, in order to not experience

cultural loss (European Union, 2012:50). Cases of academic success are rare among the Roma, resulting in the absence of incentives for adult Roma to enroll their children in educational programs. According to a UNICEF study, the salaries of employees, including those working in Tertiary Education, are not attractive to the Roma (UNICEF, 2015, p.51). However, the pursuit of a position in HE for both men and women enhances their levels of satisfaction and optimism for the future in pursuing a better life (UNICEF, 2015, p. 131).

Integration into education is a prerequisite for the inclusion of Vulnerable Social Groups (VSG), such as the Roma, into the social fabric of the countries of the EU member states. Access to education for Roma, Sinti, and Kale children is one of their most significant needs if they wish to adapt and become fully active members of society in the respective EU member state (Council of Europe, 2003). The high unemployment rates of the Roma are due to their low educational level and, combined with the discrimination they face in the labor market and social exclusion, the vicious cycle of extreme poverty is perpetuated (O' Higgins & Ivanov, 2006). According to research, the Roma population aged 16 to 24 years, which accounts for 56% of the Roma population in the EU Member States, falls into the category of NEETS (Not Education, Employment, Training) (FRA, 2023, p.23). Higher levels of education offer opportunities for a better position in the labor market, promote an active social life, and ensure better health and safety conditions (EU, 2011).

The higher education as a field of conflict in the cultural identity of Roma graduates from the University

The integration of Roma into the educational systems of EU member states as a precursor to their social integration therein, has been a concern of international organizations for at least the last three decades. The Council of Europe proposes a series of policies and strategies to member states for Roma access to all levels of education, especially higher education, through scholarships, special quotas, and state subsidies, in order to increase the rates of Roma participation in it (Adamopoulou, 2021). Formal education is not a priority for the Roma (Council of Europe, 2014, p.12), while high rates of school dropout and abandonment from primary education are found in most European states where they live. Roma parents consider school a threat to the preservation of their cultural identity (Rutigliano, 2020).

On the other hand, the prevailing racism, stigma, and antigypsyism increase the rhetoric of hate and make their social integration more difficult, with European programs emphasizing, besides education, health, housing, and the labor market. In most European societies, young Roma find it difficult to claim their rights and affirm their identity and belonging (Council of Europe, 2016). Young Roma face structural discrimination, marginalization, and are not accepted as citizens, as a strong mechanism of stigma is observed, resulting in many young Roma denying their identity (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 46). The aversion and segregation due to stereotypes and discriminations experienced by young Roma lead them to hide their cultural identity (Council of Europe, 2021, p. 46).

Identity conflicts for the Roma, especially those who choose to continue their education, are experienced at all levels of education, from Preschool, Primary to Higher Education. One of the main problems faced by Roma and Sinti who have graduated from Higher Education is that they often have to hide their identity (EE, 2011, p.27). Roma who have received higher education often do not disclose their Roma or Sinti identity, anticipating difficulties in the job market. Roma graduates state that the only security they feel is within the family context (FRA, 2011, p.27). Thus, the identity of the Roma is not asserted, especially among the more educated Roma (UNICEF, 2012, p.15).

The perceptions of the collective Roma Community regarding education often reinforce identity conflicts for Roma who decide to continue their schooling. Conflicts are exacerbated by the Roma Community against Roma who decide to pursue their access to university. A widely held assumption about the educational marginalization of Roma graduates by the

Community is partly due to their lack of ambitions and the perception in some environments that Higher Education is something to be avoided in order to avoid experiencing cultural loss (Brüggemann, 2012).

The identity conflicts experienced by Roma university graduates are more intense, especially for women. The patriarchal structure of certain Roma groups hinders women's access to higher education and professional activities (Council of Europe, 2016, p.8). The dropout rate for girls is much higher compared to boys in countries like Italy, with girls usually leaving school earlier (EU, 2010, p.108). The pursuit of women's right to access education is a path marked by frequent identity conflicts, where their roles and responsibilities in Roma patriarchal society, such as caring for the home and raising children, do not equate to a position in higher education. Social expectations for women focus on household and childcare, making it difficult for them to access the job market through tertiary education, as they are mainly trained in the spirit of being good wives and mothers (Council of Europe, 2014). The conflict becomes even more pronounced when customs such as early marriages, prevalent in Roma communities, become the sole means of validating a woman's honor and self-image within the community.

According to research, identity conflicts persist for Roma university graduates even after their graduation. Young Roma prefer to conceal their Roma identity at work to avoid discrimination and racism (Council of Europe, 2013, p.50). Roma university graduates often refuse to rekindle their relationships with their community, facing internal and external identity conflicts.

Many Roma who complete university studies do not return to the Roma community, and a significant number choose to live among non-Roma citizens (Brüggemann, 2012). A study by Doubek, D., et al (2015) on Roma university graduates in the Czech Republic regarding their individual and cultural identities states that assimilated Roma graduates do not feel the need to publicly declare their Roma origin. The concealment of Roma identity is common even among Roma who have not entered and graduated from university due to the associated stigma (Bittnerová et al, 2011). According to a study by Patache, L., & Negurita, O (2020) on the Romanian government's policies for the education of Roma, young Roma do not seek access to higher education for reasons related to their socio-economic status, lack of support from the Roma family, conflicts between traditional roles in the Roma community and their new identity acquired through university education.

The hiding of cultural identity has also been observed among Roma women in the job market to avoid stigma and discrimination (Council of Europe, 2022, p.19). The concealment of Roma identity by Roma graduates in Spain due to discrimination and stigmatization in their educational journey is highlighted in studies by Flecha et al (2022), reaching a percentage of around 12% of Roma graduates. Thus, the small percentage of Roma achieving admission and graduation from university in EU member states must navigate a myriad of conflicts between the new identity gained from university and their Roma identity.

Research methodology

The percentage of Roma entering and graduating from higher education in most EU member states is less than 1%, resulting in a perpetuation of a cycle of extreme poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion for the Roma who lack professional training or experience. The purpose of this article is to explore the consequences experienced by university-educated Roma in the reconstruction of their identity and their relationships with their community due to conflicts or ruptures with their original identity. Young Roma graduates often clash with the customs, traditions, and values imposed by their traditional identity, often rejecting their Roma identity or adopting a new one that seeks to reconcile the conflicting values of the two identities mentioned above. Our research question focuses on how Roma graduates reconstruct the new identity acquired from higher education, in

comparison with the traditional identity of the Roma. This study has limitations. The sample of Roma graduates come from different camps of the Greek territory where different customs and traditions from Roma apply. Also, lack of in-depth Knowledge of Romani culture may have influenced our model estimates. However the etiological effects of Roma identity's conflicts were estimated from metanalysis with confirmatory validity analyses.

The design of the research methodology, based on both the conceptual framework and the participant sample, followed the qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research emphasizes to the interpretation of the individual's behavior (Bairagi & Munot, 2019). The research covered the period from June 2023 to September 2023. The qualitative research tool used was interviews, one of the primary tools for collecting qualitative data (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The interview contributes to approaching the experiences and perspectives of Roma university graduates who have experienced identity conflicts, providing individualized insights into their conflicts as experienced individually. Furthermore, the interview serves as a tool for exploring the phenomena and experiences of a subject and less as a tool for collecting structured data (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The interviews were semi-structured with pre-determined open-ended questions, closed-ended questions, scale questions and the sequence of questions often modified during the interview. The researching tool which was used, the interview, was a piloting research tool.

In qualitative research, the appropriate sample size is one that adequately addresses the research question or questions (Marshall, 1996). The sample for qualitative research in this study consisted of 10 Roma graduates from Greek universities, from different regions of Greece, including 2 (two) male Roma and 8 (eight) female Roma graduates from Greek universities. Exclusion criteria included Roma students who had not yet graduated from higher education and Roma graduates from secondary education schools (Public or Private Vocational Training Institutes) as well as colleges. Nine out of ten university-educated Roma had graduated from fields within the Humanities, while only one had graduated from Health Sciences profession. Regarding housing during their school years before entering university, four out of ten Roma graduates lived in houses, while the remaining five resided in Type III settlements (neighborhoods in permanent use, often in degraded areas of urban structure, mainly houses, apartments, or single-family homes in some makeshift constructions, containers).

The analysis of qualitative interview data was conducted in five steps, following Tsoli, G. (2018): a) Interview Transcription, b) Identification and collection of excerpts corresponding to the research questions, c) Coding, d) Themes and e) Presentation of Findings. After transcribing the interviews, excerpts were collected by code, and then the qualitative data from the interviews were coded. The fundamental function of qualitative data analysis is coding, essentially the process that assigns meaning, a specific interpretation to different excerpts of qualitative material (Iosifidis, 2002). The Online Voice Recorder program was used for transcribing the interviews. Coding of data was carried out once the interviews were transcribed. Coding starts with the general image of multiple codes formed from the qualitative data of the interview and exclusively reflects them (Deterding & Waters, 2021). Subsequently, a list of codes was created, where similar codes were merged and minimized into unique categories, grouping and matching them with the research purpose. The final codes constitute the final interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation, and a comparison of the thematic sections arising from qualitative research with the broader literature is considered necessary (Mantzoukas, 2007).

Finally, every research process must consider certain ethical requirements regarding research ethics, ensuring confidentiality and trust of the participants involved. An information/consent form was provided to all participants before the research, informing them about the purpose, process, recording, duration of the interview, research details, and researchers' information, as well as potential benefits and risks associated with their

participation. Additionally, anonymity of the interviewees was maintained, and coding was applied to names and any personal information that could lead to their identification.

Research results

The education of Roma graduates from Greek universities was their initial priority in order to be able to secure a position in the job market and, consequently, a more equal participation in both private and public spheres. According to Roma graduates, access to university was seen as their sole way out of a vicious cycle of extreme poverty that had been perpetuated by previous generations of Roma. Interviewee 3 states, "*Education is the future,*" while Interviewee 10 equates education with light: "*Education means living in the light, it opens clarity, the mind, and gives you new perspectives*." Higher education, as reported by female graduates, served as a ticket to a life that goes beyond the traditional Roma family structure, which primarily involves household chores and child-rearing. The motivation for pursuing university education for Interviewee 1 was the desire to participate in a different life than that of the camp, where exclusive responsibilities are household chores and child-rearing. She mentions, "*Education is a way to participate in the world*." Extreme poverty, stereotypes, the patriarchal structure of Roma families, and Roma customs and traditions were some of the main reasons why women fought to gain admission to and graduate from university. Interviewee 2 states that education was the only way to escape the situation experienced by a Roma child: "*I got engaged at the age of five*". Interviewee 5 expresses: "*I felt a desire to study and contribute to society… I didn't want to stay inside the house all day with our children, waiting for my husband*".

The contribution and action of Roma parents for their children's access to Greek universities were crucial for the entire research sample. The Roma parents of graduates significantly reduced the identity conflicts experienced by the latter. The parents' beliefs in the value of education in their children's lives contributed to strengthening their ambitions to continue their education and pursue access to Greek universities, mainly for reasons such as finding employment and professional restoration. Interviewee 1 states: "*Education for them is a way to be restored professionally*." For some other Roma parents, access to university was their childhood dream that was not fulfilled, and they decided to contribute to the improvement of their children's school attendance. Interviewee 6 mentions: "*My dad didn't even finish elementary school; his dream was for his children not to follow his path*." However, there was also the case of interviewee 8, where her mother did not want her to study because she was a girl, unlike the boys in the family. As interviewee 8 states: "*The boys will go to school, my mother used to say...you won't go to school*." Almost all parents in the sample supported young Roma in their decision to study, as exemplified by interviewee 5, who says: "*I was influenced by my parents to study; they supported me and told me to go on, go on, go on...*" In some cases, parents did not hesitate to argue with other family members and, in some cases, even break ties with the Roma community to support their children's continuing education. Interviewee 1 mentions: "*My grandmother had an issue because she believed that studying would not offer me anything*." Interviewee 2 mentions: "*My grandfathers, my uncles, always mocked my parents for sending us to tutoring, saying it's all for nothing and why do you pay. But this didn't affect them at all*."

The parents of Roma individuals, seem to be a determining factor in the access of young Roma individuals to Greek universities. While the value of education is recognized for the inclusion of their children in the job market and, consequently, in securing a decent standard of living and basic goods, education as an institution diverges from the values and lifestyle of the collective Roma community. Education for the Roma community, though acknowledged, is not encouraged for young Roma individuals, as it is considered to promote a lifestyle that deviates from Roma traditions and values. The Roma community does not hesitate to marginalize those young Roma who choose to pursue higher education. Interviewee 1

mentions: "*other priorities, such as creating a family and supporting the overall family institution, take precedence.*" Interviewee 3 reveals: "*the Roma community had somehow taken away my Roma identity for many years, leading me to further distance from it.*" In the case of Roma women graduates, identity conflicts intensify even more as they are linked to values and honor within the Roma community. Interviewee 6 states: "*pursuing education and avoiding to get married was viewed as immoral by the Roma community, and those who saw me studying were thinking that I am immoral*". The decision to seek a different life from what the norms and values of the Roma community dictate perpetuates conflicts in the consciousness of women, primarily because the price of their freedom encounters their ostracization from the Roma community.

Significant role in reducing Identity conflicts experienced by Roma graduates seems to have been played more by educators and less by the school as an institution. Educators were quite encouraging during the Roma students' school attendance and beyond, often serving as mentors and role models for young Roma to pursue higher education in Greek universities. Interviewee 2 states: "*Most educators encouraged me and spoke with my parents daily.*" In contrast, almost the entire sample of Roma graduates responded that the school increased identity conflicts for them through discrimination by educators, stereotypes from non-Roma students, the inclusion policies applied, and the absence of bilingual education. Interviewee 7 states: "*The school increases conflicts; they spoke more harshly to Roma children; they would quarrel with them more easily.*" Interviewee 10 reports: "*The school tried to reduce conflicts, but it increased them even more... it faced opposition from the parents of non-Roma in the local community.*" The importance of attending preschool education for the subsequent integration of Roma into later school life and the school environment was crucial. The entire sample of Roma graduates attended preschool primary education. The first identity conflicts begin to appear from preschool age, with the main obstacles being the learning of the Greek language and other issues related to dress, hygiene, discipline, and rules imposed by the education system. Interviewee 4 mentions: "*Some children are not familiar with Greek; they speak more Romani in their neighborhoods and camps, so it is not easy for Roma children to communicate.*" Secondary education, with a focus on Gymnasium, is the level of education where graduates often experience identity conflicts, as most of them leave school at this level, especially girls who are expected to marry at a young age according to Roma traditions. Secondary education gathers a small number of students, and the small percentage of Roma continuing their education at this level faces identity conflicts mainly related to the traditional roles that young Roma are expected to take on in their community through early marriages. These conflicts are often intensified by fellow Roma who decide to drop out of school and marry early. Interviewee 4 reports: "*In Gymnasium, I experienced conflicts due to racism from non-Roma children but also from Roma children.*" For some Roma graduates, identity conflicts continued until Lyceum, where the percentage of Roma continuing, was very small. Interviewee 3 mentions: "*I consider the biggest conflicts to be in high school and later at the university, where I would say I completely lost my contacts. Sometimes, they would stop me and say, 'You behave like a Gadjo (non-Roma).*" Identity conflicts are also intensified by Roma peers when someone from their community chooses a different path that leads away from the community.

The ranking of the Higher Education Institution (AE) was the stage with the most significant identity conflicts for Roma graduates from Greek universities, both during their attendance and after graduation. The integration of Roma into the Greek university system triggers conflicts in the new identity of the Roma, which begins to take shape through a new way of life, thinking, and action. Adopting a new set of values poses the greatest challenge for Roma graduates, especially for women. Interviewee 1 states, "*I grew up in a specific community with specific values, values that may not be as understandable, and there may have been a conflict at some point... let's say, about whether I will keep the values I grew up with or if all of it will*

change. I tried to combine things and find myself between the values expressing me, either as a member of the Roma community or as a member of a broader society". The majority of the sample accepts the identity change that occurred with their admission and graduation from the university without mourning the alteration of their Roma identity. Interviewee 8 states, "*No, I did not experience any mourning for the loss of my Roma identity... some things need to change within the Roma Community.*" However, Interviewee 3 mentions: "*the truth is that I experienced pain rather than mourning during certain times due to racism, victimization tendencies, and having to fulfill the duties of representation…yet I understand that any identity in need of empowerment would evoke similar feelings*". A significant portion of the graduates' mentions that the financial difficulties they faced during their studies (housing, living expenses, clothing) hindered them in claiming a new identity. Interviewee 3 explains: "*Identity conflict during my studies... the financial part... I had to fit into a framework where I had to study. So my parents should continue supporting me.*" Other challenges arise from the lack of financial ability of Roma families to cover their children's university expenses, forcing the graduates to take on the cost of their education through activities that may jeopardize their physical integrity. Interviewee 5 highlights: "*The biggest challenge for Roma children at the university is not to be swayed by someone to change their principles... it's very easy to lead them astray, but they are forced to take the easy money... because they don't have a financial background*."

For some Roma individuals, identity conflicts lead to rupture, sometimes temporary and sometimes permanent. The university, as one of the stages with the greatest identity conflicts for graduates, has been a space where at least five Roma individuals from the sample did not disclose their Roma identity due to the prevailing racist perceptions among Roma themselves. Interviewee 4 states: "*I didn't say it, to tell you the truth, I didn't say it at the University... even now, I think some of my classmates don't know*." Many Roma graduates from Greek universities hide their Roma identity. The concealment of Roma identity exists for several Roma individuals who have completed university. Almost the entire sample admitted that during their time at university, they concealed their Roma identity for reasons related to racism and stereotypes. Interviewee 6 states: "*Basically, I did it at the university... I hid that I am Roma, and I can say even before... I wouldn't say that I am a Gypsy*". Identity conflicts were even more intense for Roma individuals who at some point hid their identity during their studies and never revealed it. Interviewee 2 states: "*I never said... I never raised my hand, let's say, to tell you guys who accuse Roma children and say that they don't go to school for this reason and for that reason... know that I started from there and I am here, and I am proud... I never said it! Later, I realized that I was wrong, and the older I get, the more I enjoy saying it.*"

The concealment of Roma identity by Roma graduates is often encouraged by the broader Roma family, as they believe that acknowledging it would be a hindrance to the social integration of graduates into the job market. Interviewee 8 states: "*In order to understand, my aunt constantly tells me, when they ask you, you will say no.*" The main challenge faced by Roma graduates, according to qualitative data analysis from interviews, is their integration into the job market, due to reasons related to racism, stereotypes in the local or wider society, unemployment, and low wages. Interviewee 4 mentions: "*Those who look like Roma are not hired in jobs; those who don't look like them are hired*." Almost the entire sample of Roma graduates is employed, with seven working in a field related to their studies and three continuing their studies at the postgraduate level. Six out of ten Roma university graduates have degrees in Humanities and Social Studies, while one has graduated in a Health Sciences profession. Six out of ten Roma university graduates stated that their choice of study subject is connected to how they, as researchers and scientists, would like to revitalize their relationship with the Roma community and contribute to the education of Roma through their studies. Interviewee 5 states: "*Of course, I thought about it. I thought and tried, as there is a framework for refugees, there should be a framework for us Roma, so that we can work in*

schools for Roma children. I speak to them in our language, and I consider it a huge motivation for the children. But I am in one school; I cannot be in all schools in Greece simultaneously." The education of Roma at the university, in terms of acquiring knowledge, skills, and abilities for their integration into the job market, met their expectations. Interviewee 10 says: "*It responded very well because it changed the communication channel and path. I think about things very differently. I don't think about them only from one side.*" However, some Roma graduates' express disappointment with low wages and their inability to secure a decent standard of living. Interviewee 9 says: "*It responded because I understood that I am not inferior to anyone and I can do everything. But It did not respond to the part of professional settlement...*" The decision of Roma to pursue education and graduate from a university in several Roma communities is equivalent to the decision of young Roma to reject their Roma identity and adopt a norm and lifestyle that opposes traditional Roma identity and the values of the Roma community. Although the educational path of Roma graduates towards the university and graduation is admired and considered an achievement, they believe that young Roma graduates lose the values promoted by the Roma identity. An example is the exclusive use of the Greek language by the Roma community among all the graduates in the sample. Interviewee 2 mentions: "*Many times I went back to my community, and for them, I was a stranger. They will speak to me in Greek and not Romani.*" Almost all female graduates in the sample admit to observing only some Roma customs, such as formal marriages and some customs related to dance and music, excluding the custom of early marriage. Interviewee 2 states: "*I observe the customs that all Roma families have: the foods we make at Easter, 1ˢᵗ of May... My father would cut wheat from the field every 1ˢᵗ of May and give it to us to put in our beds to grow like wheat.*" In contrast, interviewee 8 says: "*No, I don't observe anything... but something I will do is when I get married, because my parents want it. It is the formal marriage.*" The biggest challenge that the new students entering university face is accepting their Roma identity as a more biological identity than a social one that can define them as individuals within a broader society. Interviewee 8 states: "*I am in a rupture with the traditional identity of the Roma. However, I will not deny something that I am. When someone asks me, I never say no. You must not deny yourself to say this, and I know people who do that. For me, the break is final. However, I will not hide that I am Roma... obviously, I will say that I am Roma."* Interviewee 2 adds: "*I would say to young Roma to become a role model for younger children. Like me, I consider it my duty to pass it on and become a role model for younger children. Many children graduate from university and will never say that they are Roma... so all these role models that I say we don't have... are lost.*" In these cases, the conflict takes the form of a definitive rupture."

Conclusions - Discussion

Education is the means to overcome extreme poverty and create opportunities for more equitable participation in work and, consequently, social inclusion for Vulnerable Social Groups. The number of Roma graduates from Higher Education in EU member states is very small and statistically invisible (FRA, 2021, p. 8). Roma remain among the lowest academic achievers in most European countries, including Greece (Doctors of the World, 2020). While education, especially higher education, is positively regarded by the Roma community, it is not their initial priority in life. The values, norms, lifestyle, thinking, and actions of university graduates create a disconnection with their Roma identity, promoting a set of values inconsistent with those of the Roma community. Continuing school attendance, especially for Roma girls, raises issues of honor and morality for women, their Roma families, and the value of women in the core of their collectivist society. Roma individuals seeking to assert a new identity through obtaining a university degree face numerous conflicts at all levels of education, from preschool to their graduation from Higher Education. Conflicts, although reduced in many cases by Roma parents supporting their children's ambitions for a place in

the workforce, are often intensified by schools and, particularly, the Roma community. Sometimes conflicts lead to a rupture, either temporary, aligning with the new hybrid identity of Roma graduates, or permanent. In the latter case, Roma individuals refuse to publicly renounce their Roma identity and fully integrate into the social fabric of the dominant society. This marks the beginning of a cycle of frustrations, loss of traditional identity, and the pursuit of new ones, promoting different value codes and behavior models from those of the Roma community. Harmonizing the traditional identity of graduates with the new identity acquired in Higher Education poses a challenge in terms of how the traditional roles of the Roma community can coexist with the graduates' new lifestyle and thinking. While some young Roma express a desire to maintain certain customs and traditions of the Roma community, even after graduating, such as creating large families, they face difficulty in mitigating ongoing identity conflicts. Almost the entire sample of graduates maintains relationships with their families; however, the same does not apply for maintaining relationships between the Roma parents of graduates and the wider Roma community.

The Roma community considers Roma graduates as outsiders. Conflicts intensify even more for graduates seeking reintegration into the Roma community through the new identity acquired from university. They seek ways to actively be a part of both societies without sacrificing their cultural identity. Almost the entire sample of graduates navigates between the two identities – the Roma identity and the new identity acquired after graduation. They claim it is an endless conflict, as their synthesis often requires the elimination of one identity over the other. Traditional identities, rooted in experiences, situations, ethics, and customs dictated by biological culture, are incompatible with new elements that undermine the authenticity of the new identity, as defined by Taylor (Taylor, 2007). According to Taylor, the search for authenticity is primarily in the subject's ability to choose because they have the capability to choose, not so much in the content of the choice (Kotanidis, 2013). Roma graduates question, explore, and challenge the ways of shaping a traditional identity in the collectivist Roma community, which removes their ability to choose. They are not seeking fragmented identities, isolated and individual, but entirely new identities where social connection is an indispensable need to showcase the subject as both an individual and not just a temporary reflection of an idol that merely demands its continuity over time as an idea or norm.

Young Roma graduates aspire to serve as role models and mentors for Roma children, demonstrating that pursuing a new identity through education can secure a future beyond the confines of a camp… The pursuit of a new, hybrid identity, combining aspects of Roma identity with those acquired through education, is sought in rare cases, seeking a common point of reference or identification. For Roma girls, the conflict often leads to temporary or permanent ruptures, as the new value codes may not always align with traditional Roma identity codes but they negotiate, ruthlessly, with the attitudes and practices that each individual chooses to adopt for their personal identity against their collective identity. Roma graduates do not compromise, having experienced a new environment of action and reporting, where individual and collective meet as companions rather than with the individual as the guide. At this point, a percentage of Roma university graduates choose to be part of the dominant group on terms of assimilation rather than integration, further intensifying their internal conflicts and experiencing a different mourning than Roma graduates, who embrace their Roma identity. The rupture of identity here is not subject to negotiation, as the embodiment of one identity requires the abolition or loss of the new identity…Thus, traditional identity is fragmented, losing all those elements that defined it over time. Conflicts for Roma graduates persist even after graduation, placing dilemmas at the center of their experiences.

Perhaps future research will highlight ways of coexistence between traditional and modern societies in the contemporary, evolving multicultural and global context in ways in which the

authenticity of traditional identity does not presuppose its abolition, but ensures its evolution in practice, demonstrating that the continuity of both identities over time may be feasible. The results of this research should be further discussed and explore the ways in which traditional and modern identities may or may not be reconciled in today's changing global societies or whether choosing one constitutes a rejection of the other.

In Giannis D., Antonopoulos (ed.) "The Clash of Civilizations" (1998), S. P. Huntington categorizes conflicts between cultures as the most significant clashes of identity that the modern migratory subject must manage within the multicultural core of modern societies... The conflicts of Roma graduates may perhaps be classified among the ethical dilemmas that such type of clashes bring about, as they seek through them to assert their own internal authenticity in space and time…

References

Adamopoulou, H. (2021). *Roma access to higher education according to the official texts of the Council of Europe.* Academia, (23-24), 150-174.

Alshenqeeti, H. (2014). *Interviewing as a data collection method: A critical review. English linguistics research*, 3(1), 39-45.

Bairagi, V., & Munot, M. V. (Eds.). (2019). *Research methodology: A practical and scientific approach*. CRC Press.

Bittnerová, D., Doubek, D., & Levínská, M. (2011). *Stigma in school*. Journal of Pedagogy, 2(1), 11-28.

Brüggemann, C. (2012). Roma Education in Comparative Perspective. Analysis of the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011. Roma Inclusion Working Papers. Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme. https://www.undp.org/eurasia/publications/roma-education-comparative-perspective.

Council of Europe (2016). Roma Youth Academy. Supporting the emergence of a new generation of Roma youth leaders and for strengthening Roma youth participation and the sustainability of Roma youth organizations. DDCP-YD (2016) 172. Council of Europe Publications. https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806b95f6.

Council of Europe (2021). Antigypsyism: Causes, prevalence, consequences, possible responses Committee of experts on Roma and Traveller issues (ADI-ROM) Council of Europe Report prepared by Iulius Rostas in November 2021. https://edoc.coe.int/en/roma-and-travellers/11121-antigypsyism-causes-prevalence-consequences-possibleresponses.html.

Council of Europe (2022). 8th International Roma women's conference Protecting the human rights and dignity of Roma and Traveller women in times of crises. Council of Europe Publications. https://edoc.coe.int/en/roma-and-travellers/11305-8th-international-roma-womens-conference.html.

Council of Europe. (1997). Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities and Explanatory Report. https://rm.coe.int/16800c10cf.

Council of Europe. (2003). Education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe Training Modules for Teachers in the History, Culture and Language of the Roma. Council of Europe Publications. https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/publications_en.asp.

Council of Europe. (2013). The innovatory practices in the field of the education of Roma Children. Council of Europe Publications. https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/GoodPractice_EN.PDF.

Council of Europe. (2014). DOSTA! Enough! Go beyond prejudice, meet the Roma! Council of Europe Publications. https://rm.coe.int/16806fd1cd.

Deterding, N. M., & Waters, M. C. (2021*). Flexible coding of in-depth interviews: A twenty-first-century approach.* Sociological metho21ds & research, 50(2), 708-739.

Doctors of the World (2020). Empowerment of Roma Community. Inception Report, July, 2020. Doctors of the World, Greek Delegation 2020. https://www.mdmgreece.gr/en/publication/empowering-the-roma-community/.

Doubek, D., Levínská, M., & Bittnerová, D. (2015). *Roma as the Others.* Intercultural Education, 26(2), 131-152.

European Union (2011). Roma: A European Minority. The challenge of diversity. European Union. Group of the Progressive.

Flecha, A., Abad-Merino, S., Macías-Aranda, F., & Segovia-Aguilar, B. (2022). *Roma University Students in Spain: Who Are They.* Education sciences, 12(6), 400.

FRA- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014). Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma women in nine EU Member States. Publications Office of the European Union. https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/discrimination-against-and-living-conditions-roma-women-11-eu-member-states.

FRA—European Union Agency and Fundamental Rights. (2023). Roma in 10 European Countries. Results. Roma Survey 2021 – Main results. Publications Office of the European Union. https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2022/roma-survey-findings.

FRA—European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2021). Roma and Travellers in Six Countries. Publications Office of the European Union. https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2021/roma-and-travellers-six-countries-technical-report.

FRA—European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2011). Poverty and employment: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States Roma survey – Data in focus. Publications Office of the European Union. https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/poverty-and-employment-situation-roma-11-eu-member-states.

FRA—European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2012). The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States Survey results at a glance. Publications Office of the European Union. https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2012/situation-roma-11-eu-member-states-survey-results-glance.

FRA—European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2022). Roma in 10 European countries. Publications Office of the European Union. https://doi.org/10.2811/930443.

Huntington., S.P (1998). The clash of civilizations and the reshaping of the world order. In Giannis D., Antonopoulos (ed.). Athens: Patakis.

Iosifidis, Th. (2002). *The use of computers in the analysis of qualitative social research data.* The Step of Social Sciences, 7 (33).

Kotanidis, N. L. (2013). The concept of authenticity in Charles Taylor (Doctoral dissertation). Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. https://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/133963?ln=el.

Kyuchukov, H. (2000). *Transformative education for Roma (Gypsy) children: An insider's view. Inter Cultural education*, *11*(3), 273-280*.

Mantzoukas, S. (2007). *Qualitative research in six easy steps. Epistemology, methods and presentation,* Nursery Review, 46(1), 236-246.

Marshall, M. N. (1996). *Sampling for qualitative research. Family practice,* 13(6), 522-526.

O'Higgins, N., & Ivanov, A. (2006). *Education and employment opportunities for the Roma*. Comparative Economic Studies, 48, 6-19.

Open Education Fund & UNICEF (2015). The rights of Roma Children and Woman. https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/rights-roma-children-and-women.

Parthenis, C., & Fragoulis, G. (2016). "*Otherness" as Threat: Social and educational exclusion of Roma people in Greece*. International Journal of Multicultural Education, 18(2), 39-57.

Patache, L., & Negurita, O. (2020). *An overview on Romanian strategies regarding Roma minority concerning education and employment*. Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People, 9(2), 60-70.

Qu, S. Q., & Dumay, J. (2011). *The qualitative research interview.* Qualitative research in accounting & management, 8(3), 238-264.

Rutigliano, A. (2020). Inclusion of Roma students in Europe: A literature review and examples of policy initiatives. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 228, OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/8ce7d6eb-en.

Sime, D., Fassetta, G., & McClung, M. (2018). '*It's good enough that our children are accepted': Roma mothers' views of children's education post migration*. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 39(3), 316-332.

Skourtou, E., Kourtis-Kazoullis, V., Aravossitas, T., & Trifonas, P. P. (2020). Language Diversity in Greece. Springer International Publishing.

Taylor, C. (2007). A secular age. Harvard university press. Cambridge MA.

Tsiolis, G. (2018). Thematic analysis of qualitative data. In G. Zaimakis (ed.). Research Pathways in the Social Sciences. Theoretical Methodological Tips and Case Studies. University of Crete. Laboratory of Social Analysis and Applied Social Research.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2012). Roma Early Childhood Inclusion: Overview Report. Open Society Foundations, Roma Education Fund & UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/eca/what-we-do/ending-child-poverty/roma-children.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2015). Rapid Review on Inclusion and Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. https://unsdg.un.org/resources/building-more-inclusive-sustainable-and-prosperous-societies-europe-and-central-asia.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2022). Education Pathways in Roma Settlements: Understanding Inequality in Education and Learning. https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/19456/file.

Zachos, D. T., & Panagiotidou, A. (2019). *Roma parents' perceptions on éducation.* Journal of Advances in Education Research, 4(1), 13-23