Ethnicity and Gender in Post-socialist Spaces: Romanian Women's Discourses of Sexual Violence

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The research for this paper grew from my experiences as an Australian feminist woman working and studying in Bucharest, Romania. While my postgraduate academic research focuses on the performance of ethnicity in public spaces, I was acutely aware of my own constant negotiations of gendered identity in cross-cultural encounters. This paper aims to utilise these experiences of shifting boundaries to address the intersections of gendered and ethnic matrices of identification in public space in Bucharest.

While gender, along with ethnicity, is a constitutive discourse of society, gendered subjects are articulated in relation to their 'places'.[i] Masking their construction through claiming to be located in the body, discourses of gender are in fact dynamic, constantly negotiated and policed. I take as my organising factor that the Romanian social body is pervasively gender regulated and dominated by the heterosexual masculine ideal. The social body is also constituted by discourses of ethnicity, which intersect with gendered power relations.

This paper examines the nature of the ethno-national Romanian feminine ideal and the Roma ethnic Other in post-socialist Romanian society and their articulated 'places' in urban Bucharest.[ii] The modern Western public/private space differentiation, while requiring a problematisation for use in post-socialist societies, is a useful way of understanding how gender constructs and is naturalised as places and spaces. Discourses of 'danger' in public space amongst ethnic Romanian women in Bucharest, which ethnicise the sexual threat of the masculine subject as 'Ţigani', will be used to explore the intersection of gendered and ethnic matrices of contemporary Romanian society. This paper does not address the specific question of Roma women's discourses or experiences of gender in post-socialist space, dealing only with Romanian articulations of the masculine ethnic Other.[iii]

The place of 'woman' in post-socialist Romania

Romania shares many aspects of gender construction with other post-socialist societies but is unique in a range of historically and culturally specific discourses. The centrality of nationalist discourses and socialist pro natal legislation to post-socialist policy have been documented by noted scholars such as Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman, and a recent wave of Romanian feminist researchers build on their thorough conceptualisations of the place of gender and ethnicity in the state.[iv] The post-socialist period is one in which new articulations of (national, ethnic and gendered) identity are under intense negotiation, a process which is often masked as a 'retraditionalisation' to 'pre-regime' values. This masking goes hand in hand with the normalisation of gender roles as essential to bodies.[v] The strength of the 'traditional' heterosexual patriarchy in post-socialist societies means that 'women's issues' are usually linked to reproductive issues, such as abortion. While women have not had access to abortion threatened by legislation in the period since 1989, the dominant discourses of post-socialist Romania do articulate woman as the site of national reproduction. This designation constitutes the private sphere, where women fulfill their reproductive roles within the patriarchal institution of marriage.

Post-socialist societies are dealing with intense economic, social and political changes, which have resulted in a plurality of available identifications. Pornography, embraced as free speech, has pervasively established a new articulation of the feminine ideal as sexual object (women as whores as well as mothers), while, in Romania at least, subcultures of femininity such as career women are circumscribed as 'unnatural'. Post-socialist attempts to articulate Romania as a EUropean nation require an intense series of discursive manoeuvres to negotiate European Union definitions of gender and ethnic 'equality' on the one hand, and the 'traditional' values as constructed in the Romanian patriarchal matrix on the other.[vi] An interrogation of the spaces between EUropean discourses and dominant discourses of the media regarding violence against women (sexual harassment, domestic violence, rape) are useful for a brief overview of how gender roles are created and contested in post-socialist Romania.

The European Union articulates women as one of multiple categories which must be brought into line with its own constructions of gender. Placing 'gender mainstreaming' alongside economics, trade, environment and industrial production in its regular reports for accession, the European Union requires that Romania show 'political will' to incorporate a 'gender equality perspective' in all policies, including the introduction of legislation against sexual harassment in the workplace by 2006.[vii] It is common, however, for employment advertisements to stipulate gender, physical appearance, age and marital status of applicants. The actions of legislators and discourses in the media regarding legislation against sexual harassment reflect and corroborate the role of women as either sites of reproduction or sexual objects for men.[viii] Romanian feminist sociologist Otilia Dragomir traces the development of Romanian workplace sexual harassment legislation from its introduction in 1997, through various parliamentary debates, to the present, where it remains stalled as of October 2002, and is expected to be passed at the end of 2003 (six years after its introduction and on the eve of the European Union deadline).[ix] Dragomir uses discourse analysis to compare Romanian and American legislation, noting the Romanian use of the 'Victorian' concept of 'scandalous behaviour', which depends on social and perpetrator definitions and places the onus on victims to prove their right to be 'scandalized'.[x]

At each stage of parliamentary debate the Romanian media has bemoaned the legislation, reporting employers as 'under fire' and warning that 'employing women with coloured hair and long legs will be sanctioned'.[xi] Another reporter described the legislation as banning blonde jokes.[xii] Dominant discourses in the media trivialise sexual harassment while simultaneously constructing the workplace as a masculine sphere in which women can only exist as sexual objects of male desire.

While almost half of journalists in the Romanian media are, a recent study by Romanian sociologist Romina Surugiu notes that the media stereotypes women as mothers, housewives and sexual objects.[xiii] Reports of women being bashed and raped in public and private space are detailed in narratives similar in style to pornographic prose, with

the victims address, school and age provided. Initials usually replace the victim's name, a useless form of 'privacy protection' which is also characteristic of the unnamed pornographic object.[xiv] The function of these reports as social discourses of sex crime bear a striking resemblance to those addressed by Caputi in *The Age of Sex Crime*.[xv] Caputi argues that adult men's magazines heroize sex crime as an active, masculine behaviour, and that patriarchal identification with the perpetrator 'correspondingly demands that women play along by identifying with the sexual victim'.[xvi] Indeed, an article in the Romanian version of international men's magazine 'Play Boy' in 2000 illustrates this point. Entitled 'How to Beat Your wife without leaving any marks', the article was narrated by a fictional policeman advising husbands on ways of beating their wives which would not be detected by hospital staff.[xvii] Feminist organisations rallied for the only feminist public space protest in Romania since 1989, while the media remained disinterested.[xviii] Popular opinion at the time amongst contacts in Bucharest was, with the exception of feminist protesters, that the article had been, as Play Boy stated, an 'April Fools Day' joke.   It is interesting to note that 'mass responses of titillation…and expressions of envy or amusement' amongst men regarding sex/violent crimes against women have been noted by numerous scholars as reflecting a measure of pleasurable identification of men with the actions, and women as victims.[xix] As Caputi notes, 'all instances of sexual terror serve as lessons for all women', and pervasive social discourses of violent sexual crime against Romanian women serve to construct the public sphere as dangerous for all women.[xx]

The familiar theme is, of course, that women who are outside 'natural' boundaries invite sexual violence. The private sphere offers sisters, wives and mothers some protection from rape, which fits the 'traditional' place of women in the home as reproducers, protected by brothers, husbands and fathers. The compounded need for a private sphere created and perpetuated by the terror of sexual violence 'outside', also contributes to an understanding of the disparities between the importance placed by Romanian post-socialist discourses of women 'catching' a man and real experiences of married life. An article in a weekly Romanian women's magazine entitled "How to find your ideal husband", for example, was composed of a short editorial stressing that age and money

are not important characteristics of an ideal husband and accompanied by a series of vox pops responses from women which were overwhelmingly negative in nature.[xxi] Respondents lamented their failure to find an ideal husband, one even stating that 'when men marry they take a slave, not a woman!' The editorial decision to allow the disparities of utopian and experience discourses of marriage to remain side by side perhaps reflects the perceived ability of readership to move between the two discourses, and illustrates the centrality of private space through marriage in post-socialist Romania.

As the Romanian feminine ideal is also a sexual object for men, victims of sexual violence are held responsible for attracting the desire of men. In this construction, women who fulfill the feminine ideal suffer sexual violence. The 'place' of women in post-socialist Romania is therefore a double bind which discursively chains women to the terror of sexual violence in the location of the feminine ideal. Private space is the safe place for the reproducer/sexual object, protected through the extension of patriarchal claim in marriage.

Domestic violence, therefore, becomes what may be termed a lesser or necessary evil in opposition to the dangers facing 'woman' outside the institution of marriage. Historically and culturally established, domestic violence has been the subject of a number of post-socialist studies and awareness campaigns. To some extent, the focus on 'gendered violence' in the designated feminine private sphere is made possible through women's 'place' there; as naturalised site of reproduction, women can claim a right to safety within the institution of marriage. A recent European Union funded survey recorded 73% of respondents as having been involved in domestic violence.[xxii] The right of men to 'discipline' women who 'fail' to inhabit the feminine ideal (too assertive, not physically attractive enough) is pervasive, as is blaming the female victim.[xxiii] The severe lack of institutional support for and the social stigmatisation of single mothers, both contribute to the lack of real change (despite increased discussions and surveys) in post-socialist Romania. Rape within marriage is not a criminal offence. It is also interesting to note that domestic violence in the street is treated by urban society as a 'private matter',

illustrating that 'private' space is constituted by gender, the feminine subject claimed by the masculine ideal, not just an arbitrary physical distinction.[xxiv]

We have seen that women are constructed as natural to private space as sites of reproduction, while also constructed as sexual objects, constituting gendered roles in the workplace and for women as objects of sexual violence. There have, however, been new models of femininity introduced since 1989. 'New (career) women' are featured in the popular Romanian version of women's magazine *Cosmopolitan*. While addressing issues of importance for women who work (such as interview techniques and tips for confident presentation in male dominated work spaces), *Cosmopolitan* adds to the mainstream ideal feminine subject, who is a site of reproduction, sexual object and now recognised as capable intelligent individual. The fact that adding to doesn't always add up (to borrow from Bhabha), can supposedly be solved by the 'new woman's' fashion/work strategies/time management. The issues become very close to those faced by certain classes of women in the west. Even career women, however, remain a subculture which fits within the dominant (mother/sexual object) feminine ideal. The absence of any other accepted or even identified subcultures of ethno-national Romanian femininity in contemporary Romania reflects the strength of the masculine ideal's dominance of society.[xxv] In order to turn to sexual violence outside the private place of the feminine gender, the nature of public space must be addressed.

Encounters with others in 'real' space and time are powerful because the ambivalent relationship between the Self and Others must be negotiated through the mobilisation of extensive chains of dynamic stereotypical discourses in order to cope with the unpredictable power of the Other to participate in the encounter.[xxvi] The Self invests heavily in a fixed origin of identity, and uses stereotypes to articulate Others as likewise embodying essentialised characteristics. Stereotypes are thereby excessive claims to knowledge which necessarily over-reach the subject, the inherent lack (of essential, fixed identity) circling back to displace the articulated knowledge. The dynamics of real space encounters often thereby require the mobilisation of multiple contradictory stereotypical discourses in the effort to maintain privileged Self identifications.

In addition to being the actual scene of encounters, existing places are often also discursive locations for framing discourses of Others. As Lemon notes in her study of discourses of Otherness in the Moscow metro, such 'narratives achieve forceful validity not only because they seem to be grounded in concrete spaces but also because they intersect familiar discourses and images depicting authority, culture and belonging'.[xxvii] To explore the constitutive role of gender in public spaces and encounters, therefore, it is useful to take what we know about the functioning discourses of gender in post-socialist Romania and then examine how women articulate their experiences of public places. Because Romanian women's discourses of public space utilise Romanian articulations of the Roma ethnic Other, some basic examples of how ethnic articulations constitute public space must be addressed.

Stereotypical discourses of the ethnic Other in Bucharest's public space

Roma travelled from India in various waves. The first Roma ethnic group crossing from the south into the Wallacian lands in 1370 were immediately captured and enslaved.[xxviii] Slavery remained a government policy for all Roma who were captured on Romanian lands until 1856. Having played a vital economic role, Roma were stereotyped as the uncivilised, uneducated, nomadic, exotic Other (Ţigani) by the first Romanian elites as they began to articulate themselves as a civilised, European, ethno-national group in the nineteenth century. Various ethnic Others, such as Hungarians and Jews, were vital to the articulations of Romanian national identity at various historical stages, but the Roma (as Ţiganii) have been the consistent inferior Other against which Romanian superiority was and continues to be articulated. Post-socialist changes in Romanian economics, politics, culture and international relations, which have physical effects on the way that public space is used, are discursively addressed using stereotypes of the Roma Other. These discourses draw on existing tropes and create complex and contradictory new stereotypes of Roma to explain a range of new social factors. Through articulating the Other as essentially nomadic/devious/uncivilised, Romanian post-socialist discourses

attempt to mask the intense process of negotiation of their own ethnic and national identity.

In the first days of 1990, new combinations of old stereotypes of Roma as nomadic and exceeding Romanian national space were used to explain the appearance of road side trade as disorderly.[xxix] Carloline Humphrey's studies of Russian post-socialist trade 'disorder' also note the role of ethnic stereotypes in the discursive linking of economics, ethno-national identity, and public space.[xxx] In post-socialist Romania, the stereotyping of Roma Others has been central to articulating Romanian identity in new relationships between citizen, state and the capitalist market, as well as new ethno-national identities in relation to the West and the European Union. A brief overview of some specifically post-socialist discourses of Ţiganii in public space will flesh out some important points.

In 2002, the role of wholesale purchasers, who buy agricultural produce direct from the farmers to distribute and sell at Bucharest markets, has become important to an unprecedented extent. Although farmers who sell at the markets use these middle men themselves, explaining that it prevents the usual problem of surplus and subsequent reduced pricing for clearance, the farmers have also begun to articulate themselves as 'real producers' against urban traders who sell produce as retailers. 'Real producers' are articulated as ethnic Romanians, while the middlemen are described as Ţiganii, despite their Romanian ethnicity. This discourse, dealing with a new set of co-ordinates in market reform, links with older stereotypes of Ţiganii as hagglers and cheats, and socialist stereotypes of Ţiganii as international black market traders. Stereotypes of Ţiganii and their role in post-socialist Romanian economics have been consistently used to explain high inflation, which renders the influx of previously unavailable goods in the market expensive in relation to domestic wages. In these discourses, Ţiganii are secretly powerful international traders who profit from Romanian consumption, even while they remain the uncivilised and uncultivated ethnic Other (who merely appears poor).[xxxi]

Discourses of public transport in post-socialist Bucharest are the primary site through which the ethnic Other is articulated. Alaina Lemon's study of discourses of and in the

Moscow Metro examines how public transport narratives plays an everyday vital role in the lives of urban city dwellers, as a real space in which the Other is (or may be!) regularly encountered.[xxxii] Discourses of the Other in public transport create a fixed 'grammar of surfaces' to enable identification of ethnic groups through physical characteristics which link to supposedly fixed stereotypical identities.[xxxiii] Stereotypical ethnic identities (including that of the Self) are utilised in discourses of public space as a means of addressing, explaining and organising localised issues of economics, politics and cultural identity.

Bucharest's public transport, and specifically its buses, are a public space medium which represent a kind of contained space of ethnic oppression in pervasive ethnic Romanian discourses. Pickpockets are articulated as Ţiganii, and the stereotypes of Ţiganii as uncivilised, violent and vengeful are utilised to explain why, when someone is robbed on a crowded moving bus, no one should protest. A numerically superior group of witnesses articulate thieves as Ţiganii who will find your home and beat/kill you if you react. 'Civilised' Romanians (which in this case include ethnic Roma who articulate themselves as 'civilised' in (Romanian) culture), are thereby rendered powerless in the face of Ţigani criminals, a glitch reversal of the dominant social structure which oppresses and marginalises Roma communities. The transgressed against is re-presented as the transgressor. This discursive construction of public space and its controlling ethnic Others not only creates a fixed 'grammar of surfaces' for real space encounters, but uses this essentialised grammar to explain, justify and strengthen Romanian ethnic control in post-socialist society.

Post-socialist Romania has been an unabated struggle of articulations of ethno-national identity, with the governments choosing at the elite (structural) level to articulate Romania as historically and inalienably EUropean. Accession to the European Union requires Romania to show its 'will' to be EUropean through a series of economic, judicial and social reforms. Demands that Romania provide equal opportunities for Roma have been heeded by elite discourses, while society remains dominated by ethnic articulations against Ţiganii. The battle over how to refer to Roma provides insight into the centrality

of this ethnic group for Romanian ethnic identity. The government decreed in 2000, in line with international standards and the demands of International and local Roma groups, that the name 'Ţigani' would be replaced by 'Rom' in official documents. Romanian parliamentarians, intellectuals, nationalists and media protested that this spelling was unacceptably similar to the Romanian language term 'Român' for individuals of Romanian ethnicity. Though the two words are different in spelling and pronunciation (Romi/Români in plural), the hysteria surrounding possible confusion provides insight into the investments of the majority of Romanians in the terms and their perceived differences. The Romanian government then (informally) decided that Rroma, spelt with two r's though pronounced as before, would be the official term.[xxxiv]

The name 'Ţigani' continues to be used in contemporary mainstream Romanian discourses referring to Roma people, and the government decreed 'Rroma' is mobilised as a tongue-in-cheek reference to a government decision which is considered to betray the 'national' (Romanian) cause. In 2001, the mayor of Piatra Neamt, for example, declared a new estate of concrete blocks on the city margins, surrounded by barbed wire fencing and 'self sufficient' to itself, as a 'gift for Rromii'.[xxxv] While Rroma intellectuals floundered to address the issues of segregation versus positive discrimination over the functioning gap between politically correct language and its meaning, a Romanian intellectual published an article which laid bare the real mechanisms of the debate, entitled "Just between us; Rromii are all Tigani".[xxxvi]

A final example of the function of the naming issue as drawing together a range of discourses at the core of Romanian ethno-national identity is the fact that with the release of the 2002 census statistics, one newspaper added to the statistically uncorroborated frenzy of Romanian nationalist persecution complex with a title screaming that soon 'Romania will be spelt with two r's!"[xxxvii] This title manifests the direct discursive link between Roma as threat to actual Romanian ethno-national identity and the perceived 'concessions' of the government in choosing to use the term 'Rroma'. The fears of some Romanian nationalists regarding the post-socialist governments' articulations of Romania

as EUropean go hand in hand with their reliance upon the Ţigani Other to articulate a Romanian Self.

Discourses of the Roma ethnic Other in contemporary Romania, therefore, function in a dynamic and constantly changing series of specifically post-socialist contestations of identity. Discourses of the Other in and through public space reflect the power of real space encounters with the Other and create a 'grammar of surfaces' through which intense negotiations of economic, politics, culture and ethnic and gendered identities are performed.

Women's prescriptive discourses; placing danger within the patriarchy

Discourses of gender, as with those of ethnicity, are pervasive in ways of speaking about (constituting and negotiating) real spaces and encounters.[xxxviii] We have already seen that discourses of sexual crime are articulated as manifested in 'public' space, and yet there is a distinct lack of information specifically about public space and women.   It is interesting to note that the single Romanian Non-government Organisation which uses the term 'feminist' in its name, the Society for Feminist Analysis (ANA) has, from its inception, prioritised issues of women in relation to public space. Laura Grunberg, one of the founders and a leading Romanian feminist, explained in the organisation's journal that 'for a long time ANA was considered a kind of infant which needed to be thrown into the fight against the authorities, the poverty, the pollution, the streetdogs and the tiganii of the area'.[xxxix] This description locates the 'feminist fight' in public space, articulating the ethnic Other alongside animal and chemical threats to the innocent feminine (albeit feminist) subject. This section draws on discourses of public space circulated amongst women in contemporary Bucharest to explore how women negotiate gendered places in public space.

As a foreign Romanian speaking woman in Bucharest, I inhabited a unique position perceived as vulnerable and requiring education as to the dangers of Bucharest's public space. In meetings with women, informal and formal, in bars, universities and private

homes, I repeatedly received a series of explanatory warnings about how a woman needed to behave in the city.[xl] Initiated with the statement that a woman should not walk alone in Bucharest at night because it is dangerous, the answer in response to a prompt of 'why', is 'Ţiganii'. As a foreigner who may not understand the implicit gamut of stereotypical discourses conjured by the name of the ethnic Other, women were patient enough to answer a further question of why with the word 'rape'. I call this a prescriptive discourse because it is pervasive and identifiable as a kind of warning, prescribing behaviour. This prescriptive discourse is also enacted for Romanian women new to Bucharest, or reiterated in response to an individual's actions (such as if a woman admitted she intended to walk home alone at night). I would describe the discourse as a kind of crash course for adult education, a series of signposts to wider discourses of danger in public space.

In order to unravel these signposts of the prescriptive discourse, striking in uniformity and repetition, one must examine a range of unstated discursive links between its various terms of engagement. Numerous questions arise. How does the utterance of 'Ţigani' function? What stereotypical discourses link this ethnic Other with a specifically gendered sexual violence in public space? What information is elided with the stated danger of rape, and are there any other discourses of gendered violence utilised by Romanian women? Where is the 'real' Roma man in public space encounters, and does the ethnicisation of threat displace attention from Romanian men? What is the purpose of this discourse circulated amongst women, and can it be considered a form of gendered agency? Possible answers to these questions cannot be found in local sociological studies, and asking patient Romanian colleagues resulted in a lot of conversations highlighting the lack of discursive tools for addressing what are considered individual lived experiences of violence. In tandem with discursive silence is the absolute lack of institutional support such as shelters or counseling services. These factors must be situated in the context of Romanian post-socialist patriarchal society, which relies upon creating and maintaining gendered spaces for its perpetuation. If the threat of sexual violence in public space is the means for constituting women as (private) sites of

reproduction in the ways briefly discussed, it is little wonder that there is no discourse of sexual harassment in public space.[xli]

I designed an open ended interview structure using Romanian surveys and studies of women's experiences of violence, which was then used for individual and group surveys.[xlii] A sample of forty-five Romanian respondents aged 18-35 (including eleven men, the majority in group interviews), identified through social and professional networks, partook in interviews lasting approximately one hour.[xliii] The interview questions were open ended and conducted informally to encourage respondents to utilise their own discourses. This structure created a conversational setting in which respondents were free to articulate their perceived position in relation to the interviewer (myself). As a foreign Romanian speaking woman connected to respondents through distant social or academic networks, I observed that respondents used language suitable for a local Romanian speaker, and yet were sensitive to explaining their meanings at length to ensure that I understood specific inferences. Respondents were more patient in answering questions for an inquisitive Australian, while a level of trust was gained through shared language and culturally specific knowledge as well as possibly through the assumption of shared experiences of gender. Due to the qualitative nature of the interviews and the sample size, I claim no results in terms of generalisable conclusions, but use these interviews to reflect upon the range of discourses used by a sample of ethnic Romanian women to articulate their experiences of the place of gender in encounters in/of public spaces in Bucharest.

Each interview began with the question of what places in Bucharest the respondent considered dangerous. While some respondents primarily answered that everywhere was equally dangerous, the vast majority named suburbs where they did not reside.[xliv] At the following prompt of 'why', approximately seventy percent of respondents answered that places were dangerous 'because of Țiganii', while the remaining minority identified potential threats in general terms for men such as *baietii de cartier*, a term which can be culturally translated as 'boys in the hood', and 'people up to no good'. Expanding further on why Țiganii/general men posed a danger, respondents detailed a chain of scenarios

including pickpockets on public transport, being talked to or asked out on the street, being touched by men and rape.

Verbal harassment was articulated most often as 'a kind of stress', and the term sexual harassment was never used. This lack of a name for a commonly occurring and feared practice reflects, in this case, its normalisation. 'Pretend not to notice' was the most common advice for how a woman should react to being approached in the street, because 'a response will just provoke them' or 'if you answer it means you want him to touch you'.[xlv] This situates verbal harassment within a series of actions while also placing responsibility for physical approach on the object of attention. Responsibility is placed on women through a widespread interpretation of rape as a sexual act incited by the feminine ideal. The Romanian woman who fulfills her supposedly natural role of sexual object, therefore, is trapped in the double bind of also being considered responsible for defending herself against men fulfilling the masculine ideal though violent sexual acts.

Numerous respondents said that it was only women who want to be touched who are assaulted, while also citing cases which did not conform to this theory. One (post graduate sociology) respondent explained that she wore jeans without make up in public space to avoid attention from men, and then recounted a recent experience of having being groped in the street by two 'younger and weaker' male children of about 13 years of age.[xlvi] This respondent began her story by pondering whether she looked 'too girly', illustrating the pervasiveness of interpreting harassment as an issue rooted in the appearance of women and their role as sexual objects for men. Another postgraduate respondent spoke at length of the way that men in groups laughed while one would make sexual comments to a passing woman, noting that these men perform for the masculine gaze and not for the gaze of the sexual object, concluding that 'a real man can make a woman afraid in front of his friends'.[xlvii] This corroborates Caputi's insights into how social discourses of sexual violence are points of masculine identification (often expressed in laughter) which simultaneously identify the women as potential victims.[xlviii]

Respondents often elaborated the fact that they were afraid of sexual violence at all times in public space. One young woman described the feelings of a friend who had to walk home alone at night after work; 'nothing has ever happened to her but she can't relax…she doesn't think 'oh, it will be ok', no, every night she is still stressed even if nothing has happened, my friend can't relax at night, one never knows when something will happen'.[xlix] The fear of sexual violence, perpetuated through events, their media coverage, and social discourses of sex crimes, is of a threat located anywhere and anytime in public space.

The question of who female respondents would approach for help in public space received a variety of responses, all variations on a theme of masculine ideal. While some women said they would find a shop space with a policeman or a security guard (an authority figure over a designated space), a Romanian man who 'looked nice' was the most common answer. One respondent reckoned 'not the police, they work with the criminals…a man, a Romanian man…not a woman – what could a woman do?', thus illustrating the nature of safe space for the feminine gendered subject as a space claimed by the masculine ideal.[l]

Returning to the articulation of the threat of public space as 'rape' in the prescriptive discourse, the interviews suggested that respondents held rape to be the most severe act of sexual violence. Rape is, however, the end point of a series of acts of sexual violence, which, despite their unnamed normalisation, include forms of verbal and physical harassment. One of the leading Romanian feminists, Mihaela Miroiu, considers widespread sexual harassment on Romanian streets 'socialisation for rape', while Sorina Neculaescu, another local feminist, terms sexual harassment 'mini-rape'.[li] Local feminist academic understandings of the role of sexual harassment thereby also situate such acts as stages linked clearly to rape. The utterance of this most severe manifestation of sex crime in the prescriptive discourse fits with the medium and its aim of educating women as to the dangers of public space in Bucharest.

While the general 'dangerous places in Bucharest' question consistently led to discourses of sexual violence in public space, no respondents raised the issue of domestic violence. Respondents were led through a series of questions as to whether they believed domestic violence took place in their area, in their block, and then amongst their family and friends. Three respondents of twenty-six individual interviews with women said that they had *not* experienced violence in their personal life from partners or family. All twenty-three other respondents volunteered the information that they had experienced violence at the hands of male partners and family members. In every case the perpetrator of the violence was Romanian. While seven respondents articulated their level of education as source of their ability to 'walk away' from the perpetrator, none of these respondents spoke of the fact that the perpetrators of violence against them had all been educated to an equal or standard than themselves.

While such a high ratio of respondents had experienced violence at the hands of Romanian men in the private sphere, none had experienced rape by Roma men. It can also be assumed that not all the sexual harassment experienced by those who used 'Ţigani' as a shortnote for the actions was perpetrated by Roma men. Actual statistics are impossible to calculate due to severe underreporting of rapes, lack of prosecutions and statistics including ethnicity, and disproportionate incarceration rates of Roma men.[lii] We must not confuse the utterance 'Ţigani', invoking a range of historically and culturally specific stereotypical discourses, with self identified ethnic Roma men, although individuals of this group are inarguably affected in the process. The question then becomes, why do Romanian women ethnicise the masculine threat of sexual violence in public space?

This paper offers no concrete conclusions, but aims to work through some possible functions of the ethnicisation of violence in public space in Romanian women's discourses. Avtah Brah provides a model for mediating the intersections of gendered discourses of ethnic Others in her study of an English community in the midst of post-World War II immigrations.[liii] Noting discourses amongst women which discursively embodied the 'intruder' as a 'form of aggressive masculinity', Brah considers that this is

discursive displacement of male aggression onto the ethnic Other through a transmutation of the Other (formerly colonised) into colonizer, so that 'the discourse converts the trangressed against into the transgressors.'[liv] This reading could be applied to the range of discourses briefly examined in which Romanians articulate the Roma ethnic Other as controlling trangressor. Indeed, we have seen how the stereotypical discourses of Ţiganii are manifest in public space, and how these discourses are utilised by respondents in their articulations of the dangers of public space; as Ţiganii in public transport, as unpredictable Others. Through invoking the ethnic Other, Romanian women may be displacing male aggression from the site of Romanian men. This creates a space for women to articulate masculine threat (which is trans-ethnic) while avoiding the possible policing of the discourse by Romanian men and simultaneously retaining the position of Romanian woman as site of reproduction of the Romanian nation and sexual object for (Romanian) male desire. In a case of danger, siding with the (Romanian male) hegemon in the gendered and ethnic matrices and locating all threat (to the national site of reproduction) in the ethnic Other is a good way of trying to gain protection. The preference for turning to Romanian men for help in public space is a physical manifestation of this strategy for survival.

The prescriptive discourse is, we must remember, a specific medium of brevity, which signposts the vital points as danger-Ţigani-rape. As we have discussed, rape is the most serious of a perceived trajectory of attacks, and is it not possible that the utterance of 'Ţigani' functions in a similar way? An attacker of an ethnicity articulated as inferior (though secretly controlling) by Romanians would be the 'worst case scenario' not only because of any stereotypical reasons, but because this would represent the power of the masculine ideal on the gendered matrix to override the ethnic hierarchy. The power of the masculine ideal is the potential to violate Romanian women as both gendered and ethnic subjects. Considering the construction of the Romanian feminine ideal in post-socialist Romania as site of national reproduction, an encounter in which the ethnic subaltern utilises the power of the masculine ideal to overcome ethnic hierarchy is an encounter which places the feminine gender outside the protection extended to her within the Romanian gendered and ethnic matrix.

By this logic, it is in the 'private sphere' of marriage that the Romanian feminine ideal is 'safe', claimed within the dominant Romanian heterosexual matrix as vital site of national reproduction. Social discourses of sex crime function to create public space as the sphere where women (especially those who inhabit their 'natural' place as sexual object) face the perpetual dangers of sexual violence. The prescriptive discourse, therefore, articulates women as both gendered and ethnic subjects vulnerable outside the protected ('natural') place of the private sphere.

Shifting our focus to agency, is it possible that the masculine ethnic subaltern does utilise the gender matrix and the nature of public space as a form of agency? While a minority of men of any ethnicity rape, is it possible to explore the question of real Roma men and public space encounters with Romanian women? It is clear that the stereotypical construction of the Roma Other as violent can be negotiated by the articulated Other to their benefit; such as thieves on buses who, through being articulated as Țiganii, can work without intervention. Romanian stereotypes of Țiganii in this context are inhabited by thieves who take advantage of the bind of powerlessness through which Romanians articulate their ethnic selves. We also know that this 'powerlessness' is avenged by the dominant Romanian ethnic group through economic and social marginalisation and oppression of the Țigani Other (in turn affecting Roma individuals). Stereotypical discourses which essentialise identity can be inhabited by Others as a means of agency, but the power of the Romanian ethnic self is consolidated within the social body as a whole through these real encounters of subaltern agency.

Encounters between gendered and ethnic Others in public space likewise hold an inherent potential for discursive manipulation, strategy and agency. Through inhabiting a stereotypical characteristic of the ethnic Other (through physical or linguistic signifiers or actions), an individual can mobilise a range of discourses (Țiganii as unpredictable, violent, powerful), a movement of agency which may bring concrete gains or a paranoid intensification of the dominant discourses. From lengthy observations, as well as

everyday lived experience, I suggest that Roma men do utilise the power of the gendered Ţigani Other in public space. It is common amongst groups of (physically and linguistically signifying) Roma men who stand along the boulevard in the centre of Bucharest, at Piata Unirii, to target a Romanian woman who walks with a Romanian man for verbal sexual harassment. The Romanian woman is clearly identified as inhabiting the feminine ideal, the Romanian man is humiliated through being unrecognised as inhabiting the masculine ideal, which should extend to 'protect' (claim) the feminine subject. The Romanian man is bound by his own discursive construction of the ethnic Other (as violent and vengeful) and cannot demand recognition of his gendered place in the social body. Such actions must be considered a seizing of agency by the ethnic subaltern that functions through the gendered and ethnic hierarchy of the Romanian social body, though the effects in the bigger picture are a consolidation of Romanian ethnic power (through stronger articulations of ethnic Otherness). These interactions of groups in the ethnic matrix also rely upon and thereby strengthen the gendered matrix as constitutive discourse of the social body.

Women's discourses and the question of agency

To question the agency of ethnic Romanian feminine subjects in the post-socialist Romanian patriarchal social structure is a necessary movement which not only recognises women as agents interacting strategically with their environments, but also enables one to reflect on lived experiences and their place in the gendered matrix of the social body. Whether or not physical and cultural survival is a project of 'agency' is central to asking whether the prescriptive discourse explored in this text can be thus defined.

The ethnicisation of the masculine threat in public space is a strategy which mobilises hegemonic ethnic discourses in the service of the feminine gendered subject, placing women in the priveleged place of the Romanian feminine ideal (site of national reproduction and sexual object). This is a strategic movement which enables individual women to place themselves as central to Romanian national reproduction, claiming the protection of the masculine ideal against the ethnic threat of the Ţigani Other. This

movement also constitutes and consolidates the private sphere (secured through the institution of marriage) as 'natural' place of the feminine subject in opposition to the perpetual threat of 'outside'. This strengthening of gendered spatial spheres further complicates the possibility of articulating violence within the 'safe' place of the home as *un*natural.

The ethnicisation of masculine threat in public space also elides the fact that Romanian men *are* complicit in sexual violence against women. Such recognition is necessary in understanding how elite, legal and media discourses perpetuate and encourage masculine identification with sexual violence. The fact that Romanian society, as dominated by the masculine ideal, relies upon sexual violence to construct gendered places as 'natural', cannot be approached while masculine aggression is disassociated from Romanian masculinity through ethnicisation.

Placing the threat of sexual violence with the Ţigani Other not only intensifies stereotypical discourses of the Other and inevitably consolidates the severity of marginalisation of real people who identify/ are identified as Roma, but precludes an interrogation of how the gendered matrix relies upon ethnic Others to strengthen and normalise its own structure. The prescriptive discourse's imperative structure (you must/should not go out alone) circumscribes activity of and places responsibility for sexual violence on the feminine subject. Even considering its aim to educate women for survival, the prescriptive discourse can not be said to reflect an agency of women amongst themselves beyond manifesting dominant discourses (which blame the victim) through a kind of 'tough love/reality bites' reading.

The prescriptive discourse, while functioning as a severe educational strategy for the physical safety of women, fails to contest the dominant discourses of gender. Displacing aggression to the ethnic Other, while a complex strategy utilising a range of ethnic and gendered discourses, can be understood as consolidating Romanian masculine hegemony. The discourse not only fails to contest the constructed place of the feminine ideal as in the home, but supports this role in an attempt to gain the masculine ideal's extended

protection. Rather than a manifestation of women's agency, the prescriptive discourse is an example of how a number of real women in Bucharest negotiate the violence of everyday spaces within a system regulated by the masculine ideal through the mobilisation of dynamic gendered and ethnic discourses.

Conclusion

The post-socialist Romanian social body, constituted by constant dynamic negotiations of gender and ethnicity, is dominated by a historically and culturally specific masculine ideal. The feminine ideal, as site of national reproduction and sexual object, constitutes the private space. The pervasive nature of social discourses of violent sex crimes, and the actions themselves, function as part of the dominant gendered social structure to make 'public space' a place of danger for women, who 'belong' in the private sphere. The use of a prescriptive discourse amongst ethnic Romanian women highlights the interactions of the gendered and ethnic matrices in articulations of public space and sexual violence. While the effects of this discourse debatably consolidate the dominance of Romanian masculinity, its existence illustrates a dynamic strategy for the negotiation of gender and its places in everyday life amongst Romanian women in contemporary Bucharest.

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[i] Gender is defined in this work as a series of acts and gestures which are 'performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means'. Butler, Judith 1990 *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* New York, Routledge; 136.

[ii] This text will use the international spelling of Roma (as opposed to the Romanian 'Rrom') except when referring to discourses in which speakers utilise the (derogatory) term 'Ţigani'(and 'Ţiganii' in plural). This term specifically invokes a range of (negative) ethnic stereotypes and also enables authorial differentiation between discourses of an ethnic group and real people identifying themselves as of Roma ethnicity.

[iii] The nature of stereotypical discourses of Roma women reflect their position as subaltern of both the gendered and ethnic social matrices. It is due to space that I limit this paper to Romanian women's discourses, Roma women's varying experiences of gender requiring a separate detailed study.

[iv] Specifically Bucur, Maria (2002) *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* Pittsburgh University Press, Pittsburgh,

Kligman, Gail (1998*) The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania,* University of California Press, Berkeley,

Verdery, Katherine "From parent-state to family patriarchs: gender and nation in contemporary Eastern Europe" in *East European Politics and Societies*, Spring 1994 vol8 n2 225-31.

[v] For concepts of 'retraditionalisation' in Romania see Băban, Adriana (2000) "Women's Sexuality and Reproductive Behaviour in Post-Ceauşescu Romania: A Psychological Approach" in Gal and Kligman (eds) *Reproducing Gender*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey and Verdery, 1998. For 'retraditionalisation' throughout post-socialist countries see Gal and Kligman (2000).

[vi] The term EUropean refers to the specific historically located concept of Europe as a united continent of varying ethno-national identities finding expression in the political and cultural concept of the European Union. In relation to post-socialist Romania, EUropean identity is a fantastical return to a 'traditional' cultural homeland which will be achieved with accession to the European Union.

[vii] Council of Europe *Gender Mainstreaming – conceptual frameworks, methodology and presentation of good practices Final Report of the Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming* Strassbourg, February 1999, and *Regular Report from the Commission on Romania's progress towards accession*, 8 November 2000

[viii] For an article addressing the spectrum of discriminations facing women in post-socialist Romania see Băban op cit.

[ix] Dragomir, Otilia (2002) "Limbaj, Gen şi Putere" in Dragomir (ed*) Femei, Cuvinte şi Imagini: perspective feministe* Polirom, Bucharest;125-183

[x] Ibid 152-3

[xi] Capuerde, Georgiana "Discriminarea femeii 'costa' 15 millioane lei" Libertatea 15 September 2001; 7

[xii] Nahoi, Ovidiu "Guvernul va veghea sa nu se mai spuna bancuri cu blonde" *Evenimentul Zilei* August 8 2002

[xiii] Surugiu, Romina "Oglindă, Oglinjoară, cine-I mai frumoasă în ţara? Imaginea femeilor în emisiunile româneşti de divertisement" in Dragomir, (ed) 2002 67-123.

[xiv] For an article detailing how stylisation of sexual violence functions in the post cold war world, see Lindsey, Rose (2000) *From atrocity to data: historiographies of rape in Former Yugoslavia and their effects on the study of the gendering of genocide.*

[xv] Caputi, Jane (1987) *The Age of Sex Crime* The Women's Press, London

[xvi] Ibid 47

[xvii] For an english translation of the article ("How to Beat Your Wife…Without Leaving Prints" Playboy, April edition, 2000) see www.tol.cz/itowa/apr00rol.html For the two published commentaries see Misleanu, Magdalena "How to Beat Your Wife" in *ANAlize*, vol 8 August 2000; 11-14 and Nistorescu, Cornel "With Playboy and the wooden spoon" *Evenimentul Zilei* editorial 25 March, 2000.

[xviii] The author is not aware of any feminist protest in Romania apart from the one mentioned, and Misleanu's article (2000)claims the anti *Play Boy* protest to be unique.

[xix] Caputi, op cit; 46 and Millett, Kate (1971) *Sexual Politics* Rupert Hart-Davis, London.

[xx] Ibid, 47

[xxi] in *Timpul Femeilor in Ţăra Bărbăţilor* (Women's Time in a Man's Land) Nr 5 November 15-December 14 1992.

[xxii] Asociaţia pentru Promovarea Femeii din România, Project "Centrul de Informare, Educaţie şi Consiliere Timişoara pentru femeile şi feţele victime ale violenţei domestice şi abuzului sexual" a survey of opinions conducted 5-7-July 2002, financed through the PHARE-ACCESS program.

[xxiii] Ibid, 46% of respondents stated that both the victim and the aggressor in cases of domestic violence were responsible for the attack.

[xxiv] It is insightful to note that the section of the penal code which could be applied to the not uncommon sight of sexual domestic violence in public space would be article 200, which applies to 'public scandal'. This is the article which is used to prosecute both organised prostitution (when it suits) and, primarily, gays and lesbians. Gays and Lesbians can and have been charged throughout the 1990s for associating in public space (the *potential* to create public scandal violates article 200; thereby extending to rooms with windows which could be viewed and signs of physical affection in hallways of apartment blocks). Heterosexual persons are not arrested for 'public scandal'. See the Human Rights Watch International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission report (1998) *Public Scandals: Sexual Orientation and Criminal Law in Romania,* Arta Grafica, New York and London. Needless to say, overt sexual harassment and violence in public space are not addressed in legislation. Together these factors plot the construction of gendered spaces and places in Romanian society.

[xxv] Romanian stereotypes of ethnicised (Other) femininities have existed throughout history as a means of creating the Romanian feminine ideal against ethnic Others. A contemporary example is the articulation of Roma women as exotic and overtly sexual. There is also a burgeoning discourse which claims to recognise

(primarily for stigmatisation and attack) Lesbian identity. Young women who dress in casual clothes/pants with short hair may, for the first time, expect to be harassed in the street as Lesbians.(personal observation from research in June/July 2002) The popularisation of discourses of homosexuality can be attributed to the massive right wing sponsored public campaign *against* repealing article 200 which has been underway since 2000 (also an issue of 'real' versus EUropean Romanian identity). The circumscription of the act has disseminated awareness and knowledge to unprecedented extents. For a study of this process see Butler, Judith (1997) *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* Routledge, New York and London.

xxvi This reading is based on the work of Homi K. Bhabha, see *The Location of Culture*, 1994, Routledge, London and New York.

xxvii Lemon, Alaina (2000) "Talking Transit and Spectating Transition: The Moscow Metro" in Berdahl, D. Bunzl, M. and Lampland, M. *Altering States: Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* University of Michigan Press, Michigan; 14-39; page 14.

xxviii For Roma slavery in Romania and after see Achim, Viorel (1998) *Ţiganii în Istoria României* Editura Enciclopedică, Bucharest, and Hancock, Ian (1988) *The Pariah Syndrome*, Ann Arbour. This section is based on my forthcoming PhD thesis, which traces Romanian stereotypical discourses of Roma Others through history.

xxix See *Gazeta de Bucureşti*, Şaptaminal editat de Frontul Salvarii Național 1990 Numbers 2-14 May-August 1990.

xxx See especially Humphrey, Caroline (1999) "Traders, "Disorder" and Citizenship Regimes in Provincial Russia" in Burawoy, M. and Verdery, K. (ed) *Uncertain Transition* Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham.

xxxi Romanians utilise the ethnic stereotypes of Ţiganii not only to explain economic changes, but as part of articulating market spaces themselves. A recent Masters thesis dealing with discourses of backpacker tourism in Bucharest specifically took issue with Lonely Planet's description of a large market (Bucur Obor) as a 'Romanian experience'. The author stipulates that this particular market is a 'Ţigani place' and definitely not Romanian. The author's rebuke uses ethnicity to express perceptions of black market trade and disorder. This perception of Bucur Obor remains despite its overwhelmingly Romanian traders and the regulations of police and administration which have effectively 'ordered' the market (a vote winner of the Mayor, Traian Băsescu since 2000) see Neagu, Diana *Turismul International ca Inventariere Culturală* Masters Thesis, Bucharest University of Political Science, 2001.

xxxii Lemon, op cit.

xxxiii Ibid 27

xxxiv Memorandum nr.H03/169 of 31 January 1995 from the Minister of External Affairs declared that the term "tigan" would be used in official documents. Following extensive protests and petitions from Roma organisations, Memorandum Nr.D2/1094 29 February 2000 from Petre Roman (Prime Minister) repealed the former decision and replaced "tigan" with "rom" for use in official documents.

xxxv see the following newspaper articles Munteanu, Lelia "Ţigani de lux şi second hand" in *Adevarul* 15 October 2001 pg 1and 15. Popovici, Petru "După modelul Piatra Neamţ: Cartier pentru ţiganii şi la Deva" *Adevarul* 13 October pg. 12.

xxxvi Ghinea, Cristian "Între noi fie vorba, rromii tot ţigani sint" in *Dilema* 19 October 2001, pg 3.

xxxvii "M. Voicu 'o sanse creada ca pâina in 2020 România se va scrie cu doi 'r'" *Evenimentul Zilei*, 5 July 2002 pg 3. Despite the census reporting falling numbers of ethnic minorities, the majority of reports garnered quotes from Rroma representatives concerning under-representation and still presented the census as signalling the imminent extinction of the Romanian nation.

xxxviii For writing gender in history see Spivak, Gayatri (1999) *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* Harvard University Press, Massachusetts and London. Scholars of the subaltern studies collective also deal extensively with issues of sourcing the subaltern.

xxxix Grunberg, Laura "Stories from the time I tried to be a good Foisoreanca" *in ANAlize: Revista de Studii Feministe* Vol5 August 1999, 16.

xl I was aware of this discourse through 1997-1999 and began making notes of each occasion it was presented to me in 2000. Rarely did a new female acquaintance *not* perform this discourse.

xli I will use the term sexual harassment to mean any unwelcome verbal or physical sexual approaches which take place in public spaces such as the street and public transport. For more about sexual harassment and its history as a term in post socialist societies see Daskalova, Krassimira "Women's Problems, Women's Discourses in Bulgaria" (337-369), Fuszara, Malgorzata "New Gender Relations in Poland I nthe

1990s" (259-285) and Grunberg, Laura "Women's NGOs in Romania" (307-336) in Gal and Kligman, (ed) (2000) Reproducing Gender, Princeton University Press, New Jersey

xlii Surveys included *Report of Asociația pentru Promovarea Femeii din România* (July 2002), Grunberg L. op cit 2000, Olteanu, Tatiana 1998 *Studiu de opinie privind violența asupra femeii în familie* (www.pitesti.ro/grado/studiu_ro.html) last accessed August 5, 2002,

xliii My personal thanks for networks of samples to Alin Ciupala (Department of History, Bucharest University) and Diana Neagu.

xliv Most cited 'dangerous' suburbs were, in order of frequency, Ferentari, Rahova, Pantelimon and Cringasi. This articulation of 'new'(socialist period, post 1970) suburbs and city as dangerous in opposition to the old 'authentic' centre of Bucharest is in keeping with post socialist discursive articulation of Ceausescu's 'new city' as corrupt, and the pre-Ceausescu city as genuine. See Buica, C., Popescu, M. and Tomescu, O. "Bucureștiul văzut de Bucureșteni; reprezentări speciale ale spațiului urban" in *Revista de Cercetari Sociale* Vol 3 1995 111-115.

xlv Interview I, 07-03-2002 and Interview D, 07-03-2002.

xlvi Interview D, 07-03-2002. Note that the respondent's articulation of her harassers as 'weaker' shows the encounter's rupture of 'natural' discourses which conceal feminine 'weakness' as a biological trait normalising physical harassment.

xlvii Interview I, 07-03-2002

xlviii Caputi, op cit; 46.

xlix Group Interview A, 07-12-2002. The respondent's generalised conclusion 'one never knows' locates the value of her example as applicable to all women.

l Interview L 06-30-2002

li see Miroiu, Mihaela (1997) "Experiențele Femeilor" in *Gen si Societate* Alternative, Bucharest; 81 and Neculaescu, Sorina (2000) "Corpul Femeii – Trofeu al Dominației Masculine" in *ANAlize* September 2000; 15-16.

lii For further information on Roma and the penal system see Romani CRISS și Agenția de Monitizoare a Presei, *Prezentarea romilor in presa românesca*, Report February-August 2000 or the Open Society Institute's European Union Monitoring Program's *Protecția Minoritaților in România*, central European University Press, Budapest and New York, 2001. For insight into Romanian police mechanisms of 'keeping tabs on' the Roma community see Amza, Tudor *Fenomenul infracțional în rîndul țiganilor: Activitați specific Poliției Române pentru protenjarea etniei și prevenirea faptelor antisociale* Academie de Poliției Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Bucharest.

liii Brah, Avtah (2000) "The scent of memory: strangers, our own and others" in Brah, Avtah and Coombes, Annie E. *Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, science culture* Routledge, London and New York, 272-290.

liv Ibid. 277