

<http://revped.ise.ro>

Print ISSN 0034-8678; Online ISSN: 2559 - 639X

THE PRESENCE OF ROMA LIFE'S EXPERIENCES, TRADITIONS AND HISTORY IN THE ROMANIAN TEXTBOOKS – A CONTENT ANALYSIS FROM A SOCIAL JUSTICE PERSPECTIVE

Prezența experiențelor vieții, a tradițiilor și a istoriei romilor în manualele
românești – o analiză a conținutului din perspectiva justiției sociale

Cristina TUNEGARU

Journal of Pedagogy, 2020 (1), 93 - 114

<https://doi.org/10.26755/RevPed/2020.1/93>

The online version of this article can be found at: <http://revped.ise.ro/category/2020/>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.
To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA
94042, USA.

Published by:

**CENTRUL NAȚIONAL DE POLITICI ȘI EVALUARE ÎN EDUCAȚIE
UNITATEA DE CERCETARE ÎN EDUCAȚIE**

<http://www.ise.ro/>

<https://rocnee.eu/>

Further information about *Revista de Pedagogie – Journal of Pedagogy* can be found at:

Editorial Policy: <http://revped.ise.ro/editorial-policy/>

Author Guidelines: <http://revped.ise.ro/the-writer-guide-2/>

THE PRESENCE OF ROMA LIFE’S EXPERIENCES, TRADITIONS AND HISTORY IN THE ROMANIAN TEXTBOOKS – A CONTENT ANALYSIS FROM A SOCIAL JUSTICE PERSPECTIVE

Cristina Tunegaru*

University of Bucharest,
Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences,
Bucharest, Romania
cristina.tunegaru@gmail.com

Abstract

Roma people have been victims of oppression in Romania for many centuries, “in the long course of the Gypsy experience in Eastern Europe, none has been worse than that in Romania” (Crowe & Kolsti, 1991, p. 61). Nowadays, education can play a key role in assuring that the Roma are treated with respect and dignity, in assuring that they receive recognition, while dismantling the stigma.

This paper is the outcome of a study of the representation of minority students in Romanian textbooks. While many educational reforms were targeted to increase Roma students’ attendance and results - schools with Roma language teaching, textbooks in Roma native language, affirmative actions for high school and university students of Roma origin – it’s an open question as to whether the Romanian textbooks are sufficiently inclusive and effective in combating racial discrimination and stereotyping.

By employing a social justice perspective, I argue that textbooks systematically discriminate against Roma children by under- and misrepresenting the Roma experiences, traditions and history. My argument unfolds through two main directions from the data analysis. Firstly, we examine primary and middle school (2nd grade - 6th grade) textbooks in search for representations of Roma realities and culture. Secondly, we explore the presentation or absence of historical facts regarding Roma. This exploratory study hopes to become a starting point for a discussion about

* PhD Candidate, University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Bucharest, Romania.

applied curriculum in Romania, specifically the textbook component. Limited comparative data was collected and stark differences can be inferred between the attention devoted to Hungarian culture and realities versus the Roma, but further research is warranted.

Keywords: minorities, oppression, Roma, social justice.

Rezumat

Persoanele apar înând minorit ii rome au fost victime ale opresiunii în România timp de mai multe secole, „în lunga prezen a romilor în Europa de Est, nic ieri experien a lor nu a fost mai grea decât în România” (Crowe & Kolsti, 1991, p. 61). În prezent, educa ia poate juca un rol cheie în a garanta c romii sunt trata i cu respect i demnitate, c primesc recunoa tere f r a fi stigmatiza i.

Aceast lucrare este rezultatul unui studiu privind reprezent ri ale minorit ilor în manualele române ti. În vreme ce multe reforme educa ionale au avut ca obiectiv îmbun t irea prezen ei la cursuri i a rezultatelor colare – coli cu predare în limba romani, manuale în limba romani, locuri rezervate la liceu i facultate pentru elevii de etnie rom – r mâne o întrebare deschis m sura în care manualele române ti sunt suficient de incluzive i eficiente în combaterea discrimin rii rasiale i a stereotipurilor.

Utilizând perspectiva justi ie sociale, argument m c manualele discrimineaz sistematic elevii romi prin subreprezentarea experien elor, a tradi iilor i a istoriei rome. Analiza datelor permite explorarea a dou direc ii de argumentare. În primul rând, am examinat manualele pentru coala primar i gimnazial (clasele a II-a - a VI-a) c utând reprezent ri ale realit ilor i culturii rome. În al doilea rând, am explorat prezen a sau absen a datelor istorice referitoare la etnia rom . Sper m ca aceast explorare s devin un punct de plecare pentru o discu ie despre curriculumul aplicat din România, componenta analizat în cazul nostru fiind manualele colare aprobate de Ministerul Educa iei. S-a colectat, de asemenea, o cantitate limitat de date comparative care sugereaz o aten ie dispropor ionat pentru minoritatea maghiar în raport cu cea rom , aceste date deschizând posibilitatea unor cercet ri ulterioare.

Cuvinte-cheie: justi ie social , minorit i, opresiune, romi.

1. Introduction

The Roma living in Romania have a long history of socio-economic problems, poverty, marginalization, isolation and invisibility. Only in the second half of the 19th century, the enslaving of the Roma in Romania ceased. However, the free Roma were not given the opportunities to prosper, instead they were segregated at the periphery of the cities and lived in deprivation and returned to their traditional occupations. As has happened throughout the Eastern bloc, the communist regime tried to erase every ethnic characteristic, and the Roma began to be assimilated (Elleh, 2014). Only after 1989, after the fall of the communist regime, the Roma gained their place as a minority, the second biggest minority in Romania. However, the great majority of the Roma still experience poverty and deprivation, with 3 out of 5 Roma still living in destitution in 2008 (Fleck & Rughini , 2008).

Roma children face great challenges in school, as the number of drop outs within the Roma population are more than six time the baseline values, indeed, more than 80% of drop outs are Roma children (Ivan & Rostas, 2013). The power dynamic which renders Roma groups as marginals generates a series of *survival strategies*, in order to resist external forces of assimilation and to preserve the cultural legacy, what Carol Silverman calls “the negotiation of Gypsiness” (as cited in Barany, 1994, p. 325). For this reason, the real number of ethnic Roma is unknown.

In order to address these problems, a series of policies were implemented by the Ministry of Education. First, the Roma groups were acknowledged as a national minority with specific educational demands. Second, affirmative action policies for the Roma were implemented. Third, classes and schools teaching in Rromani language started to develop around the country. Alongside this development, a curriculum for the Roma was implemented and textbooks for the subject of Rromani language were created. In addition, the Ministry of Education developed two optional courses for Roma students, concerning the history and the culture of Roma groups.

However, the issue of Rromani teaching in Romania faces a number of problems. First, Roma groups are very diverse in Romania (Barany, 1994),

not all groups speak Rromani language. The Roma are not a people, rather they constitute social groups with various characteristics.

Second, there is a shortage of teachers specialized in Rromani language. After the Romanian Revolution, one university in the country started to offer a program for Rromani language (tef nescu, 2005). Our own research was unable to identify any new Rromani section being established in the intervening decades, with the exception of optional Rromani language courses. Considering the number of Roma reaching university is very small, only a few teachers specialized in Rromani language graduate each year. When there are not specialized teachers in the school, the optional courses are not available.

Third, due to the stigma associated with being Roma, a great number of people deny their ethnicity. Certain policies of affirmative action are associated with a positive impact on formal ethnical identification of Roma people.

Another problem is school segregation, a phenomenon which manifests at many levels: inside the classroom, when students of low socio-economic background are placed at the back of the classroom; between classes of the same level, when students are placed discriminatory in specific classes according to their background or performance at the school level, when Roma children study in a different building than their non-Roma peers. Segregation has a profound negative impact on the educational provision (Greenberg, 2010). Schools tend to do their best for the high-performance classes: the best teachers, better educational experiences, while lessening their expectation and their involvement for the less-performing classes. In segregated classes, Roma students are enrolled in Roma classes or sent to schools with a predominant Roma population. In both situations the educational provision is poorer than for the rest of the population (Petrova, 2003).

2. Cultural imperialism and textbooks

The marginal status of Roma groups in Romania requires a social justice perspective in the educational field. In her theory of social justice, Iris Young

(1990) develops a framework in which justice is examined through forms of injustice, materialized in oppression and domination. We have employed the concept of oppression in regard to textbook representations in order to explore the textual and visual representations of Roma history, personalities, culture in textbooks for primary and middle education, grades 2nd-6th.

In Young's view, oppression "refers to systemic and structural phenomena" (idem, p. 270) "that immobilize or reduce a group" (idem, p. 272). The structural nature of oppression relies in the everyday practices, common narratives, gestures, attitudes of people who don't see themselves as oppressors. Oppression acts almost invisibly through social manifestations which are rendered as usual, acceptable. While the oppressor must not be seen as a *tyrant* who acts intentionally to limit or reduce one specific group, "the oppressed people share some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings" (ibidem). When injustice manifests, it affects people who identify with a specific social group. As Young points out, individuals don't choose to be part of a group, instead they find themselves part of a social group. One can identify with more than one group, so groups overlap.

The national curriculum, the result of a consensus regarding educational ideals and objectives, is a communicative tool. Curriculum includes "not only texts, but also other instructional materials, programs, projects, physical environments for learning, interactions among teachers and students, and all the intended and unintended messages about expectations, hopes, and dreams that students, their communities, and schools have about student learning and the very purpose of schools" (Nieto et al., 2008, p. 176). This exploratory study focuses only on the textbook curricular component and it is intended as a starting point for a discussion about minority representation and educational outcomes that should involve the entire educational process. In regard to textbooks, oppression can manifest through cultural imperialism; the term is defined by Young as follows:

"The experience of existing with a society whose dominant meanings render the particular perspectives and point of view of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other." (Young, 1990, p. 285)

Two key points emerge from the definition: first, cultural imperialism creates a hierarchy of values within society, the point of view of one group becomes the norm, the acceptable, while the others are marked as different, wrong, unacceptable. Second, the universalization together with the validation of the dominant group's experiences, creates a set of stereotypes used to devalue the difference, which furthermore immobilize and limit one's possibilities and potential. Oftentimes, the dominant group's cultural views are described as unique, "representative of humanity as such" (ibidem). We argue that the Roma life's experiences, traditions and history are less present in student textbooks. The absence can be a form of oppression, as it becomes a communicative instrument for what is meaningful.

Textbooks are interpretations of the curriculum by their respective authors and teachers can choose between alternative textbooks. In Romania, textbooks have gained authority, they comprise what is valuable to be transmitted to next generations, what is acceptable and worthy. Through text, image, the presence or the absence, textbooks map the meaningful cultural, social, economic, political knowledge. The choice of integrating one group's experiences and ignoring another group from textbooks are forms of cultural imperialism.

3. Methodology

The current study aims to investigate the ways in which Roma realities are portrayed in textbooks of 2-6 grades. The research question is focused around the number of references to Roma, the manner of presentation in textbooks for students, the extent of the references, as well as the illustrations depicting Roma. The choice of the textbook sample is in line with recent curricular reforms that have prompted the publication of new textbooks for children that started school in 2013. The older textbooks for grades 7 and 8 are soon to be obsolete and the 1st grade textbooks are not pertinent to the study. Indeed, even the 2nd grade textbooks include no references to Roma and minorities, the first general references to diversity beginning in the 3rd grade.

The research method used is content analysis which brings together qualitative and quantitative elements. As Holsti (1969, p. 14) points out,

“content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages”.

Through this research we have examined a number of 189 student textbooks currently used in primary education (for 2nd - 4th grades), 5th and 6th grades. Table 1 comprises the number of textbooks included in the analysis.

The data was collected through content analysis of all the textbooks that matched our criteria made available online by the Education Ministry on the dedicated platform (<http://manuale.edu.ro>). The platform was accessed in August 2019 and the selection criteria were grades 2-6, published in Romanian, according to the revised curriculum. Publication dates were between 2016 and 2018 inclusively.

Table no. 1. Number of student textbooks by subject and grade

Subject	Number of student textbooks				
	2 nd grade	3 rd grade	4 th grade	5 th grade	6 th grade
Romanian Language	4	6	4	9	2
Mathematics	4	6	2	7	2
TIC				6	3
Science/ Biology		6	5	9	2
Geography			6	6	1
Personal Development				5	
Physics					2
History			4	8	1
Religion	4	6	9	2	2
Music		6	6	2	2
Sports				3	1
Technological Ed		4	2	6	2
Arts (painting)				1	1
Social education		6	4	8	2
Total	12	40	42	72	23

The textbooks were searched for Romanian words pertinent to the research subject: *rom/rrom*, *igan*, *etnic/etnie*, *minoritate*. When possible, the textbooks were searched digitally for an appropriate stem in order to find all inflexions and diacritical forms (e.g., **igan**, **ig n**, **rom**, *minor**, etc.); a minority of textbooks were manually searched as the format precluded digital search. The data was coded and put into themes: visual, textual, historical, etc.

We have employed Zacho's (2017) framework and their categories for analysis: 1) number of references; 2) extent of references: short or long texts; 3) character of the references: positive or negative; 4) manner of description. Zacho's instrument is useful, as it allows to organize and structure the extent to which one group is present in the textbook imaginary. Consequently, the analysis follows, through closely monitored steps, first, a quantitative approach and then a qualitative approach to effectively deconstruct and interpret the data.

Limitations

This study refers to textbooks for 2nd-6th grades published in 2016-2018. Consequently, we have only analyzed textbooks corresponding to two years out of four years of middle school compulsory education. We have employed a comparative approach focusing on Roma and Hungarian representations in primary school textbooks. This comparative analysis is limited to textbooks until grade 5.

Notably, the textbooks offer the author's perspective on the themes included in the curriculum. The texts, the classroom activities, the exercises and the projects represent the author's interpretation of the curriculum.

4. Results

4.1. Number of references

The words *rom* and *igan* referring to the Roma minority appear for 76 times. Table 2 includes the number of references and the textbooks where they appear.

Table no. 2. Number of references by grade and subject

Student textbook	Number of references 2nd and 3rd grade	Number of references 4th grade		Number of references 5th grade		Number of references 6th grade	
	Rom/Rrom/ igan	Rom/Rrom	igan	Rom/Rrom	igan	Rom/Rrom	igan
Romanian Language	0	0	0	3	7	0	0
History	0	9		0	0	0	0
Social Education	0	2		35	1	9	1
Musics	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Geography	0	8		0	0	0	0
Total	0	19	1	38	8	9	1

As previously explained, the references to Roma are very rare in primary school textbooks – grades 2-4. No references to Roma can be found in textbooks for 2nd and 3rd grades. However, diversity is discussed in general terms, rather using international, than local references.

While some discussion about diversity is introduced in 2nd and 3rd grade textbooks, the Roma are mentioned starting with 4th grade History textbooks. Nonetheless, the word *Roma* is used mainly for the purpose of enumerating the minorities living in the country (Geography, Aramis, 4th grade, pp. 50-51; Geography, Arthur, 4th grade, p. 54; Geography, Intuitext, 4th grade, p. 26; History, Aramis, 4th grade, p. 41; Social Ed., Aramis, 4th grade, p. 16; Social Ed., CdPress, 4th grade, p. 23).

There is little information about the financial, economic or social status of the Roma. Only one paragraph offers general information about this minority. However, it emphasizes the otherness of the Roma, by pointing out the Indian origin, their nomadic character, their traditional occupations which are related to poverty, marginalization and isolation. The discourse conveys a group of people different from the Romanian majority by means of occupation, language and origin which inhabit Romania designated as *our land*. According to the paragraph reproduced below, the Roma still live in a pre-modern state, strangers among other cultures:

“The Roma have their origin in medieval India. Being nomads (travelers without a stable domicile), they have spread throughout Europe. Today, many Roma living in our country practice trades they inherited from

their ancestors: they make pots (c ld rari), they process gold (zlatari), they put on shows with bears (ursari), etc.

Nowadays, the Roma have become sedentary, adopting the language and culture of the nation in which they have integrated, although many still speak the Romani language.”

(History, Aramis, 4th grade, p. 42)

To bring the data into perspective, a similar albeit less detailed analysis was performed for the Hungarian minority, limited to the 4th grade textbooks. As can be seen from the table below, the number of references for Roma is significantly lower than those for “maghiar”. A caveat here is that Hungarians had a history of living in Transylvania as part of an empire. Considering this limitation, the references to the Hungarian ethnicity are still more recurrent than what the subject matter would imply:

Table no. 3. Number of references for Rom and Maghiar in primary school textbooks

	<i>Rom / igan</i>	<i>Maghiar / Ungur</i>
No. of occurrences	20	72

4.2. Extent of references

We have distinguished between instances where Roma appear as a word in a sentence, a short paragraph and a long paragraph.

In the first category we include:

- 1) 16 one word references, mainly for the purpose of **enumerating the national minorities** in the country (Geography, 4th grade, Intuitext, p. 26, p. 55; Geography, 4th grade, Aramis, pp. 50-51; Geography, 4th grade, Arthur, p. 54; History, 4th grade, Aramis, p. 41; History, 4th grade, Corint Educational, p. 45; Civic Education, 4th grade, Aramis, p. 16; Civic Education, 4th grade, CD press, p. 23; Social Ed., 6th grade, EDP, p. 24, p. 43; Social Ed., 5th grade, Litera, p. 37), **their celebration date** (Social Ed., 6th grade, EDP, p. 43; Romanian Language, 5th grade, Litera, p. 91), **minorities festivals** (Social Ed., 6th grade, EDP, p. 41).

- 2) one reference to **dance** (Music and movement, 4th grade, Aramis, 2nd part, p. 51).
- 3) 4 references related to **school activities/ projects** regarding the Roma (Romanian Language, 5th grade, Litera, p. 97; Social Ed., 5th grade, Litera, p. 31, p. 32; Social Ed., 5th grade, Aramis, p. 59).

In the second category, which comprises short paragraphs and short texts, each of which includes at least one occurrence of the relevant terms, we include:

- 1) 21 fragments tackling **discrimination, stereotypes** and **racial issues** (Social Ed., 5th grade, Ascedia design, p. 72, p. 95); (Social Ed., 5th grade, Litera, p. 30; Social Ed., 5th grade Litera, p. 32, p. 77); (Social Ed., 5th grade, Cd press, p. 33, p. 47, p. 74, p. 62); (Social Ed., 5th grade, Aramis, p. 13, p. 61, p. 62; Social Ed., 6th grade, EDP, pp. 43-44).
- 2) Short texts concerning social, economic condition of Roma students (Social Ed., 5th grade, Litera, p. 31), reasons for **dropout**; economic **deprivation, child abuse** (Social Ed., 5th grade, Litera, p. 74).
- 3) Short text concerning **Roma history, culture** (History, 4th grade, Aramis, p. 42).

On the other hand, references to Hungarian are usually whole paragraphs, even an entire page is dedicated to Hungarian historical personalities (History, 4th grade, Corint Ed., p. 42).

The relatively significant number of references to minorities suggest that the topics are salient in the textbook authors' perspective. However, this interest does not extend to the Roma minority, despite its comparable population to the Hungarians.

4.3. Character of the references: positive, neutral, negative

The character of the references refers to the positive or negative meaning of a context referring to Roma. The positive references are associated with cultural, historical information about the Roma. For example, a note that informs students that 8 of April marks the *International Romani day* (Social Education, 6th grade, EDP, p. 43). Another positive example is the case of

the textbook which discourages students to use the pejorative term *igan* (Romanian Language, 5th grade, Litera).

In the neutral category, we have included one word references which have little value and school activities targeted to combat stereotypes and discrimination against the Roma, as they imagine a desired order of society. References with a negative impact are as follows:

- 1) 9 contexts which use the term *igan(i)*;
- 2) exercises/ classroom activities where the topic of discrimination is introduced, without being explicitly discouraged. For example, one Social Education textbook proposes a role play activity in which students are asked to imagine they are a 14 year old illiterate Roma girl. (Social Education, 6th grade, EDP, p. 43).

Table 4 comprises 4 positive references, 57 neutral references and 15 negative references.

Table no. 4. Character of reference by grade and subject

Textbook	4th grade			5th grade			6th grade		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Language and Communication				2	2	6			
Social Education		2			35	1	1	6	3
History		5	4						
Geography	1	7							
Music			1						
Total	1	14	5	2	37	7	1	6	3

4.4. Manner of description

The imagine of the Roma is comprised of simple, yet harsh notes, which can strengthen stereotypes and confirm racialized narratives. There is very little information about the present life, the culture, the diversity within the Roma groups. Textbooks offer limited information which concerns: the presence of the group among other minorities, the Indian origin, the nomadic past, some traditional occupations, few remarks on the Romani language.

4.5. Absent history

Historical accounts about the relationships between the Romanian majority and the Roma minority are ignored, even when these are key elements for the comprehension of a text (Romanian Language, 5th grade, Litera). Even when storylines characters are Roma slaves (*Vasile Porojan*), the context of Roma slavery in Romania is ignored. The enslaving of Roma people which lasted for five centuries created a specific power dynamic between ethnicities and was part to the formation of the Romanian identity, in which oppression against specific groups became hegemonic:

“Forces of domination were generated during the emergence of a pan-Romania social formation, creating conditions of prejudice that became hegemonic. This form of cultural domination stereotyped ethnicities as natural or biologically determined cultural, social and economic proclivities of certain groups. In this sense, Gypsies came to be seen as universally marginal sub-humans.”

(Beck, 1989, p. 54)

Textbooks do little to repel the stereotyping of Roma, choosing the discourse of the absence. However, the cultural contribution of the Roma groups cannot be ignored. During the long period of slavery, the Roma were driven to specific roles within the Romanian society, contributing to the economic and cultural life. The Roma were craftsmen, iron smiths, cooks, they produced music, embroidery (Beck, 1989). Nonetheless, the cultural domination of the Roma assigned them a parallel cultural road which is de-valued, just as the Roma slaves were de-humanized.

This domination is seen even in the choice of words which designate Roma groups. Although more than 100 years ago, in 1919, the Roma communities in Romania, at the meeting in Ibasfalau/ Dumbraveni, in Transylvania, have militated for eliminating the derogatory term *igan* from official documents, the word is still present in students' textbooks:

“As children and citizens of the great Romanian nation, not wanting to be considered foreigners in a foreign country, as we have been considered for centuries, please: from here on, in all official Romanian documents, the naming (nickname) of ‘*igan*’ shall no longer be used to ridicule us and our descendants. “

(as cited in Buzducea, 2013)

Some textbooks use both words (Romanian Language, 5th grade, Litera), and a single instance was found that discourages students to use the form *igan(i)*. The selection of the words is neither justified, nor presented as substantial. Until recently (2012), the Romanian Language Dictionary considered the words *rom* and *igan* as synonyms, with the word *igan* also encompassing a pejorative meaning: *person with bad habits*. At one point, *igan* included the sense *slave* (Achim, 1998, p. 33). At the initiative of NGOs, the definition of the word *igan* was changed in 2011, so that the offensive connotation is now clear (Annual Report, Agen ia Împreun , p. 25).

Evidently, this linguistic battle, an incontestable evidence of the oppression the Roma have experienced, is yet to be reflected into textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education.

Social Education textbooks (5th and 6th grades) discuss the issues of discrimination, racial stereotypes and have the potential to enable critical thinking strategies through the real-life events they embody. These contexts usually portray Roma children being rejected, victimized, punished, abused by their Romanian colleagues, friends, neighbors or even their parents for being Roma. It is in the teacher's power to appropriately tackle such sensitive situations and to encourage tolerance, acceptance and empathy. However, the decision to rely mainly on teacher's classroom contribution in order to combat discrimination can become oppressive as such. A recent research led by University Babe Bolyai (B descu et al., 2018) revealed that one in seven teachers think Roma students ought to be separated from other ethnicities. Moreover, almost half of the teachers in favor of segregation support it for the benefit of Romanian students, as "Roma students' behavior would make teaching difficult for the rest of the students" (idem, p. 17).

The cited study found that for Romanian teachers, Roma are the third most undesirable group to have as neighbors, after drug addicts and alcoholics - more than 40% of questioned teachers don't want to be neighbors with Roma people (idem, p. 8). This preference is associated with harsh schooling conditions - poor safety, the presence of children from vulnerable groups, poor exam results, bad management (idem, p. 18).

With respect to the interaction between Roma groups and other ethnicities,

textbooks present very little information. The interactions between the Roma and the Romanians are sources of critical engagement with race issues and are based on fictional events which tackle rejection, domination. Only one picture illustrates a possible communication between people belonging to the two groups. However, the instance suggests a power asymmetry: while the Romanian woman faces the viewer, the Roma woman's face cannot be seen, she is not to be distinguished and treated as an equal person to the other.

4.6. Minorities' personalities

While every History textbook for Primary school develops at least one activity concerning people representing minorities, there is no Roma personality depicted in any textbook. We consider this absence especially important in the attempt for intercultural education. Roma realities are invisible, they do not penetrate the dominant culture.

On the other hand, Hungarian personalities can be seen in many instances. Hungarians are inventors – Rubik's cube and the pen were invented by two Hungarians, László Biró and Ernő Rubik (History, 4th grade, Corint, p. 29), military leaders and kings – Tuhutum (History, 4th grade, Corint, p. 42), Matei Corvin (History, 4th grade, Corint, p. 55) and the brilliant ruler Gabriel Bethlen (History, 4th grade, Corint, p. 60), chroniclers writing about injustice such as Ludovic Tubero (History, 4th grade, Corint, p. 59), writers and scientists like János Apáczai Csere (History, 4th grade, Corint, p. 60). Even more, the Hungarian language is described as a language of culture and great achievements in many fields:

“In the Hungarian language, valuable literary works have been written by great cultural people like Sándor Pëtofi, Ady Endre or Imre Kertész. The Hungarian people gave the world great scholars and scientists, mathematicians and renowned doctors, but also artists like composers Franz Liszt or Bela Bartók.”

(History, 4th grade, Corint, p. 28)

Roma people who could represent their ethnicity and are successful in Arts, Science, Journalism are not mentioned in primary school textbooks. No other Roma role models are introduced. This absence is significant not only to

Roma children, but also to their non-Roma peers, as Roma becomes associated with failure. This absence is an evidence of cultural imperialism, an oppression which narrows educational possibilities; one cannot see behind the cage one is locked into (Frye, 1983).

4.7. Roma characters in storylines

Three literary pieces illustrate stories with Roma characters. The most frequent story present in two Romanian Language textbooks (Romanian Language, 5th grade, Aramis, p. 76; Romanian Language, 5th grade, Litera, p. 90) and one Social Education textbook (Social Ed., 5th grade, CdPress, p. 76), *Vasile Porojan*, is the story of a friendship between a Romanian boy and a *igan*. Textbooks guide the reading-comprehension differently, either ignoring the racial dimension of the text (Aramis) or exploring the racial theme in depths (Litera). A major contribution in the comprehension process is made through illustrations, which influence the first interaction with the text. One illustration (Romanian Language, 5th grade, Aramis, p. 76) presents the two boys at the first page of the text, running happily and smiling. The differences between them are strongly emphasized through clothing, shoes, color of hair. The Romanian boy is carefully dressed in a clean, traditional white blouse, and smiling while gazing at the sun. On the contrary, at the bottom of the page there lies the figure of the Roma which is created through darker tones, his skin is brown, his hair disheveled, while his clothes are too small and unkempt. The Roma has no shoes and runs bare feet on the ground. He does not look at the sun, but, symbolically, he looks up at the Romanian boy.

When the reading-comprehension strategies focus on the racial theme (Romanian Language, 5th grade, Litera, pp. 90-92), the discourse reveals contradictory attitudes. While the title of the lesson pleads for equality (Beyond social / ethnic differences), for a perspective in which differences could be abolished, the authors' choice for guiding the comprehension has significant flaws. First of all, there is a significant lack of coherent information about the status of the Roma in the past. While the text slightly points out issues of liberty, the comprehension process ignores the reality of slavery. Vasile Porojan was a slave, as many Roma people still were in

the nineteenth century in Romania. However, the textbook only uses the word *rob* which has a double meaning in Romanian, one of them being *laborer*, thus the textbook allows a degree of confusion. Moreover, the term *Rom* is never mentioned in referring to the main character, the textbook uses the word *ig nesc*, while discouraging students to use the word *igan*.

Second, some textbook activities devalue the Roma people by delimiting the spaces they can occupy in society - asking students to place the Romanian and the Roma on an imaginary scale of values (Romanian Language, 5th grade, Litera, p 91). Third, the power asymmetry is validated through the absence of historical information about the living conditions of Roma in the past. The Roma inferior status is presumed, allowed and never contested. The reading comprehension strategies envisage a reality in which the Roma is bound to the lower levels of societies as opposed to his wealthy Romanian friend. The authors choose the sentence *He had a brilliant social career* (idem, p. 92) in reference to the non-Roma child and the sentence *He could not hope for any social achievement due to ethnicity* (ibidem) for the Roma child. Ethnicity becomes an unsurmountable confinement.

However, literary pieces must not be treated as mere fictional instances, as *through children's books, children shape their thinking about themselves, their peers and society, they sense what is expected from them and they gradually develop modes of thinking and behaving that suit their constructed roles as boys or girls, disabled or non-disabled children, children from ethnic minority groups or children from the dominant culture* (Monoyiou & Symeonidou, 2016). *Vasile Porojan* is written in the form of a letter which emulates veracity and creates the impression of reality. The realism stimulates a deeper connection with characters.

Reading is transactional (Morrisson & Wlodarczyk, 2009, p. 111), a continuous negotiation between text and reader, always dependent on a social interaction. Furthermore, “focusing on a figure that is considered different from the dominant group” has the potential to perpetuate “the gap between the dominant characters of a given culture and the perceived Others”.

The second text with a Roma character (Romanian Language, 5th grade,

Art, pp. 159-160) is an ethnic story presented alongside other stories of different origins in a multicultural class reading activity.

5. Discussion and conclusions

While the new syllabi for primary and middle school plead for diversity, tolerance and an interest for intercultural education, textbooks fail to put in practice these principles, thus allowing the reproduction of stereotypes and negative attitudes towards the Roma groups. Most significant is the absence of Roma related events, personalities, historical facts. It is relevant to note that, while all 4th grade History textbooks have a chapter dedicated to minorities personalities, no Roma personality is presented or discussed. The only Roma figure present in Romanian textbooks is a successful football player, B nel Nicoli (Social Ed., 6th grade, EDP, p. 67). By contrast, there is ample space dedicated to Hungarian historical figures, authors and scholars.



Figure no. 1. Roma young people dancing while celebrating the International Romani Day - 8 April, EDP, Social Education, 6th grade

The Roma appear to have no contribution on the development of the country in any field, as their presence in textbooks is rather ghostly, usually achieved through pictures. The most prevailing illustration (Figure no. 1) shows Roma

people dressed in traditional clothing, dancing on grass, celebrating, living a leisurely life.

A more realistic perspective is pointed out by Social Education textbooks which allow a glimpse on the conditions faced by many Roma students. A few instances present Roma children as theoretically equals to their Romanian peers, but the social context in which they find themselves limits and reduces their ability to thrive.

In order to reduce the oppression through cultural imperialism, we propose Nancy Fraser's (1995) framework on social justice. One strategy to reduce injustice consists of affirmative remedies which are "aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them" (Fraser, 1995, p. 82). This type of remedy implies that students are rational agents, they learn what they are being told and internalize the rules, which is a contested idea. Some authors suggest an approach that "teaches" rather than "preaches", a strategy of deconstruction and reconstruction since "adolescents do not like to be told" what to do and how to behave (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997, p. 127). Students should be treated as "agents of rather than passive recipient of" reforms (ibidem).

Concentrating on textbooks can leave out a key component of the curriculum, the teachers, as they interpret the textbooks themselves and create local and original discussions in the classrooms. Teachers need adequate guidelines and formation to effectively teach such sensitive matters. Roma realities, lives, personalities, history ought to be integrated in classroom discussions, as well as elements of culture, story lines, traditions. These contents have the potential to reduce the marginalization of Roma students and alleviate the stigma, by raising awareness about Roma groups' present and past, their cultural richness, their essential contribution to the formation of the Romanian identity. Reading literary texts which present credible characters can "empower both children from ethnic minority groups and children from the dominant culture to understand the complicated nature of human experiences" (Monoyiou & Symeonidou, 2016, p. 2). As long as the text does not solely emphasize the victim and is not centered on the powerlessness and marginalization of the racially marked individual (Rogers & Christian,

2007) but questions the “ideology” of “the master”, it can be a valuable piece of work in addressing racial interactions.

Through a position paper, UNICEF recommends creating an inclusive, local curriculum:

“The curriculum needs to be reviewed to ensure that it is inclusive of all children, and all teaching and learning materials are free from harmful or negative representations of Roma communities [...]. The curriculum should include the teaching of Roma language, culture and history.”

(UNICEF, 2011, p. 56)

In this paper I have critically analyzed the Romanian alternative textbooks in search for the representation of Roma groups. I have employed Iris Young’s conceptualization in the field of social justice to argue that textbooks can become an oppressive tool for the Roma minority. My argument follows two directions. Firstly, using Zacho’s framework for content analysis of textbooks, I have analyzed the number of references to Roma people, the extent, the character of references and the manner of description.

Secondly, I have explored the presence or the absence of historical figures and events about the Roma in textbooks. Notably, we have identified very little information about the history of Roma people in Romania. The interactions between the Roma and other groups are presented only for the purpose of introducing themes of discrimination, prejudice and racism. However, textbooks do not address the sensible and intricate historical relationship between the dominant population and the Roma minority - which is vital in understanding the status, the narratives surrounding the Roma in Romania today. References to slavery are very rare and achieved through literary texts adding a sense of dimness. The prejudice against Roma today is approached as a given reality, imprinted in the present, but not within a diachronic approach.

Using a comparative strategy, we have employed similar content analysis instruments on the representation in textbooks of the Hungarian ethnic minority. The data, while less detailed and limited to 4th grade textbooks, suggest a significant difference between the positive attitudes and attention devoted to Hungarian themes compared to the Roma ones, though more research is warranted.

References

- Achim, V. (1998). *igani in istoria Romaniei*. Editura Enciclopedic .
- Agen ia Împreun . (2012). *Annual Report, What have we done together in 2011?*.
- B descu, G., Ivan, C., Angi, D., & Negru-Sub iric , O. (2018). *Educa ie pentru democra ie în colile din România*.
<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bukarest/14767.pdf>
- Barany, Z. (1994). Living on the Edge: The East European Roma in Postcommunist Politics and Societies. *Slavic Review*, 53(2), 321-344.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2501296>
- Beck, S. (1989). The origins of Gypsy slavery in Romania. *Dialectical Anthropology*, 14(1), 53-61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00255926>
- Buzducea, D. (2013). *Economia social a grupurilor vulnerabile*. Polirom.
- Crowe, D., & Kolsti, J. (1991). *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*. Sharpe.
- Elleh, N. (2014). *Reading the Architecture of Underprivileged Classes*. Routledge.
- Fleck, G., & Rughini , C. (Eds.). (2008). *Vino mai aproape. Incluziunea i excluziunea romilor în societatea româneasc de azi*. Human Dynamics.
- Fraser, N. (1995). From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'PostSocialist' Age. *New Left Review*, 212, 68-93.
- Frye, M. (1983). *The Politics of Reality. Freedom*. Crossing Press.
- Greenberg, J. (2010). Report on Roma education today: from slavery to segregation and beyond. *Columbia Law Review*, 110(4), 919-1001.
- Holsti, O. R. (1969). *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*. Addison-Wesley.
- Ivan, C., & Rostas, I. (2013). *P r sirea timpurie a colii - cauze i efecte*. Roma Education Fund Romania.
- Kenway, J., & Fitzclarence, L. (1997). Masculinity, violence and schooling: Challenging "poisonous pedagogies". *Gender and Education*, 9, 117-133.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540259721493>
- Monoyiou, E., & Symeonidou, S. (2016). The wonderful world of children's books? Negotiating diversity through children's literature. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 20(6), 588-603.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540259721493>
- Morrison, V., & Wlodarczyk, L. (2009). Revisiting Read-Aloud: Instructional Strategies That Encourage Students' Engagement With Texts. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(2), 110–118. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RT.63.2.2>
- Nieto, S., Bode, P., Kang, E., & Raible, J. (2008). Identity, Community and Diversity: Retheorizing Multicultural Curriculum for the Postmodern Era. In F.

M. Connelly, M. F. He & J. A. Phillion (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction* (pp. 176-196). SAGE Publications.

- Petrova, D. (2003). The Roma: Between a Myth and the Future. *Social Research*, 70(1), 111-161.
- Rogers, R., & Christian, J. (2007). 'What could I say?' A critical discourse analysis of the construction of race in children's literature. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 10(1), 21-46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320601100351>
- tef nescu, P. (2005). *Legal rights and educational policies for ethnic minorities in Romania*. Paper presented at the International week. Berlin.
- UNICEF. (2011). *The Right of Roma Children to Education: Position Paper*. UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS).
<https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/1566/file/Roma%20education%20position%20paper.pdf>
- Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton University Press.
- Zachos, D. T. (2017). Roma, Curriculum, and Textbooks: The Case of Greece. *Creative Education*, 8(10), 1656-1672. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2017.810112>

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://revped.ise.ro/category/2020-en/>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Versiunea online a acestui articol poate fi găsită la:
<http://revped.ise.ro/category/2020-ro/>



Această lucrare este licențiată sub Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Pentru a vedea o copie a acestei licențe, vizitați <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> sau trimiteți o scrisoare către Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, SUA.