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‘The voice of the Roma’? National identity, ethnic building and regional politics within Roma-led publications in interwar Romania

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Introduction

Over the past three decades, with the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the rise in scholarship on matters of Roma identities, Roma classification and Roma mobilisation has led to an increase of both theoretical and empirical developments in studies of Roma/Gypsy communities, as well as a means of highlighting the importance of acknowledging Roma’s active participation within matters of (Roma and non-Roma) politics. More importantly, however, it has led to specific approaches to scholarship among Roma, by Roma and about Roma, which emphasise this population’s undeniable embeddedness within the societies they live as well as their active role in the construction of particular national histories. In that sense, the themes of Roma classification (or identification), in particular, become tied and entangled into the ways in which matters of identity become a matter of concern for nation-states, international governmental and non-governmental organisations, and Roma national and international activists themselves. Finally, the aim has become not only to open up the floor for full participation of Roma actors and voices to wider debates that pertain to Roma issues but, just as importantly, to acknowledge Roma’s own contribution to the construction of national and European cultural heritages. The focus on post-socialist Roma activism and Roma mobilization, therefore, has come centre stage as a means of understanding the possibilities of addressing centuries of marginality.

Yet, apart from historical discussions within national circles, much less has been said or emphasised about the earlier forms of Roma emancipation and the ways in which we can understand present day experiences of mobilisation, activism and the construction of ethnic categories by connecting them to its much earlier forms. To this end, this paper aims to emphasise the manifestations, entanglements and complexity of Roma civic emancipation in the inter-war period, by a comparative content analysis of key Roma publications in Romania. While bringing into discussion all six Roma newspapers published during this time period in Romania, a specific focus will be placed on *Glăsuț Romilor* (translated as ‘The voice of the Roma’ and published in Bucharest) and *Neamul Țigănesc* (tentatively translated as ‘The Gypsy People’ and published in Făgăraș). At times, as even their titles suggest, these associations had contrasting (and even opposing) views concerning both the means of Roma emancipation and the main issues that could lead to the promotion of Roma rights across the country. The birth of a Roma national consciousness was also grounded in the efforts of specific Roma intellectual elite, who led these organisations, and who aimed to bring together the diverse and numerous Roma communities in the country under common guiding principles. These efforts were often made manifest in the

publication of Roma-led and Roma-focused newsletters, with the aim to awaken the sense of ethnic consciousness among Roma across the country.

In the current day climate, primarily within the context of a rise in both anti-Gypsy manifestations across Europe and the rise of a politically-engaged Roma middle-class, knowing and engaging with previous forms of emancipatory movements is crucial in understanding fully the ways in which identity politics are shaped, by Roma and for Roma. It is within this broader context that this paper will explore the specific narratives of social emancipation among Roma in Romania during the inter-war period, alongside the projects of fostering a nation-wide social and political Roma mobilisation in the country, as found within two leading Roma newsletters of the era: *Glasul Romilor* ('The voice of the Roma') and *Neamul Țigănesc* ('The Gypsy People'). As the paper will show, the two publications represent not only two different socio-economic and geographical areas of Roma civic mobilisation in Romania (Bucharest, the capital city, and Ardeal/Transylvania, a region in the Western part of the country), but, most importantly, reveal the multi-faceted experiences of Roma social and political mobilisation between the two world wars.

The aim of this approach, and its comparative focus, is to offer an exploratory and analytical picture of the ways in which interwar Roma intellectuals engaged with both national and regional politics, and the ways in which emerging ideas of Roma rights and Roma emancipation were being promoted. A focus on the articles, themes and directions taken within these key Roma publications of the time can, therefore, reveal the ways in which ethnic mobilisation is not a unitary action but one that is inevitably complicated by diverse historical, social and economic contexts: including, but not limited to, the personality of their editors and the distinctive relationships they have had with the state, with the Church, with other Roma leaders and with local authorities.

Roma organisations during the interwar period in Romania: between Romanian and Roma “nationalism”?

Broadly put, the interwar period in Romania was the time when the seeds of Roma political and civic mobilisation were first made manifest. In contrast to popular perceptions that Roma political organisation was the outcome of post-socialist transitions, in reality, the former has been a particular characteristic of Eastern European societies, as early as the 1930s (see, for instance, Achim, 1998; Klimova-Alexander, 2005; Marushiakova & Popov, 2017a, 2017b; Matei, 2010b). Looking specifically at Romania, several key Roma organisations were formed during this time, and they constituted the seeds of a movement that took upheaval during the interwar years.

Among these, 'Asociația Generală a Țiganilor din România' (The General Association of Gypsies in Romania, or AGAT) and 'Asociația Uniunea Generală a Romilor din România' (The General Union of Roma in Romania) were perhaps the two key figures, and contributed to the development of several Roma publications, more or less influential in the process of mobilising individuals under the aegis of an ethnic banner: *Timpul, O Rom* (both published in Craiova), *Foaia Poporului Romesc* (published in Rupea), *Neamul Țigănesc* (published in Făgăraș), *Glasul Romilor* (published in Bucharest), *Țara Noastră*- special edition for the Roma in Romania (published in Bucharest).

AGAT, perhaps the most influential at its inception, was formed in April 1933 at the efforts of then archimandrite Calinic I. Popp Serboianu, together with G.A. Lăzureanu Lăzurică, as general secretary (Matei, 2010a, p. 161). The purpose and scope of the organization were printed in the organization's manifesto, first distributed in 1933, and said to be both 'cultural', moral and social, tackling distinct elements of social life. As such, the emancipatory movement that began aimed to engage both with social and economic issues facing 'Gypsy' communities. In fact, the archimandrite C.I. Popp Serboianu was also to become a key figure in the movement, as well as publishing a central publication concerning 'gypsies' at the time, titled *Les Tsiganes*.

Yet, soon after this organisation was set up, a new one emerged, led by Lăzureanu Lăzurică (the former head secretary of AGAT) who, in September 1933, split from Popp Serboianu. The reasons for the split were uncertain, and often attributed to personal animosities though, among other things, Lăzurică accused Serboianu of moving away from the Orthodox faith and trying to convert Roma to Greek-Catholicism (Matei, 2010a).

The new union was to be called the General Union of Roma in Romania, but Lăzurică was soon also to be overthrown from its leadership, in 1934, by flower salesman Gheorghe Niculescu. The latter would become the new leader of the organization, re-named as the Association of the General Union of Roma in Romania. This 'newly' formed organisation would, in fact, follow by with the same incentives set out by Lăzurică and maintain almost all aims/goals as presented within AGAT's manifesto. It would, however, unlike the first one, obtain juridical statute, and would gradually attract to it many other organisations set up outside of the capital city.

Similar to the dynamics occurring within the capital city, smaller organisations began to appear in other regions of the country. For example, an Oltenia circle of AGAT was formed in 1934. Likewise, the Neo-rustic Brotherhood, under Naftanalilă Lazăr (stated to be recognised as a legal entity in 1926) became affiliated with the General Union of the Roma in Romania, at the time led by Lăzureanu Lăzurică

As one can see even from this brief outline, the picture of the mobilisation, emancipatory movement and the shaping of Roma organisations during the inter-war period was far from straight forward and has been potentially complicated by several distinctive factors. Among these, worth mentioning are: the issue of legitimacy among its leaders and the struggle for leadership of the organisations, the distinction between the centre and the periphery (primarily Bucharest, Ardeal and Oltenia), the best means of mobilising Roma individuals and attract them to join different organisations and the desire and need to collaborate with state institutions and church authorities. The remainder of this paper will tackle only some of these issues as reflected primarily in two selected publications (*Glasul Romilor*, Bucharest and *Neamul Țigănesc*, Făgăraș), though the interlinking between these themes is present in all Roma periodicals of the time and among all Roma organisations. As such, what follows is an exercise in highlighting the complicated nature of emancipatory movements, especially within the volatile political climate at the time, and the means by which claims to legitimacy were being laid out by different Roma intellectuals and elite, as reflected within the newspapers that they led.

- *The centre and the periphery: using the example of the newsletters Glasul Romilor and Neamul Țigănesc*

The distinctive experiences and manifestation of emancipatory actions among and by Roma leaders and organisations during the interwar period in Romania was particularly reflected in the geographical/regional differences of some of them and, in particular, in the distinction between the centre (or the capital) and the provinces. Broadly put, many Roma were unhappy at times about the ways in which the interests and needs of Roma outside of the capital city area were being approached by central organisations. In particular, the situation of Roma in Ardeal often came to the centre as both a social and political issue and leaders in the capital sometimes collaborated with local authorities in order to register Roma in their organisations. Though there is no space to go in depth into it here, the situation of Hungarianised Roma was particularly of interest both to Roma leaders and Roma organisations, and a means by which the latter two proved their loyalty to the Romanian nation: namely, in stating their engagement in a process of Romaniasation of Hungarianised Roma and, thus, the important help that Roma associations might offer to national authorities in their attempt at Romanianising Roma communities.

These distinctions were made especially visible in the articles of the two main Roma newspapers under analysis: *Glasul Romilor* and *Neamul Țigănesc*.

The Association of the General Union of Roma in Romania mentioned above, led by Gheorghe Niculescu, began publishing the journal '*Glasul Romilor*'/'The Voice of the Roma' (between 1934 and 1940), in Bucharest, on the 15th of November 1934. This newspaper became perhaps the most well-known Roma newspaper of the interwar period. In fact, *Glasul Romilor*, founded by Gh Niculescu, was one of the longest lasting Roma publications of the interwar years (though *Timpul*, published in Craiova, had more overall published issues). It had 15 issues, published from 1934-1940 (another issue would be published in 1941) and, similarly to AGAT's initial manifesto, stated the Union's main aims as being the emancipation and re-awakening of all Roma in Romania, on a social, cultural, moral, economic and spiritual ground.

Among other things, in its manifesto/programme it presented this call by stating the intention to lay 'the foundations for tomorrow' and by arguing that Roma too deserve to be heard by the leaders of the country, as Roma too are faithful citizens of Greater Romania. Some of the prospects of the Union, as reflected in the newspaper, were to set up kindergartens for Roma children, encourage education, engage in a programme of settlement of 'vagabonds and beggars', namely the so-called "colonization of nomadic Gypsies" (referring, in fact, to the sedentarization of nomadic groups), create Roma consumption cooperatives, food canteens, set up funds for Roma in need, focus on the establishment of Roma libraries, etc. In other words, the organisation was stated to focus on all aspects of social life (economic, social, educational, etc.) in order to improve the fate of Roma people, and so that Roma too could stand as equal citizens of the country.

Many of the newspaper's content, alongside the elements pushing for the emancipation and mobilisation of Roma in the country, feature snippets of the struggle for legitimacy between Niculescu and Popp Serboianu/Lăzureanu-Lăzurică in terms of Roma leadership. Numerous articles are thus devoted to criticizing one or the other and proving the rightful and legitimate place of the Union as the only viable one to unite all Roma in Romania. A similar trend can be seen in the regional newspapers, where *Neamul Țigănesc* is used as a platform to highlight the qualities

of its director, Naftanailă Lazăr, while *O Rom* and *Timpul* emphasise those of Marian I Simion and N. Ionescu, etc.

Interestingly, a key focus within Glasul Romilor has also been the loyalty and devotion expressed towards the Orthodox church. In fact, as will be developed in a separate section of this paper, the role of the Orthodox church was key in supporting one leader or another (or one organisation or another). In this way, it also contributed to the potential success or failure of these associations (see Matei, 2010a). For instance, in many of its activities, the Association of the General Union of Roma in Romania was aided in its efforts by key figures of the Orthodox church, including the Patriarch Miron Cristea, and was often still in close cooperation with capital city authorities.

Looking, on the other hand, at *Neamul Țigănesc*, this was a self-titled “Gypsy newsletter” published in Făgăraș, and led by Naftanailă Lazăr, the president of the Neo-rustic brotherhood. The “Neo-rustic Brotherhood”, while smaller than the Association of the General Union of Roma in Romania (led by Niculescu), was, according to Lazăr himself, the first organisation to be set up in Romania, in 1926 in Făgăraș. Its influence, however, appears to have remained somewhat limited to the area of Ardeal, and reached little outside these regional influences (Matei, 2012). Nevertheless, the newspaper published by its founding leader reveals both contrasts and similarities with the approach of the centre, as well as a need for gaining legitimacy by organisations outside of the capital city.

Neamul țigănesc was published in only three issues (February 1934, September 1934 and April 1935). As will be discussed in more depth below, and compared to some of the other Roma newsletters at the time, it maintained the label of ‘țigan’ in its very title and dedicated two articles to clarify the use of this label. In fact, this is perhaps one of the most striking of distinctions, and one upon which Lazar remarks on several occasions.

Neamul Țigănesc also seems to have had a fluctuating and ambiguous relationship with both organizations in Bucharest, the Association of the General Union of Roma in Romania (led by Niculescu) and the General Association of Roma in Romania (led by Popp Serboianu and, later joined once more by G. Lăzureanu Lăzurică). In fact, in the second issue, on a front page article, the newspaper takes issue with this struggle for leadership among capital Roma elite. He also emphasises the fact that Lăzurică is ‘found not to be Roma’. Furthermore, this article highlights that the fight between the two leaders (Niculescu and Lăzurică) is ‘not one of principles but of petty interests, namely *who is to be the Voevod of Roma?*’, and emphasises the need to recognise the authority and leadership of those outside the capital city of Bucharest. Finally, using time in the field of activism as an honorific element, Naftanailă Lazar emphasises, yet again, that the Neo-Rustic Brotherhood was the first recognised Roma organisation, as early as the 1926 and, therefore, one which ‘bows to nobody’.

In the very same issue of the newspaper, however, on page 3, *Neamul Țigănesc* presents the minutes of a meeting of the Association General Union of Roma in Romania (from March 1934), in which the Neorustic Brotherhood is recognised as being affiliated to the former and Naftanailă Lazăr granted the recognised title of Voevod of Roma in Ardeal. Again, these interplays between affiliations to the centre and the relationship of Roma organisations from outside the capital city to the central organisations in Bucharest reiterates the complex and complicated nature of

cooperation between centre and periphery and between different individuals aiming to gain momentum and legitimacy as leaders of Roma in Romania (regionally or centrally). There thus seemed to have been a continuous tension between the organisations in the capital city and those outside it, and this was quite often reflected in the newspapers connected to various organisations. One can also see in this case an interplay of desires to collaborate with the centre and the desire for autonomy in terms of leadership of Roma in Ardeal (visible primarily in the case of Naftanailă Lazăr). In fact, most regional newspapers in the interwar period affiliated themselves, at one point or another, with one of the two leaders, though it seems that, in the end, Niculescu may have gained the greater overall support.

- ***On labels and labelling***

Much like the process of mobilisation itself, the debates on the usage of the terms Roma vs. țigan/Gypsy, are not post-socialist manifestations. In reality, many of the present-day arguments (for one side or the other) can be found as early as the interwar period. As such, it was in the 1930s that the first glimpses of the ways in which labels carry with them derogatory or uplifting connotations can be seen. In other words, the use of ‘țigan’ or ‘Roma’ became a topic of debate among Roma leaders during the interwar period, and the debate itself became one of diverging interests. These dynamics are most clearly reflected in the publications of the time. Taking *Neamul Țigănesc* and *Glasul Romilor* as a comparative framework of engaging with the issue of labelling, one can see, from their very titles, contrasting viewpoints on the nature of and extent to which label categories may foster or impinge upon mobilisation processes.

Firstly, *Neamul Țigănesc*, tentatively translated as the ‘Gypsy People’, evidently points to the adoption of the name ‘țigan’ as a potentially mobilising and emancipatory term (or, better said, does not see the use of ‘țigan’ as negatively impacting upon the process of emancipation). Yet, though it would be easily seen as pleading for the use of ‘țigan’ over Roma (by looking at the title alone), in reality *Neamul țigănesc* uses both terms, Roma and țigan, often interchangeably within its pages. Thus, at times articles refer to communities as ‘Roma’, and others as ‘țigani’, without a clear distinction made between them in terms of the positive or negative connotations (unlike in other publications in which the term ‘țigan’ is seen equivalent with with the concepts of dirty or uneducated, and not solely as referring to a particular ethnic group).

Nevertheless, in one of its issues, the newspaper also states that, unlike other Roma leaders, Naftanailă Lazăr is not ‘ashamed’ of the word țigan, and does not see in it a potential threat to the social mobilisation of țigani/‘gypsies’ in Romania. Below is a reproduction of one of the articles written along this line, which reflects upon both terms and suggest a potential benefit of using them interchangeably. Furthermore, it sees a threat of no longer being ‘recognised by outsiders’ in the complete abandonment of the word ‘țigan’ for that of ‘Roma’:

We are proud of the word Țigan/Gypsy, which we place at the head of our newspaper. The other leaders are now ashamed of being Gypsies and are looking to call themselves Roma. Under this name, that of Gypsies, we are known all over Europe and that is how we want to be known.

We accept the word Rom, as we are called in the Gypsy language "tu sam rom", but we do not deny the word Gypsy either. "Tu sam rom" means "are you a Gypsy?" And "Sar te nam rom", it is true that I am a Gypsy!

The argument is again re-stated in the last issue of the newspaper. Not only does this article emphasise the tension between leaders but also, as such, emphasises the potential, argued by Lazar, to maintain both the use of 'țigan' and the use of 'Roma', unproblematically.

Glasul Romilor on the other hand, clearly adopts 'Roma' as the preferred term and uses it throughout its publications. The term 'țigan' is only used when reproducing literary extracts (such as segments from George Potra's 'Țigani'), in connection to nomadic 'țigani'/Gypsies or when referring to what are seen as 'negative' traits of leaders of other Roma organisations. In fact, this attitude is reflected in the newsletter's very first issue, in November 1934 (with a manifesto article called 'Frati Romi!'/ 'Roma brothers!'). Furthermore, in an article published in June 1938, titled 'What we ask for' (Ce solicităm), the issue of terminology is made quite explicit in the demands laid out to public officials. I quote one segment of the article below where, among the other demands presented, the issue of labelling is clearly demarcated:

'[...] c) in all official documents and teaching books, it should no longer be written 'țigan', a name which does not belong to us and has a denigrating and mocking meaning, but 'Roma' - the true name-, coming from the Sanskrit language which we also speak'.

A gradual shift in the use of Roma instead of 'țigan' throughout the 1930s is also noticeable in most of the other Roma publications of the interwar period. For example, in the newspaper *Timpul*, published in Craiova by Aurel Th Manolescu-Dolj, the subtitle of the newspaper gradually changes from, originally, 'Independent Weekly Newspaper' to 'The Newspaper of Gypsies in Romania' (starting from Issue no 24-25, 21 January 1934), to 'The official paper of Roma in Romania' (starting from issue no 41, 29 July, 1934). One can thus observe a trajectory from the use of 'țigan', to the concomitant use of both terms, and to 'Roma' being adopted as the preferable term within most Roma periodicals of the interwar period.

The most overarching argument for this transition can be seen in an article authored by Lăzureanu Lăzurică in the newspaper *Timpul* (issue no 66, 17 August 1937). According to the Roma leader, the word 'țigan' does not belong to Roma and is a pejorative name given to them by 'Europeans', meaning 'unclean' or 'dirty'. Roma, on the other hand, is said to mean 'superior man'. The article continues with a statement that Roma know how to choose their own name and compares this situation to Romanians' preference of being called 'Romanians' instead of 'Vlachs', 'Munteni', 'Moldovians' or 'Bessarabians', thus emphasising their descent from the Dacians and the Romans. Lăzurică thus grounds the use of the term Roma in both linguistic and historical terms and clearly pleads for a rejection of the use 'țigan'. An approach which would gradually be adopted by almost all Roma newspapers of the era.

- ***Roma/Gypsy Pride***

All Roma periodicals during the interwar period emphasised the need and importance for Roma/Gypsies to take pride in their belonging to their community. This was reflected both in lengthy manifestos/programmes of the various organisations and in several poems and songs that underlined, at one and the same time, the full belonging of Roma to the Romanian nation, their devotion to King and country (see section below), and the sacrifices Roma have historically made in order to be full members of the Romanian nation.

One of the clearest examples of this is the ‘March of the Roma’, published in *Glusul Romilor*, in 1940, and authored by N Lenghescu Cley. Below is a transcription of the march, in its English translation:

*The time for our emancipation has come
And today, Roma are united Under the holy flag of salvation (bis To which they will
forever be bound! (Chorus: We swear our loyalty to the King
That we will defend our country. Our brothers, parents, sisters. From any conquering
waves, We should all stand proud
And our ancestors honour. Under its shield all of our Roma, Bound by a sacred oath,
Even before death they will not give up (bis They will not give up until the grave (*

The above poem/march is both a call to unite under a common banner and a means to emphasise Roma people’s devotion to their country of birth and toil. Such manifestations of a Roma Pride, combined with an underlining of, in effect, Romanian Pride and belonging to Romanian nation was, in fact, to be found in all Roma periodicals during the interwar period.

It was not, however, only poems that reflected such attitudes. Oftentimes, parts of the ‘calls’ or ‘manifestos’ of the organisations were published in these periodicals and, oftentimes, they included an emphasis placed both on the enhancement of one’s Roma belonging and in proving the sacrifices Roma people have made for their country of birth.

Below is another such example, as reflected in *Glusul Romilor*, in an article titled ‘What should a Roma do’. Among others, these things are:

- *Not conceal his origin of Roma and not be ashamed of his people.
[...]*
- *Be a dignified, loyal and good citizen of the country, respecting H.M the King, the Royal Family, the Laws and the Authorities of this country’*

As a synthesis of the requirements laid out for Roma within the article mentioned above, the following are also mentioned: to be proud of one’s origin and not hide it; to join the Association and pay its fees; to take part in meetings; to be a ‘dignified, loyal and behaved’ citizen of the country, respecting the King, the Royal Family, the laws and authorities of the country; to give

their children to schools; respect their elders, brothers and sisters; go regularly to church; seize living in un-married partnerships; respect the representatives of the Church and the School, etc.

Likewise, the theme of pride (though referred as “Gypsy” pride/țigan pride) is also manifested in the newspaper *Neamul țigănesc*, alongside a call for uniting together under one banner. For example, in the newspaper’s first article, titled ‘To all gypsies in Ardeal’ (Catre toti țiganii din Ardeal), the editor and leader of ‘*Neamul Țigănesc*’, Naftanailă Lazăr, lays out the need for țigani to rise and speak up concerning their own fate and needs. According to him: *‘the first step we have to do in society is not to be ashamed of being țigani. Each and every one of us should speak up clearly the proud word of țigan/gypsy’*, and emphasise that *‘we are not ashamed of being gypsies; more so than this, we are proud’* (see section above, on labelling).

Though there is a clear difference between the two newspaper’s approaches, particularly to the issue of labelling, the two converge in terms of other key issues they address: namely, the promotion of education of Roma/Gypsy children, the emphasis placed on being ‘honest workers’ of the country and obeying the laws of the state, the settlement of nomadic groups, and the mutual support between wealthier and poorer Roma/Gypsies. As such, both *Glasul Romilor* and *Neamul Țigănesc* (as, in fact, all Roma newspapers during the interwar period), highlighted the need to develop the sense of pride among Roma/Țigani communities, as a first step towards the process of solidarization, unification and emancipation.

- ***For King and Country- citizenship, national belonging and proving Romanian-ness***

Alongside emphasising the sacrifices Roma have made for their country, all Roma periodicals during the interwar period seem to point to the importance afforded to King and Country. Below is a short segment of an article from *Glasul Romilor*’s first issue (November 1934), which constitutes one of many such examples. The article is titled ‘Roma brothers’.

Roma brothers!

[...] Roma brothers! We have always done our duty - to the Land and the King. We have been and will remain royalists and faithful to the Throne, until death. Of our brethren, no traitor of country has ever been found. We have always been good citizens. So we deserve a better fate. We also deserve to be heard by those who lead the destinies of our dear country, and to lend their ears also to our rightful wishes. We deserve to be heard and helped. [...]

Likewise, this sense of national belonging and the expression of Romanian patriotism, allegiance to the Crown and Country, emphasis placed on respecting national laws, encouragement to become involved in the further education of Roma people can all be seen in a later article, also in *Glasul Romilor* (issue no 13), authored by V Dutan and published on the 7th of June 1939, titled ‘Our programme and the work of the Association’ (‘Programul și înfăptuirile Asociației’). Among others, the article stated:

'Our programme includes that the Association foster among its members the spirit of order, love for the Dynasty, respect for the laws and the authority of the Christian church, to offer guidance and support to lead a more dignified life, reliant on work; overcome illiteracy, guiding Roma children to school; organise meetings and educational conferences; create or encourage works of social support, which would come to the aid of poor Roma and new mothers; intervene for the settlement of Roma; help get rid of cohabitation; guide its members by instilling in them a religious spirit, etc.'

Used simply illustratively, these two excerpts clearly highlight the intention of Roma leaders for Roma to be seen as full and contributing members of the Romanian state, and in full agreement with the policies of the Romanian state. The focus on literacy and the settlement of nomadic groups were often emphasised within the newspaper's articles (as, in fact, within all Roma periodicals during the interwar period). Yet, the most poignant was the desire to present Roma as supporters of the current political regime.

In addition to emphasising the patriotic zeal of Roma in the country, and their devotion to both King and Country, many of the articles in *Glasul Romilor*, for example, highlight their commitment to present political leaderships and the constitutional changes of 1938. Finally, while all periodicals defined themselves as an apolitical organisation, in reality, most supported some forms of political parties and different newspapers often affiliated themselves with different political parties (see section below).

- ***'Not a minority': politics of recognition and apoliticism***

As mentioned above, a common theme within the Roma newspapers during the interwar period in Romania was also a seeming desire of the leaders of Roma organisations to highlight the status of Roma as fully embedded members and citizens of the Romanian state, often through the argument of being fully assimilated within the Romanian element, as being loyal citizens to the state (see above) and as not posing a threat of sectarianism or minority politics. In fact, the desire not to be seen as a minority was clearly manifested across most of the newspapers of the time. An example of this is an article from the second issue of *'Neamul Țigănesc'*, from the 8th September 1934, titled 'Who are we and what do we want?' ('Cine suntem și ce vrem?'). The article broadly states the aims of the organisation. It also argues that its goal has been to organise together, much like the Jewish nation, the approximately 1 million Roma people living on Romanian lands. It is highlighted, however, that the organisation is not and will *not be* a political party, neither a minority group, emphasising in particular that there will be no political manoeuvre coming from their midst, nor will they act as electoral puppets.

This interplay and comparison made with the Jewish population in Romania, as well as with other minority groups (such as Hungarians or Bulgarians) was both poignant and recurrent, not only in *Neamul Țigănesc*, but in the other Roma newspapers as well. The desire to organise themselves in

groups and associations was stated to be on the grounds of a constant struggle throughout history and was made discursively distinctive to that of Jewish organisations on several accounts:

1) they presented themselves as fully assimilated within what they called the Romanian ‘element’; 2) they emphasised the Christian/Orthodox tradition to which they adhered to; 3) they highlighted the loyalty they offered to King and Country and 4) they promoted a discourse of equal citizenship for Roma as for majority Romanians on the grounds of common sacrifices made for their common land.

Thus, the avoidance and rejection of the term ‘minority group’ was a form of affiliation to state policies and politics, rather than detachment from it, and a means to avoid the potential threat of being seen as problematic communities, as creating dissent or as posing any sort of challenge to the national order of the day. Below are, for example, some segments from an article signed by Gh Niculescu, in *Glasul Romilor* (published in April 1941, in the newspaper’s final issue), and titled ‘Racism and the Roma’ (Rasismul si Romii).

‘...they [Roma] do not present, we believe, any danger for the security and sovereignty of the Romanian people.

In duty towards the laws of the country they have always been side by side with their Romanian brothers, and there have also been cases when they have not been taken aback from protecting their land, proving their bravery and courage in the wars that the Romanian people have had with those that tried to take over our country’s land. Roma have not been deserters, traitors, nor spies and wherever they have been placed they have done their job, and they have worked without complaint’.

The excerpt above is both striking and illuminating, as it points to the clear desire of Roma leaders not to be perceived as potential separatist organisers and, in that sense, a threat to the political order, in times of a clearly volatile political climate.

In this context, it is also interesting that, though all organisations presented themselves as being (a)political (in other words, politics were not said to be on their agenda and they would not be involved in electoral processes), most newspapers reflect a particular party-orientation of their organisations, or support for specific parties in the run up to national and local elections. This, however, need not have always been the same party and allegiances appear to have changed over time. For example, the newspaper ‘*Timpul*’ initially published several articles in support of the National Liberal Party, and against the National Peasant Party (Partidul National Taranist). Later, it developed a more welcoming attitude and closer connection to the National Christian Party, particularly given its leader’s (i.e. Octavian Goga) support of the Association led by then by Popp Serboianu and Lăzurică. In fact, the front page of ‘*Timpul*’, issue number 67-68, of 20th October 1937, shows the photographs of the leaders of the National Christian Party and vows that Roma would only vote with the latter. Furthermore, the title page features two swastika symbols, alongside the following slogans, which are symptomatic of this support:

‘Roma are assimilated to the Romanian element, Christian, royalists, enemies of communism and of sects’

'Roma ask for nothing else but full equality in their treatment as citizens'

'Faith-Country-King. Romania for Romanians'

Likewise, Lăzurică and Popp Șerboianu were clearly allying themselves with Octavian Goga and the National Christian Party. In fact, it was Octavian Goga that made the publication of a special series for Roma possible within the newspaper *'Țara Noastră'*. Within this special series, the full support and allegiance shown by Lăzurică and Popp Șerboianu to the Romanian nationalistic party were evident.

One must, however, be careful to underline the fact that these manifestations of an apparent 'Romanian nationalism' (i.e.: see the slogan 'Romania for Romanians'), surprising as they may seem from a present-day perspective, need to be contextualised within the climate of the time, wherein being seen as a minority could pose a potential (and physical) threat in terms of support from the state and the Church. As such, the 'non-minority' approach evident within Roma newspapers during the interwar period, as well as the desire to create a distinction between Roma and other 'problematic' minority groups, can only be understood in relation to the claims for equal citizenship laid out by Roma leaders at the time.

- ***Faith and the Church***

'The movement for emancipation among Roma has started within the old Church and law, because Roma are, before anything else, Christians and it is within the bosom of the Church that they have always found the comfort for their soul, which has been mocked by all'

The above quote comes from an article published in *Neamul Țigănesc* (Issue no 3, April 1935, pg 3), titled 'Priests and our movement' (*Preoții și mișcarea noastră*), which emphasises the close connection of Roma with both the Orthodox and 'United' (Greek Catholic) Church and, more importantly, to Christianity as a broader concept. The emphasis placed on Roma's devotion to Christianity was, in fact, promoted in all Roma newspapers during the interwar period. Yet, while both *Neamul Țigănesc* and other regional newspapers (such as *Țara Noastră*) seemed to welcome the connection of Roma to both major Church institutions, *Glasul Romilor* seemed to promote a stronger view of the role of the Orthodox church and Roma people's duty to abide by it.

An interesting aspect, particularly salient within the content of *Glasul Romilor*, is thus the close relationship Niculescu's General Union of Roma in Romania seems to have established with leaders of the Orthodox church. In fact, many articles point to the 'missionary' purposes of the organisation, alongside the active involvement of Roma leaders in officialising marriages among live-in Roma couples, baptising children and encouraging them to go to (the Orthodox) Church. This relationship may have also contoured Lăzurică's initial connection to the Union and the initial split from Popp Șerboianu (formerly an Orthodox priest who seemed to have moved away from the Orthodox church).

That said, the Orthodox church seems to have played its greatest role in the success of the Union led by Niculescu, and contributed to several events organised by the Union, alongside practices of marrying couples and baptising children. Thus, while the broad concept of 'Christianity' was

predominant in all newspapers during the interwar period, encouraging its readers to follow through within the spirit of the Church, it seems that it was the Orthodox church that aided Niculescu's union most and, potentially, also contributed to its larger success in most regions of the country.

Concluding discussion

As I have tried to highlight in this paper, the process of Roma emancipation in Romania during the interwar period was far from unitary, and one would need to be careful in addressing the manifestations of Roma ethnic consciousness during this time period through a homogenising or generalising framework, even when discussing one single case study or country. As one of the biggest forms of Roma emancipation in Central and Eastern Europe during the interwar period, the process of Roma 're-awakening' in Romania, as it was often referred to by Roma activists and intellectuals of the time, was indeed complex and, at times, diverging points of view concerning the best means of achieving a Roma-wide solidarity came to the fore. This process was complicated further by several dynamics manifesting 'on the ground': such as the personality of different leaders of the Roma movement, who sought to achieve legitimacy as the best positioned to make claims on behalf of this population, their relationship to the Orthodox church, the struggle and the fight for legitimacy in terms of local (and/or regional) representation, the difference between the capital city experiences and the regional interests of smaller organisations, and the relationship formed or represented with other minority groups across the country. Indeed, one can say that different forms of Roma emancipatory approaches or processes developed during the 1930s Romania, rather than one unitary and coherent strategy of ethnic mobilization. This can most clearly be seen in the content of the articles published within key Roma periodicals during this time, which highlight both the overarching aims and goals of Roma organisations during the interwar period and the distinctively personal, political and social implications of Roma leaders' actions.

As such, many of the articles published within the six Roma periodicals of the interwar period in Romania (*Glasul Romilor*, *Neamul Tiganesc*, *Timpul*, *O Rom*, *Tara Noastra*, *Foaia Poporului Romesc*) feature snippets of the struggle for legitimacy manifested between its leaders. Nevertheless, they all seem to converge along the social claims laid out by the very same leaders in what concerned the 'visions' of a Roma future as envisioned by Roma intellectuals of the time. In that sense, and in spite of differences shaped by personal idiosyncrasies, some common themes can be clearly identified, pointing to the desires of Roma activists of the interwar era to bring the struggles of the Roma population in the country within the eyesight of political leaders, and to enact social change through the medium of a country-wide social mobilisation and organisation of Roma individuals.

Among these claims, one can mention: the desire to highlight Roma's full belonging to the nation state (at times meaning denying the status of 'minority' and differentiating themselves from other groups, such as Jewish people or Bulgarian minorities), emphasising the patriotic feelings of Roma towards their country, the desire to become recognised as full members of the nation and, with the exception of the newspaper '*Neamul țigănesc*', a pleading for the abandonment of the term 'țigan' for that of Roma. Furthermore, the emphasis placed on the education and settlement of Roma

across the country was combined with a desire and a pleading for a fair and equal treatment of Roma as Romanians. Through this, the forms and manifestations of Roma emancipatory endeavours in interwar Romania, as reflected within the content of the Roma periodicals of the time, reflect one of the most active movements of Roma mobilisation, whose productivity was halted only by the start of the Second World War.