



Practice&Positionality:

**ETHICS FOR EARLY  
CAREER CRITICAL  
ROMANI STUDIES  
SCHOLARS**

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Created for Early-Career  
Critical Romani Studies  
Scholars from Fellow Early  
Career Critical Romani  
Studies Scholars



**Romani Studies  
Program**

CENTRAL  
EUROPEAN  
UNIVERSITY

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## **INTRODUCTION**

**Drago\*** fellow early career critical Romani studies scholars,  
This document is intended as a short guide from fellow early career researchers in the field of critical Romani studies (CRS) facing questions about ethics and positionality in their budding research projects. Through reflection and conversation regarding our own struggles laboring in the field of critical Romani studies we carried out while attending the 2022 New Frontiers in Romani Studies: Insights from Critical Race Theory summer program at Central European University, we compiled and shared resources in the form(s) of questions to ask oneself, tips and suggestions we wish we had received at the beginning of our research processes, and academic literature we recommend looking through. This ethics playbook (otherwise referred to as ethics 'guide') is divided into sections corresponding to the (usual) phases of producing knowledge, although some topics we raise may require continuous reflection that cannot be contained in the bounds of a single section. For each part of this guide, we first share difficult questions we have had to answer and challenging dilemmas we have needed to solve during our own research processes. Following this subsection, we provide our own advice for early career CRS scholars based on advice given to us we have found valuable as well as tips we would give more naive versions of ourselves knowing what we do now. We conclude each section of the document by sharing resources in the form(s) of academic, popular, and informal literature, combined with online/accessible courses and workshops as well as multi-media resources. We have created this guide as a living document, and as such we invite readers to join this conversation by adding your own advice and recommendations.

**Devlesa\*\***,  
**Hannah, Emma, Fanni, Sevdjulje, and Vittorio**

\*= **Drago** is a word in many dialects of Romani Chib/Romanes meaning "dear" or "addressed to"

\*\*= **Devlesa** is a shortened greeting adapted from the longer **Ash[en] Devlesa** (Stay with God) and **Zhan Devlesa** (Go with god!) in Romani Chib often used to conclude letters or emails in place of "sincerely."

# DETERMINING POSITIONALITY WITHIN ACADEMIA

## Questions, Dilemmas, and/or Concerns we Have Faced at This Stage of the Research Process:

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- How do we involve ethnically Roma CRS scholars in our research without tokenizing their participation? Do ethnically Roma scholars have a responsibility to engage in CRS?
- How can we detect if we are being tokenized as CRS scholars by others?
- As early career CRS scholars, how can we shake off feelings of impostor syndrome when we are working on projects with more experienced/published scholars?
- How do we consider how our position(s) as a student and/or young researcher influence(s) research outcomes? Especially in terms of how our choices, freedom(s), and responsibilities impact the work we ultimately produce?
- How can we balance different considerations (seniority, experience, expertise, network, etc) when picking a supervisor(y committee)?

## Tips, Suggestions, and Advice we Wish we had Received at This Stage of the Research Process:

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- Be aware that picking a research topic is not a neutral act. For instance, by focusing on Roma marginalization, you might unknowingly contribute to the visibility of Roma in a negative light, such as construing Roma as people(s) with a limited agency.
- Make sure you reflect on the limitations of how you frame your research. Be open to the recognition that due to the ethical and epistemological implications of your positionality, not all topics can be pursued, and don't be afraid to tell your reader this.
- Do not take socially constructed categories such as race or gender as given! If you do so, you might end up naturalizing these.

# DETERMINING POSITIONALITY WITHIN ACADEMIA

## Resources we Recommend for Navigating This Stage of the Research Process:

- Trehan, Nidhi, and Angéla Kóczé. "Racism, (neo-)colonialism and Social Justice: The Struggle for the Soul of the Romani Movement in Post-socialist Europe." In *Racism Postcolonialism Europe*, edited by Huggan Graham and Law Ian, 50-74. Liverpool University Press, 2009, pp 50-74.
- Spivak, G. C. (2015). Can the Subaltern Speak?. In *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory* (pp. 66-111). Routledge.
- Olukotun, O., Mkandawire, E., Antilla, J., Alfaifa, F., Weitzel, J., Scheer, V., ... & Mkandawire-Valhmu, L. (2021). An Analysis of Reflections on Researcher Positionality. *Qualitative Report*, 26(5). <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol26/iss5/5/>
- Olga Burlyuk (2021) A smart hot Russian girl from Odessa: When gender meets ethnicity in academia.

# CONSIDERING KNOWLEDGE CONTRIBUTION TO CRITICAL ROMANI STUDIES

## Questions, Dilemmas, and/or Concerns we Have Faced at This Stage of the Research Process:

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- How can we write and speak about 'stereotypes' without reinforcing them?
- As early-career researchers who do not have as many outlets for disseminating research findings, how can we start thinking about co-producing knowledge?
- What if there's no willingness to collaborate within the community we wish to work with to co-produce knowledge?

## Tips, Suggestions, and Advice we Wish we had Received at This Stage of the Research Process:

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- When discussing/analyzing/writing about outsider conceptions of a culture, you should embed these 'stereotypes' into wider social structures, and shed light on how these terminologies are contested and resisted. A Critical Race Theory perspective might prove particularly helpful in this analysis.
- Engage your participants at various stages of the research process and be open to reshaping your research topic and design based on criticism(s) you might receive. For instance, you should consider (1) consulting the activists in your field during the elaboration of methodological tools and (2) applying a "double-consent" strategy to validate participants' consent once the results are analyzed and drafted.
- Be aware that you cannot achieve full neutrality in your research. Every researcher has their own experiences and bias. You should aim to become aware of how and when your biases are at play in the research process.

# CONSIDERING KNOWLEDGE CONTRIBUTION TO CRITICAL ROMANI STUDIES

## Resources we Recommend for Navigating This Stage of the Research:

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- Bevington, Douglas, and Chris Dixon. 2005. "Movement-Relevant Theory: Rethinking Social Movement Scholarship and Activism." *Social Movement Studies*, 185–208.
- Ivasiuc, Ana. 2018. "Alter-Narratives: Seeing Ordinary Agency." *Roma Activism: Reimagining Power and Knowledge*. Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 129–50.
- Marianne Janack (1997) *Standpoint Epistemology without the "Standpoint"?: An Examination of Epistemic Privilege and Epistemic Authority*
- Labelle, Alexie. 2021. "Intersectionality, White Privilege, and Citizenship Regimes: Explaining LGBTQ People of Colour Collective Engagement Trajectories in Toronto and Montreal."
- Levinson, M. (2017). When participants don't wish to participate in participatory action research, and when others participate on their behalf: The representation of communities by real and faux participants. *The Urban Review*, 49(3), 382-399.
- Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. First Ed. edition. New York: Vintage.

## Questions, Dilemmas, and/or Concerns we Have Faced at This Stage of the Research Process:

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- How do our field research efforts impact existing power relations within the group of people we are researching?
- How can we be mindful to take in a diverse array of viewpoints and lived experiences in our research process(es)? How can we portray the complexity and intersectional power structures of Roma - Gazho/Gadjo interaction, discrimination, and governance from a CRS point of view?
- How can we respond to the '(white) savior' or 'just another researcher' etc critique? Especially when we have arrived at CRS from a non-ethnically Roma background.

## Tips, Suggestions, and Advice we Wish we had Received at This Stage of the Research Process:

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- It's okay to feel uncomfortable in the face of criticism.
- Building close and trusting relationships in the field is a process that takes time. It may take years to get the relationships you want with research partners to be strong, so please give relationship building the time it needs, and be open to changing the design and move on.
- For the first two weeks of fieldwork- "Spend as much time as you can with your mouth shut and your eyes and ears open" (a quote from writer John Jakes). Think critically about which situations are better for you to take up more space and which situations are better for you to sit back and listen in.
- A researcher such as yourself may feel like an insider in some respects, and like an outsider in others when interacting with different Roma communities. Consider insider/outsider as a continuum, rather than a binary, and reflect on positionality considering several aspects such as identity, ethnicity, cultural values, power, nationality, social class and lived experience.
- Remember that you are not done when your project is accepted by the ethics committee, but that it's a living document.

# ASSESSING DUTY OF CARE IN RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## Resources we Recommend for Navigating this Stage of Research:

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- Lilla Farkas (2017) Data collection in the field of ethnicity
- Barbora Bukovska (2008) Perpetrating good: unintended consequences of international human rights advocacy. Available: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Perpetrating-good%3A-Unintended-consequences-of-Human-Bukovsk%C3%A1/d3724f4cb95b1be19e518d4a235c4b8d6c94925c>
- Kóczé, A., Rövid, M. (2012). Pro-Roma Global Civil Society: Acting for, with or Instead of Roma?. In: Kaldor, M., Moore, H.L., Selchow, S., Murray-Leach, T. (eds) Global Civil Society 2012. Global Civil Society Yearbook. Palgrave Macmillan, London. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230369436\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230369436_7)
- Labelle, Alexie. 2020. "Bringing Epistemology into Intersectional Methodology." *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 3 (3): 409–26. <https://doi.org/10.1332/251510819X15743520497579>.
- Gheorghe, Nicolae: "Choices To Be Made And Prices To Be Paid: Potential Roles And Consequences In Roma Activism And Policy-Making", in: *From Victimhood to Citizenship. The Path of Roma Integration*, edited by Will Guy, Central European University Press, 2013, pp 41-100.
- Memory Mphaphuli and Gabriele Griffin (2019) "Ducking, diving and playing along": Negotiating everyday heteroerotic subjectivity in the field. DOI: 10.1108/QRJ-03-2019-0029

# FINALIZING, WRITING, EDITING & DISSEMINATING RESEARCH FINDINGS

## Questions, Dilemmas, and/or Concerns we Have Faced at This Stage:

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- How can we learn when to speak and when to give space to others in CRS settings?
- Is an indirect benefit to Roma communities stemming from our research work still considered 'giving back'?
- As field researchers, how can we "give back" to the people we interviewed/observed without it being a tokenistic endeavor? Whom should the targets of our efforts be?
- "Who gets to leave"? As an academic, you (hopefully) have a choice about what you study, but when you write about/study subjects concerning people with a fixed home or identity, they could feel the impacts of your research long after you move on to another project. It is important to consider how you write about others, who will face lasting consequences, and whether or not your ultimate product will cause the community to close themselves to future researchers and students.
- How do you allocate your time when invited to speak at a conference. Should you invite your research participant? Whom should you include, and who should exclude? How can you make your language clear and accessible so your research participants understand your findings?

## Tips, Suggestions, and Advice we Wish we had Received at This Stage of the Research Process:

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- Use non-Romani-studies networks and circles to bring Roma-focus research to wider audiences (ie. publish in generalist journals and attend large conferences while relying on specialist scholars' work and journals)
- Keep a list of (extended) acknowledgments for your research including inspiring Roma activists, scholars, and friends, who had an influence on your project (even if not strictly speaking academic). However, you should also consider privacy (does this person **want** to be acknowledged?) and do not use your acknowledgments as a space to justify your positionality.
- Language Considerations: check if certain journals accept translations of already published work and consider publishing in another language AND/OR make it a point to publish summaries (eg. in the form of blog posts) of the academic work in different platforms considering different audiences.

# FINALIZING, WRITING, EDITING & DISSEMINATING RESEARCH FINDINGS

## Resources we Recommend for Navigating This Stage of Research:

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- Thomas A. Acton (2016) Scientific racism, popular racism and the discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39:7, 1187-1204, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2015.1105988
- Alcoff, Linda. 1991. "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique*, no. 20: 5-32.
- Krumer-Nevo, Michal. 2009. "From Voice to Knowledge: Participatory Action Research, Inclusive Debate and Feminism." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 22 (3): 279-95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390902835462>.
- Margareta Matache (2017) Dear Gadjó (non-Romani) scholars... Available: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/dear-gadje-non-romani-scholars\\_b\\_5943f4c9e4b0d188d027fdb2](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/dear-gadje-non-romani-scholars_b_5943f4c9e4b0d188d027fdb2) (3/3 pieces)
- Black Girl Dangerous. 2014. "4 Ways to Push Back Against Your Privilege." *Black Girl Dangerous* (blog). February 3, 2014. <https://www.blackgirldangerous.com/2014/02/4-ways-push-back-privilege/>.
- Becker, H. S. (2020). *Writing for social scientists, third edition: How to start and finish your thesis, book, or article, with a chapter by Pamela Richards*. University of Chicago Press.

# Parrakro Tumminge: A (Farewell) Note From the Editor

The above phrase in Angloromanes, my Roma language means “thank you” and it is truly with gratitude that I write the final words to conclude this ethics playbook. Discussions of Ethics and Positionality are never challenge-free experiences. I find this type of work particularly challenging when meshing parts of my own Romanichal identity with the academic discourse on critical Romani studies -- but I also know, as I hope you have learned in reading this playbook, that these challenging experiences provide us with the greatest opportunities to grow. I believe that just as one's identity can inform their research, one's research can inform their identity, developing oneself and one's scholarship in tandem. However, this development feat is easier said than done. Thus, the writers of this playbook and I hope that the suggestions, resources, and guided questions in this document are of value to those like you, new to the Critical Romani Studies field, and this playbook will prove useful along the academic journey from first ideation to the ultimate publication of research, especially when grappling with different dilemmas – whether they are similar to those we have faced and described in this document or a different challenge entirely. From myself and all of us scholars involved in the creation of this ethics playbook, we wish you, dear reader, well on your academic journey, and hope you will come back to contribute to the development of this playbook as you grow during your studies.

Devel (farewell in my Angloromanes), Hannah Zimmerman

# TE AVES BAXTALE!\*\*

\*\* = An Expression in Romani  
Chib/Romanes meaning "I wish you luck"  
used often as a parting phrase

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