

INTRODUCTION



This book is about ways of negotiating, contesting and attaining (or not attaining) belonging. It scopes out how these engagements are materialised and sensorially experienced in the everyday. The focus falls on how inhabited and transited spaces, material objects and household practices assist Roma from north-eastern Romania in negotiating belonging, allowing commonalities to surface. While the ways in which Roma throughout Europe produce distinctiveness against the backdrop of their coexistence with non-Roma have been well documented, forms and vocabularies of ‘belonging together’ (cf. Pfaff-Czarnecka 2012: 13–14) that emerge in these encounters have not been explored thoroughly. Following approaches that call for the need to investigate what people have in common more than what makes them different (Lemon 2000; Theodosiou 2010, 2011), the book focuses on modes of nurturing attachments to places and engaging with everyday materiality that do not point at differences but rather at the commonalities and similarities with non-Roma. This requires a destabilisation of the clear-cut distinctions between Roma and non-Roma socialities which have been prevalent in Roma-focused sociocultural analyses that tended to picture Roma as committed carriers of alternative ways of living, moralities and aesthetics.

Yet the book does not gloss over the dynamics that have been constituting the different Roma we-collectives ‘as racialised subordinated Europeans’ for centuries (Kóczé 2018a: 460; see also Yıldız and De Genova 2017). These dynamics have historically relied on the construction of Roma bodies, spaces and lives as being ‘behind the times’ due to individuals’ inability to cope, as it were, with a continually progressing world. In this sense, this book examines negotiations of belonging in relation to an inescapable urge to belong to ‘modern times’ as manifested by the people with whom I did research in Rotoieni,¹ a town in north-eastern Romania. As such, negotiating and sensing (non-)belonging entails a constant tension between the (lack of) recognition and investments in an ontologically unattainable status.

Framing the Materiality of Belonging

‘They want to modernise us’, a woman told me during one of my first visits to the southern Romanian village where I carried out field research among Ursari Roma for my master’s degree in anthropology (2009–2011). ‘They’ were a non-governmental organisation that was implementing a housing project for people on the outskirts of the village, most of whom had a Roma background. In our conversation about household practices, the woman – Manuela – mentioned that, since the project had ‘come’ to the area, she and her neighbours had *also* (like everybody else in the village) started using water-based emulsion paint to bleach the interior walls of their houses. I was told that the whitewash, which people had formerly preferred, was no longer what people used to bleach the internal walls of their houses. ‘We also have to be like the *others*, don’t we?’ Manuela asked rhetorically.

This conversation and similar ones that I had a few years later (2014–2015) in Rotoieni prompted my interest in negotiations, enactments and discourses related to dynamics that I interpreted in terms of belonging. ‘I am fascinated by people’s tenacious investment in seeking common grounds’, writes sociologist Anne Marie Fortier (2000: 1) about Italians in Britain with whom she conducted research about ‘performative belongings’. Manuela’s tag question triggered in me a similar preoccupation with the Roma people’s quest for ‘terrains of commonality’ (Theodosiou 2011: 94) with the non-Roma they live with. Commonality refers to ‘the sharing of some common attribute’ and is interlinked with ‘a feeling of belonging together’ (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 20). Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka writes that commonality, as the perception of sharing certain attributes,² is:

individually felt and embodied while collectively negotiated and performed. Commonality is often perceived through a social boundary-horizon that helps discern between the insiders and the outsiders. It thus relies on categorisations, mental checkpoints, everyday-life distinctions and public representations that often buttress boundary maintenance. This is precisely where commonality is likely to attain the form of collective identity that requires the other/the outside for engendering a perception of internal sameness. (2011: 202)

My interest in belonging and people’s quest for commonality is not primarily related to the maintenance of in-group boundaries, much less with ways of nurturing a ‘collective identity’. Instead, I am interested in exploring relationalities and the everyday fabric of these relationalities that point at the porosity of categorisations and negotiability of boundaries. Following Elspeth Probyn, who stresses the importance of exploring ‘forms of belonging outside of the divisiveness of categorizing’ (1996: 10),

this book explores negotiations of belonging *across* socio-politically crafted categorisations, rather than belonging *within* boundaries that demarcate categories.

This book relies on the understanding of belonging as ‘a profoundly affective manner of being, always performed with the experience of being within and inbetween sets of social relations’ (Probyn 1996: 13). Manuela finds herself ‘within and inbetween sets of social relations’ that comprise at least the relation with the people representing the housing NGO, with her Roma neighbours living in proximity, with her non-Roma and other Roma neighbours in the village, as well as with anyone else imagined by Manuela to bleach their walls with the new water-based emulsion paint. It is from this multi-relational entangled position that Manuela bleaches her walls like the *others* do, thus revealing the ‘minuteness of movement that occurs in the everyday process of articulation’ (Probyn 1996: 6). ‘Movement’ does not refer here to the transit of physical distances, but to the non-fixity of belonging and its performative character (Fortier 1999, 2000; see also Bell 1999).

The introduction of movement in our thinking about belonging is meant to counteract ‘the fixity of the categorical logic of identity’ and to trigger more attention to the ‘wish to belong’ (Probyn 1996: 9). This approach ‘disrupts belonging as a taken-for granted, pre-discursive, un-reflexive, and stable condition’ (Antonsich 2010: 652). But despite the emphasis on movement and unfixity, the concreteness of belonging is far from being obscured in feminist accounts. The concern with individuals’ ‘engagement with the tangible’ and their ‘devotion to trying to realize the virtual as the actual’ is central in Probyn’s theorisation of ‘outside belongings’ (1996: 6). Inspired by this work, Fortier underlines that belonging is necessarily ‘constituted through both movement and attachment’³ (2000: 2; see also 1999). These are central concerns for the chapters in the first part of this book, in which I discuss ways of making and sensing belonging through domestic practices and food.

Attachment to practices, places, localities and collective values has been frequently stressed in sociological and socio-anthropological inquiries of belonging (Anthias 2006; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011, 2012; Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011; Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005; Theodosiou 2011; Yuval-Davis 2009, 2011). Pfaff-Czarnecka argues that attachment (both material and immaterial) is one of the main dimensions of belonging, along with performance/perception of commonality and a sense of mutuality (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011, 2012). From this perspective, attachments ‘are intensified through material possessions (one’s own belongings) as well as through immaterial connections – for instance, to fields, pastures, houses, and ritual sites’ (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011: xxi).

The emphasis on attachments is one of the aspects that supported Pfaff-Czarnecka's and others' attempts to distinguish between belonging and identity as different analytical categories. It has been argued that, compared to belonging that captures relationalities, identity is conducive to polarisation (Anthias 2006: 20) and fuels 'dichotomous characterisations of the social' (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011: 203), thus denominating a 'separate and self-contained set of properties and possessions' (Theodosiou 2011: 101). What qualifies belonging to circumvent the 'residual elements of essentialisation' (Anthias 2006: 20) is its concern with the multiplicity of material and immaterial attachments.

Thinking about belonging in terms of material and immaterial attachments brings in a concern with the emotional implications of belonging. The importance of emotional investments has been highlighted in relation to a feeling of being at home (Antonsich 2010; Christensen 2009; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011; Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011; Yuval-Davis 2009, 2011). Importantly, this emphasis on the emotional dimension points at formations of belonging as embodied, thus being less cognitive than constructions of identity that require conscious and purposeful decisions regarding the content and form of representations (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011: xvii).

Despite this increased attention paid to emotional attachments and investments,⁴ we know little about how the human sensorium – that is, the bodily capacity to see, hear, smell, touch, taste – mediates people's attachments and enables their quest for commonality. Based on an empirically informed inquiry, this book seeks to narrow this gap by introducing the lens of *sensed belonging*. Throughout the chapters, the book sheds light on Roma individuals' capabilities, everyday efforts and embodied knowledge invested in forging grounds for commonality and making homes in concrete terms: renovating a house, demolishing and reconstructing parts of a dwelling, bleaching the walls and preparing the emulsion paint (chapters 1 and 9), drilling the walls and hanging or removing wall-carpets (chapters 2, 3 and 4) and cleaning the house and engaging in doings that preclude undesired smells from expanding (chapters 8 and 9). And these are examples of what the notion of texture denotes in this book: more or less versatile concrete surfaces and, more generally, materialities that frame the immaterial sensorial qualities of everyday spaces. Hence, sensed belonging is about 'the minuteness of the social surface' (Probyn 1996: 20) and the everyday sensorial deployment involved in 'being/becoming like the *others*', as Manuela put it.

In developing the notion of sensed belonging (and, as I show later, non-belonging), I follow sociological and anthropological scholarship that analysed and sought to compensate for the neglect of senses in social research. As Mason and Davies (2009: 587) put it, 'In ordinary and everyday ways, the senses are part of human life and of the experience of what Ingold calls "in-

volvement in the world” (2000: 258), and thus it would seem at the very least peculiar to filter that reality out of our social scientific ways of knowing the world’. In addition to accounts showing how the senses mediate processes of emplacement and the development of attachments to locality and the urban space (e.g. Law 2001; O’Neill and Hubbard 2010; Wise 2011), this book is also inspired by perspectives of human geography that reveal the embodied and sensuous character of these attachments (Brickell and Datta 2011; Conradson and McKay 2007; Fenster 2005; Gorman-Murray 2009). Yet the main scale that this book focuses on is the immediate scale of the domestic space.

Material attachment and ways of engaging with domestic materiality as a part of processes of negotiating belonging have been dealt with in material culture literature, often providing ethnographic accounts of the intersection of homemaking processes with class, gender and ethnicity (Clarke 2001; Garvey 2005; Miller 2001; Rosales 2010). In this book, materiality refers to ‘how people make sense of the world through physical objects’ (Atfield 2000: 1) and to the capacity of objects, buildings and places to trigger or maintain people’s sense of belonging (Fortier 1999, 2000; Leach 2003; May 2011; Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005). Household objects and infrastructure (which includes walls, fences or furniture) are not lethargic manipulable material forms. As ‘extensions of the senses’ (Howes 2006a: 166), these tangible forms have sensorial and material qualities due to which ‘we are able to unpick the more subtle connections with cultural lives and values’ (Miller 1998: 9).

More than acts of individual expressivity, making home often consists of acts of making, negotiating and enacting belonging. This book contributes to these debates with a view on belonging as a set of capabilities that enable people to make homes, to negotiate and engage in relations across material, immaterial or imagined differences. In doing so, Roma people are actively participating in the reproduction and reformation of ‘normative horizons’ (cf. Povinelli 2006) as well as of common reservoirs of values, moralities and urges that delineate between ‘modern’ and ‘backward’ standards of homemaking. This binary lay at the core of the enactments related to and discourses about selves and others in Rotoieni that I discuss in detail in chapters 2 and 3.

The domestic space and the material entities that constitute it not only serve as the arena in which these enactments and investments happen, but also make them palpable and visible to create the premises for recognition. Recognition plays an important part in creating the conditions for the achievement of a sense of belonging (Roberman 2011: 42). As an ‘inter-subjective experience’ (May 2011: 370), belonging requires other people to acknowledge someone’s place among them (Coleman and Collins 2011: 14). As Lund puts it, ‘one does not only locate oneself in a place but is also lo-

cated by other people' (2011: 120). Hence, acquiring a sense of belonging is neither solely agency-driven, nor merely structurally produced, but fuelled by relationalities (Anthias 2006; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011).

While thinking about recognition, Manuela's tag question – 'We *have* to be *like* the *others*, don't we?' – comes again to mind. This signposts that acquiring recognition and attaining belonging requires compliance with collectively endorsed norms and values. Following Judith Butler (1993), Fortier highlights that performed belonging is about citations. Citations refer to 'the invocation of convention' (Butler 1993: 225) and the 'reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer' (Butler 1993: 234, cited in Fortier 2000: 5). If the 'have' from Manuela's phrase reveals the constraint involved in the negotiation of belonging, 'like the others' epitomises the 'invocation of convention' and norm, and thus a quest for ordinariness in the name of commonality (May 2011: 368; Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011: xvii–xviii). People seek ordinariness 'in order to "opt into" a range of shared practices and activities in a situation where the multiplicity of fields may pull them into separate practices' (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2005: 11). In chapters 2 and 3 of this book, I discuss ways in which household objects (mainly wall-carpets) play active parts in people's quest for and claim of ordinariness and 'normality'.

Terminology and Field Sites

The research in this book revolved around Rotoieni, a small town of fewer than ten thousand inhabitants located in Moldavia. According to the official figures provided by the local authorities in 2013, between 8 and 9 per cent of the town's inhabitants are Roma. As for the group identification, the Roma from Rotoieni identify as 'Ursari'.⁵ Being Ursar (singular) is often said to mean being '*Romanianised* Roma', thus 'more integrated', as both Roma and non-Roma would put it (see chapters 2 and 3). Apart from self-identifying and being identified as Ursari, the words *țigăni* (sing.) or *țigani* (pl.) were not absent from both Roma and non-Roma's vocabularies. Ada Engebriksen argued that '*țigăni*' designates a position constituted through an asymmetric rapport and interdependency between Roma and non-Roma. In this sense, it is 'a significant position in the Romanian figuration' (Engebriksen 2007: 193). I employ the notion of 'gypsiness' along similar lines. Importantly, 'gypsiness' does not name a set of features ascribed to or assumed by people of Roma background and it is not an unfortunate equivalent to 'Roma identity'. Rather, I understand 'gypsiness' as a racialised position ascribed primarily to Roma, historically constituted through the reproduction of stereotypes, naturalisation of socio-economic divides and perpetuation of

power imbalances, which subjects Roma individuals to discourses and practices of oppression, marginalisation and dehumanisation.

According to the Roma linguist Ian Hancock, the word ‘tsigan’ (and its other variations such as *cigano* or *Zigeuner*) was assigned during the Byzantine period, and derives from the Greek word *atsinganoi*, meaning ‘not to be touched’ (Hancock 2005: 1). Meanwhile, the word ‘Gypsy’ is ‘a name created by outsiders and is based upon a mistaken assumption’ that these people came from Egypt (2005: xviii). The term ‘Gypsy’ cannot be used as an equivalent or as a translation of ‘*țigani*’ because the two terms are rooted in different histories of oppression that had different manifestations throughout Europe. As Hancock shows, they have separate etymologies and emerged within different historical circumstances.

While acknowledging the pejorative and racialising connotations of the Romanian word ‘*țigani*’ (see Matache 2016; Woodcock 2015),⁶ I use it in circumstances similar to those described by Alaina Lemon: ‘rather than eschewing the words “tsygan” or “Gypsy” as potential slurs, or interchanging “Gypsy” and “Romani” randomly, . . . I use both to convey subtle shadings in discourse, for the shifts are not arbitrary. . . . In this way, I can more faithfully describe verbal interactions, to untangle what speakers express by preferring certain terms in certain situations’ (2000: 5). From this perspective, replacing the term ‘*țigan*’ with the term ‘Roma’ when I report, for example, how non-Roma refer to the Roma in racist terms would be misleading. In order to remind the reader and to signal the offensive connotations inscribed in this term, I italicise this term in all chapters.

This book joins the efforts of recent studies that have advanced our understanding about formations of belonging through refreshing approaches such as that proposed by Marinov (2019), who provides an ‘inward looking’ at migration and its effects on ‘Romanipe’, Humphris’s analysis of ‘intimate state encounters’ (2019) or Solf’s lens of ‘citizen outsiders’ (2018). But while these studies discuss belonging based on studies carried out with Roma abroad, where they are framed as migrants, my research offers a perspective on belonging mainly as negotiated and sensed by Romanian Roma in Romania. In 2014 I carried out fieldwork for six months in Rotoieni. In the first two months (March and April 2014) I lived with a non-Roma couple in a flat located in the centre of the town, a two-kilometre distance from the area sometimes called *Ursărie* where most Roma in Rotoieni lived. In the following months that I spent in Rotoieni (August to November 2014) I lived mostly in the so-called *Ursărie*, benefiting from the kindness, support and help offered to me by the family that I will call the Carols. The Carols also opened their doors to me during my subsequent two-week trips to Rotoieni (April 2015 and September 2015) and short visits between 2016 and 2018.

After spending six months in Rotoieni, in 2015 I visited Roma from Rotoieni who had been living in western Romania, Spain and the Netherlands for several years. This enabled me to link the different contexts in which home and belonging were narrated, enacted and imagined. As both ‘material and imaginative’, home is defined from a critical geography perspective as ‘a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places’ (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 2). ‘Following things’ and ‘following people’ (Marcus 1995) were strategies employed in the attempt to explore the home-belonging nexus, its material and sensorial dimension being at the core of this book. Acknowledging Clifford’s suggestion that researchers should depart from localising cultures through the localisation of ethnographic research (1997), I opted for approaching Rotoieni as a locality contextualised by larger interconnected social orders shaped by globalisation, mobility and the capitalist world system (Marcus 1995).

Beyond Distinctiveness

Throughout the centuries, a series of interconnected institutional, academic and other kinds of public narratives produced essentialising interpretations of features that supposedly precluded Roma from belonging *here* or with *us*. The Roma’s Indian roots are a paradigmatic example that shows how, by invoking a remote and ‘essentially different’ origin, such narratives reinforce Roma people’s position as not belonging *here*, to the national and European *us*. The invocation of Indian roots ‘unnecessarily exoticizes the Gypsies, and second, it ignores their own view of themselves’ (Stewart 1997: 28). While acknowledging that a common Indian origin can function as ‘a strategy for international solidarity among Gypsies’, Judith Okely was the first to warn that it risks categorising people into “real” and “counterfeit” Gypsies’ such that only those who manifest signs of their ‘Indian origins’ will benefit from policies and protection based on ethnic criteria (1983: 13).

Ethnographies in the last three decades or so have revealed a few ways in which Roma identify with and belong to places within different national contexts, thus deconstructing the folklorising and romanticising views of Gypsies as nomad, unrooted or unable to settle or integrate. Not only has this work expanded our ethnographic knowledge about ways in which Roma perform their social identities as linked to places and localities within the respective national contexts (Buckler 2007; Lemon 2000; Theodosiou 2003, 2007, 2011; to some extent Williams 1982), particularly in situations framed by migration (Benarrosh-Orsoni 2016, 2019), but it has also called attention to how they see themselves as intrinsic to the histories of these places. Based

on his analysis of Gabor Roma ways of defining their identity in relation to Transylvanian territories they claim to inhabit ‘since always’, Martin Olivera (2012a, 2012b) proposes a view on ‘indigenous Gypsies’ as an analytical category that enables a view on Gabor as a social form generating and generated by ideas of autochthony (2012b).

These endeavours have also succeeded in reshuffling lorist ideas that had envisaged Roma as cultural enclaves, self-isolated (not to mention itinerant), thus socially, geographically and politically peripheral to the centres of the ‘majority’ societies they happened to be in the vicinity of. Different levels and formulas of contact with non-Roma have been conceptualised as constitutive of Roma identities or ‘cultures’ that are constantly redefined in the present,⁷ thus unfixed and constantly adapting in the face of socio-economic and political changes. Differently put, the ways in which Roma navigate the social and geographical spaces (often dominated by non-Roma) or the ways in which they integrate (Olivera 2012a; Williams 1982) are now viewed as constitutive of Roma social forms, and not of the state of being in isolation.

The issue is that showing that Roma share the same geographical and social spaces, that they engage in daily economic and social exchanges with non-Roma, does not seem to problematise conceptions that point at, as it were, Roma ‘internal coherence’ (Okely 2010). Okely makes an argument about Gypsies having ‘for centuries provided a pioneering example of cultural coherence’ and about their culture as being ‘created from and through difference’ (2010: 40). My point is that the conceptions that shed light on the linkages between Roma and non-Roma, as well as on Roma place-based self-identifications and their attachment to locality, are the same that propagate the viewpoint according to which Roma are bricoleurs of cultural autonomy and distinctiveness. The ways in which different Roma populations foster attachments to places and engage with and signify the materiality of their everyday life are held for indicators of their distinctiveness vis-à-vis non-Roma. The different ways in which they do so are regarded as fundamentally constitutive of Roma socialities. This book, by contrast, shows that Roma people’s engagements with and the meanings they attach to everyday objects and spaces articulate commonalities of aspirations, urges and capabilities. It is an attempt to unfold similarities as constitutive of both Roma socialities and Roma–non-Roma relationships.

Like belonging, which cannot be disconnected from its implicit postulation of non-belonging, the concept of similarity is not meant to transport an ideal of harmony and to dismiss matrixes that produce and maintain unescapable differences. From a cultural studies perspective, Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich (2015) propose similarity as a concept relevant for the description of relationships that imply a relative proximity and a relative dis-

tance. Spatial and contextual, these relationships set the measure of proximity (*Nähe*), distance (*Distanz*) and distancing (*Entfernung*) (2015: 13). The empirical value that Bhatti and Kimmich assign to this concept stems from its aptitude to designate continuities and thereby to rethink well-established binary oppositions such as self–other or subject–object (2015: 14). As such, the so-called ‘similarity paradigm’ attempts to reshuffle its opposition to identity (Langenohl 2015: 106) and to reflect on the pervasive tension between the recognition of similarities (empirically graspable) and assertion of differences (Bhatti and Kimmich 2015: 20).

In addition, without implying sameness, the concept of similarity has an ethical dimension and is proposed as ‘a critical and subversive’ epistemological gesture (Bhatti and Kimmich 2015: 26). In Bhatti’s words: ‘It is therefore correct to demand that the right to diversity and alterity must be coupled with the “right to be similar.” Similarity (*Ähnlichkeit*) is different from the demand for generic sameness (*Gleichartigkeit*). It is the process toward equality’ (Bhatti 2014: 39). But beyond such a critical gesture which, though important, exceeds the direct scope of this book, the analysis proposed here manifests a concern with practices of similarity (*Praktiken der Ähnlichkeit*). My concern with practices of similarity is subsumed to the focus on household-related practices and everyday material culture by means of which belonging is negotiated and sensed, and homes are made.

Everyday Material Culture

Throughout the centuries, the domain of material culture enabled different professionalised practices (those of museums, ethnologists, missionaries, activists) to shed light on *others’* ‘cultural specificities’ and markers of distinctiveness. The reifying capacity inherent within material objects has made possible to point out the differences of ‘some’ relative to ‘others’ in terms of civilisation, modernisation, as well as level of appropriation or creativity in dealing with forms of oppression. The manifest interest in objects as material entities that account for ‘other’ modes of attaching significance to, celebrating and reproducing difference has not bypassed approaches to Roma-related accounts.

The sociocultural inquiries that have advanced the study of material culture with regards to Roma social forms are concerned with ceremonial or prestige objects (Berta 2007, 2011, 2013, 2019; Teșăr 2012, 2014, 2018) or with items that make visible individuals’ belonging to a particular Roma we-collective such as Kalderari (e.g. Hașdeu 2014) or Gabor Roma (e.g. Olivera 2012a; Tesfay 2009). These studies that come to mind as material culture contributions have been interested in material presences and absences that, in Péter Berta’s terms, ‘materialise differences’.⁸

Alongside dualities like community–self, us–them, pure–impure, local–global, inalienable–alienable, dialectical movements between the sacred and profane poles have profoundly configured the anthropological thought. In totemic societies, Durkheim (2001) shows that the classification of materialia and immaterialia into the two moral domains – the sacred and the profane – enables the division between ceremonial life and daily life. Along this divide, ceremonial life consists of community-reproducing and morality-forming events, while daily life comprises ordinary and self-interested activities that aim at fulfilling individuals’ immediate basic needs. It might be thus said that anthropologists’ fascination with rituals, ceremonials and the fabrics of activities pertaining to sacred time is explained by the intention to unravel mechanisms by means of which we-collectives and their moral systems are reproduced, get transformed or become interrupted.

This Durkheimian fundamental separation between the world of sacred things and the world of profane things⁹ translates itself into the dichotomy between the respect-arousing collective-oriented realm and the ordinary self-oriented realm. As such, this separation dismisses the everyday realm as a site where consciousness of commonalities and belonging across boundaries can be furthered. At the same time, it naturalises the idea that things are not significant in themselves but are necessary as vehicles of the ideas essential for the maintenance of the collective consciousness regarding the sharing of the same moral life.¹⁰ In this Durkheimian approach, material objects are important for their capacity to give some sort of shape to ideas of collective relevance that are shared by individuals pertaining to the same we-collective, as well as to make individuals identify with and confirm each other as members of the same social unit. From this standpoint, reality is created by socially relevant and cherished ideas and not the other way around. While, ‘in order to express our own ideas to ourselves we need to anchor them in material things that symbolise them’, reading Durkheim further: ‘the role of matter is minimal. The object that supports the idea is trivial compared to the ideal superstructure that subsumes it, and, moreover, it has nothing to do with that superstructure’ (2001: 173). This conception that the material world can be read as a text, in which objects signify ideas of collective relevance, is viewed as an intrinsic approach to what material culture studies as a research field has become (see Basu 2016; Bringéus 1986; Woodward 2001, 2007).

In academic accounts about Roma, items that they wear and use in the public space have been often read as symbols of their distinctiveness from those pertaining to other Roma we-collectives or from non-Roma. Clothes and the so-called ‘dress code’ in particular constituted the object of interest of anthropologists who conducted research among Roma categorised as ‘traditional’. Olivera, for instance, maintains that Gabori clothes (women’s

long pleated and flowered skirts and men's loosely fitting black trousers, dark waistcoat and broad-brimmed hats) are signs of distinction that only those who possess insider knowledge can decipher. We are told that Gabor clothes do not have the capacity to create the distinction from other Roma (immoral, backward, inelegant) or from non-Roma; that on the contrary, the clothes signify an already existing distinction cultivated through the enactment of social and individual qualities cherished by Gabor (Olivera 2012a: 129). Hence, clothes are just collateral 'external signs of the identity' that express the identity of 'the noble Roma' as opposed to other Roma (*rumunguri*) and non-Roma peasants. Olivera's interpretation is that Gabor clothes constitute 'a sign, an essential evidence of their high morality' (2012a: 132, my translation) that manifests itself in a Gabor-respectable external appearance: clean, neat, elegant.

Regarding social distinctions preceding the use of certain objects (clothes in this case) as opposed to objects creating socio-culturally relevant distinctions, we can also read Haşdeu's account (2014) about Roma women's bodies and way of dressing. In Haşdeu's reading, female bodies are divided into the upper (thus the pure) part and lower (thus the impure) part. What delimitates between Roma and *gadje* (non-Roma) is the significance that Roma attach to this division and how that shapes the ways of dealing with everyday materiality (for instance, what can or cannot be touched in specific situations). We are told that 'there is nothing "more Roma"¹¹', than the pleated, flowered and glittery skirts worn by married Roma women which cover 'the most problematic body part' (Haşdeu 2014: 88, my translation). Hence, the clothes they wear are again seen as that which encodes principles and what makes, as it were, the supreme distinction (Roma-*gadje*) possible.

In addition to these approaches that cast light on how visible objects (e.g. clothes) represent or symbolise distinctiveness from other Roma or non-Roma, other studies uncover the ways in which objects concealed from sight, that belong to the ceremonial or sacred domain (in Durkheimian terms), play a significant role in the social reproduction of Roma we-collectives, political relationships and kin groups. Ethnographies in Transylvania, such as Cătălina Tesăr's with Cortorari (see 2014) and Péter Berta's with Gabori and Cărhar¹² (see 2019), are insightful for understanding how particularly valued objects take part in the negotiation of family alliances and marriage arrangements, as well as in the attainment of individual prestige. The two approaches differ in that Tesăr (2014) contests the idea that the possession of chalices, *taxtaja*, highly valued among Cortorari, would generate the possessor's value and prestige. In her interpretation, the extent to which individuals succeed in behaving according to moral orders cherished by their kin is what inflects value on the chalices they possess and not the other way around. Tesăr thus rethinks the general idea deriving from gift-giving theo-

ries whereby persons are extensions of objects, stressing that the subjective ways in which objects acquire significance account for the argument that objects are in fact extensions of persons.

For the Gabori with whom Berta carried out research, the possession of beakers and roofed tankards (*taxta* and *kăni*) institutes a hierarchic form of social organisation, thus being essential in ‘the creation and maintenance of harmony and balance between the ethics of sociability and the politics of difference’ (Berta 2019: 13). Central in Berta’s accounts is that, apart from their possession, these objects and the knowledge that Gabor and Cărhar Roma possess about prestige goods’ material qualities and social biographies constitute ‘a marker of their Roma identity’ (2019: 117) and, fundamentally ‘materialise difference’.

I encountered neither outstanding clothes nor prestige objects in my interactions with or accounts of Ursari Roma in or from Rotoieni. Nobody ever mentioned anything about the existence of items like *taxtăja* either in relation to themselves or their past or to other Roma we-collectives. In fact, my interlocutors referred to the long pleated and flowered skirts and broad-brimmed hats as being exclusively worn by *other* Roma (*ăialalții* or *altfel de romi/țigani*) (see Racleș 2020). In these instances, *other* Roma indexed the idea of ‘traditional’, ‘authentic’ or ‘the real Roma/țigani’. More than once, the identification as *Romanianised* Roma was accompanied by the self-reference ‘actually, we are not the *real* Roma’ as compared to those regarded as ‘traditional’.

The case study of Ursari Roma provides empirical means to grasp material objects outside the material-world-as-a-system-of-signs paradigm. The question is: how can we depart from a view that regards objects as symbols at the service of social scientists in decrypting specific cultural orders? How can we circumvent the understanding that has long regarded the material thing, in Durkheimian terms, as a sign ‘that serves only to recall the reality it represents’ (2001: 165) and that serves to relentlessly actualise our collective set of moral considerations?

This book deals with these questions in three ways: by looking at ordinary objects and everyday spaces; by examining their sensorial dimension; and by inquiring into material absences. I suggest that by ascribing analytical value to ordinary everyday objects, ways of using and signifying them, as well as to their sensorial and affective dimension, more light can be shed on people’s enactments of and discourses about belonging, similarities and the formation of linkages between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘now’ and ‘then’. Distinct from ceremonial objects, prestigious objects or items that are endowed with analytical significance in an identity register, ordinary objects in the realm of the everyday have the analytical capacity to challenge the conception of unambiguous distinctions between ways in which Roma

engage with and assign meanings to everyday materiality and the ways in which non-Roma do.

The imperative of examining ordinary or banal objects as constitutive of everyday spaces, practices and social fabrics has been signalled as a reaction to the pervasive interest in rather extraordinary materialities (Attfield 2000; Tilley 2006: 70; Woodward 2007: 108, 167). In the framework of more recent studies about Roma social forms, the research of Norah Benarrosh-Orsoni (2016, 2019), about ‘transnational households’ cultivated by Romanian Roma who live in the Parisian suburbs, shows how everyday materiality (e.g. landlines and cell phones or food) enables them to foster ‘a shared sense of double-rootedness’ (2016: 149).

Everyday objects refer in this book to items that contribute *par excellence* to the maintenance of a sense of familiarity and ordinariness, which I examine in Part I. Yet this does not impede them from intermeshing in practices of self-identification, resignification or ascription. The case of wall-carpets discussed in chapters 2 and 3 provides a means to analyse understandings and resignification practices whereby these objects went from being objects that ‘Romanians’¹³ enthusiastically hung on the interior walls of their houses to being deemed as obsolete items that supposedly indicate backwardness or ‘lack of will to modernise’ of inhabitants. Despite the fact that in previous decades ‘Romanians’ enthusiastically covered the interior walls of their houses or flats with the ‘Abduction from the Seraglio’¹⁴ style of carpets (Figure 0.1), at the time of my research this practice was referred to as a ‘typically’ Roma or *țigani* practice. Refraining from implying that the ways in which people engage with the material world are essentially shaped by who they are or are considered to be, I show how people are actually constructed based on how they engage with the material world at a particular point in time. In other words, people do not hang wall-carpets because they are *țigani* (as non-Roma and better-off Roma often imply), but they are constructed as *țigani* based on the use of these items which, in the light of the claimed ‘modern’ standards of homemaking, have become local insignia of backwardness.

The sphere of the everyday is not solely a sphere of material presences, but equally a sphere of absences that need to be attended to as well. The absence of carpets from the walls which I discuss in chapter 3 is relevant for the understanding of how Roma negotiate, attain and sense belonging, as well as how this absence fosters similarities, in this specific case, to those who had already removed the carpets from the walls. Thinking with Patrick Williams, ‘Meaning emerges from the play of emptiness and fullness’ (2003: 24) and absences are constitutive of presences (2003: 55). Severin Fowles suggests that we ought to examine ‘the politics of attending to what is missing and why’ (2010: 26), criticising the neglect of absences brought along by ‘a notion of presence linked to physicality and tangibility, as if the only



Figure 0.1. The ‘Abduction from the Seraglio’ wall-carpet, Rotoieni, October 2014. © Andreea Racleş.

meaningful relations were those between entities that can be seen, smelt or felt’ (2010: 25). But *Textures of Belonging* shows that absences can equally be felt, seen, smelt and tasted.

Sensorial Politics and Non-Belonging

Thinking about physical absences takes me to the material-sensorial nexus which is central in this book. While the study of materiality has always been concerned with processes of objectification, as classical works of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984) and, later, of Daniel Miller (e.g. 1987, 1994, 2013) show, Christopher Tilley¹⁵ points out the necessity of ‘refining our empirical understanding of the manner in which these processes work in relation to the manifold sensuous qualities of things’ (2006: 71). But if the dynamics of the materialisation of individuals’ belonging to different we-collectives have been explored, by contrast, little has been inquired about how belonging and its antipode, non-belonging, are sensed.

The focus on the sensorium in social sciences constitutes one way of departing from the perspective on material culture as a text that can be read

(Sullivan 1986), where objects are signs or symbols that can be deciphered according to the specific cultural guidelines. Based on the premise that sensorial orders are translated into social orders, David Howes (2006a) proposes an ‘intersensoriality model’ of analysis according to which the traditionally recognised sensorial modalities (sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste)¹⁶ are not equal. The way they operate and are organised reflects power relations in societies. Supporting the argument that sensorial modalities do not operate socio-culturally and politically in the same ways, the cultural historian Constance Classen encourages sociocultural analysts ‘to go beyond the audiovisual and recover the senses of smell, taste and touch as subjects of serious inquiry’ (1997: 404).

Considering that the olfactory is ‘the most denigrated sensory domain of modernity’ (Howes 2006a: 169), this book channels its effort precisely in this direction. In contemporary Europe, wherein ‘anti-Roma politics has political currency’ (Stewart 2012: xviii), it is not surprising that the ‘bad and dangerous smell’ as a racialising marker of Roma people’s otherness appears not only in daily encounters, but also in public and political discourses, generated by and generating racism against Roma. At the beginning of April 2015, during a conversation about the local Roma with the librarian from the municipal library of Rotoieni, the non-Roma woman asserted: ‘I guess you also realised this, as you lived with *them*. Wherever you’d go in this world and there’d be a *țigan*, you’d feel that specific smell’. Furthermore, in 2014, during the first months that I spent in Rotoieni, I was often asked by non-Roma how was I able to stand ‘that smell of *țigan*’.

These and other equally unsettling manifestations of racialising discourses and practices that I encountered during my fieldwork in Rotoieni are dealt with in chapters 6 and 7, where I unpack the racist logic of differentiation to which the local Roma were subjected. It is a logic that dehumanises, neutralises socio-economic cleavages and makes the individual accountable for the success or failure in complying with normative standards of homemaking; a logic that pretends to justify why some are (and deserve to be) part of ‘us’ while ‘others’ are part of the marginalised ‘them’; a logic that reifies bad smells as results of Roma people’s alleged ‘natural characteristics’, such as indolence and carelessness in regard to how their house looks or smells. In this sense, the endeavour of this book joins the approaches that examine and critique the ways in which olfactory politics target people with either ethnic minority or migration backgrounds by ascribing malodours to these people’s spaces and bodies.

Roma are certainly not the only ‘others’ that are targeted by discriminatory olfactory politics. Black people (e.g. Smith 2006), the Jews in Europe (in Howes and Classen 2014: 69), Pakistanis in Britain (in Largely and Watson 2006: 31), Indians in Thailand (in Beer 2000: 217–18) and migrants from

other African countries in South Africa (in Howes and Classen 2014: 88) are just a few scattered examples of presences constructed as incorporations of olfactory otherness. In her monograph about Russian Romani, Lemon shows how Gypsies are racialised by being mapped onto settings like street markets, which are described by non-Gypsies as ‘Gypsies’ “natural habitat” (2000: 58). Gypsies’ bodies and presence are thus racialised through the naturalisation of their allegedly inherent connection to such spaces. It is in relation to the ‘pragmatic immediacy’ (cf. Lemon 2000: 57) of space that the olfactory as a marker of otherness will be unfolded in this book. In my conversations with non-Roma, smells were constructed as one of the main markers of difference between Roma and non-Roma households (chapter 7), thus pointing not only to Roma people’s bodies, but to the connections between bodies and the immediacy of their inhabited space. Unpacking the connections between bodies and the domestic and urban materiality thus enables the analysis of the ways in which racialising dynamics are materialised.

Book Outline

The places lived and made by people who are identified or self-identify as Roma/*țigani* constitute the main socio-material fields in relation to which sensed belonging will be discussed. My fieldwork has shown that negotiations of belonging have major sensorial implications which can be grasped only in relation to everyday materialities. To expand on these considerations systematically, this book takes the shape of a two-part account: the first part is mainly concerned with materialities of belonging, while the second expands on senses of (non-)belonging.

In the first chapter, I begin with a discussion about my movements between ‘sites’ that fostered a reflection on the rapport between myself as a ‘white’, ‘schooled’ and non-Roma young researcher, and the people who participated in my research. Thoughts on the ways in which the related asymmetries impacted the knowledge-making process are also considered. They are articulated in relation to the methodological approaches mobilised in a bid to tackle the material-sensorial nexus involved in negotiations of belonging and in homemaking processes.

Chapters 2 and 3 show how, either through their presence or absence, wall-carpets materialise people’s engagements in processes of negotiating belonging on the level of their inhabited space in relation to ‘modern times’ and to the Roma we-collective. Both chapters point at Roma women’s relation to the materiality of space, mediated by practices related to wall-carpets, by means of which Roma women engage in negotiation of ‘modernity’ as understood locally.

Chapter 2 fleshes out meanings and resignifications that Roma in Rotoieni attach to the wall-carpets and the related practices. It is an account about wall-carpets as objects that provide a sense of familiarity and materialises the emotional attachment to the place Roma called home in Rotoieni or abroad. It will be shown that at times, framed by the research situation, the practice of hanging wall-carpets partakes of the repertoire about ‘us, the Roma/the *țigani*’.

Meanwhile, chapter 3 looks into how people position themselves vis-à-vis these objects that went from being ordinary to becoming discredited and associated with gypsiness. If value is a criterion that establishes which desires are legitimate and which are not (Graeber 2001: 3), then wall-carpets acquire value through their absence. This chapter shows how the absence of wall-carpets serves enactment purposes. It serves one’s affirmation of belonging to ‘modern times’ by decorating the inhabited space in a way that is legitimated as ‘modern’, and thus one’s self-identification as ‘*Romanianised Roma*’.

Chapters 4 and 5 cast light on translocal entanglements and engagements in homemaking processes *elsewhere*. Roma’s expenditure of physical and emotional energy is related to the aspiration of having a ‘home where nobody can throw you out from’, as Maria, my host mother, put it. Locality will be reflected upon in its material and sensorial proportions – as something that is seen, touched, smelled and listened to – something people engage with during their everyday activities carried out within their inhabited space(s).

Chapter 4 discusses particularities of Rotoieni that prompted and facilitated Roma people’s decision, urge or aspiration to move. Based on my conversations with Roma abroad and in western Romanian localities, the analysis expands further on translocal entanglements and on the affective materiality of homemaking processes *elsewhere*. It discusses ‘the sense of contiguous home’ (Wise 2011) of the Roma people who identify Rotoieni as their hometown but live (or lived at the time of my research) abroad or elsewhere in Romania.

Chapter 5 revolves around the ‘affective materiality of food’ (Alexeyeff 2004) through which meanings of home are made and tasted. It shows that, by eating and making ‘home food’ abroad, the feeling of estrangement is negotiable, but not completely surmountable. The absence of certain ingredients leads people to nostalgically evoke their longing for home. Their position as migrants and the feeling of estrangement lift food from home (such as, for instance, *sarmale*) out from the banality they might have been relegated to when cooked back in Rotoieni. While abroad, eating and talking about food are acts through which not only ‘home’ is translocally consumed (and often idealised), but also through which narratives of belonging in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are enacted.

In the second part of the book, I begin from the observation that Roma in Rotoieni are people subjected to a logic of differentiation that naturalises ‘bad smells’ as part of Roma people’s households and bodies. I will analyse the ways in which the olfactory acts within and outside the parameters of this racialising logic by exploring everyday domestic practices that Roma engage in, create and resignify. I must warn the reader that the accounts reproduced in chapters 6 and 7 are particularly disturbing and injurious vis-à-vis the Roma. I chose to include them in this book with the intention to unpack and critique flagrant manifestations of local racialising representations, as well as to (self-)critically reflect on what determined my non-Roma research participants to articulate offensive discourses in conversations with me, also a non-Roma.

There are two registers of analysis that form the second part of this book. One register encompasses dynamics of constituting gypsiness as racialised otherness, while the other uncovers the individual expressions and interpretations of olfactory experiences framed by the immediacy of the inhabited space. To trace connections between these two methodologically asymmetric registers of analysis, I will draw on individual and group conversations with non-Roma (first register) and conversations with and olfactory diaries written by Roma research participants (second register).

After discussing notions related to olfactory politics in chapter 6, chapter 7 relies on conversations with and among non-Roma to uncover what is so particular about the olfactory – as compared to sight, hearing, taste and touch – that enables people to draw hierarchical lines between ‘us’ and the different ‘them’, thus between who belongs and who does not. I show how, based on lived or projected olfactory experiences, non-Roma employed racialising tropes as part of a repertoire of representations that naturalises and reifies socially vilified features that are said to be innate to the Roma: indolence, carelessness and thus immorality. In this vein, chapter 7 reveals how non-Roma affirm themselves as righteous citizens by naturalising ‘filthy smells’ as markers of otherness and, thus, by projecting inferiority on Roma people’s bodies and spaces.

Chapters 8 and 9 address the question of how the olfactory operates outside (though not completely disconnected from) racist ascriptions. I show how Roma in my research endorse a series of normative aspects that derive from the local olfactory politics. Besides analysing ethnographic interviews with Roma, I reflect on the content of the olfactory diaries¹⁷ written by six Roma research participants. They shed light on the corporeality and materiality of the olfactory experiences and, by that means, on the individual acknowledgement, contestation or enforcement of the local meanings and implications of the olfactory. I conclude that the local meanings of the olfac-

tory (that operate within a racist logic) inform claims and contestations of belonging.

In the concluding chapter I summarise the contributions that the notion of ‘sensed belonging’ and the view on belonging as a set of capabilities make to the various debates with which this book has engaged. Proposing the notion of ‘unattainability of belonging’, the concluding chapter is also a reflection on the underside of belonging. It suggests that all discussion and conceptualisation of belonging is in fact about non-belonging. The negotiations of belonging are made on the grounds of the unachievable, which are framed by a configuration of power relations, surreptitiously preventing the societal recognition of Roma people’s belonging.

Notes

1. To preserve anonymity, the town’s, streets’ and research participants’ names have been fictionalised.
2. The attributes that Pfaff-Czarnecka names are a ‘common lot as well as cultural forms (language, religion, and life-style), values, experience, and memory constructions’ (2011: 202).
3. As expressed by Fortier, her concept of ‘migrant belongings’ seeks to capture both ‘the constitutive potency of movement, in the formation of physical and symbolic locations of belonging’ and ‘new formations that emerge from deterritorialization and reterritorialization, and that are rooted, even momentarily, in place’ (2000: 2).
4. For considerations about these issues in relation to Roma people, see Theodosiou and Brazzabeni 2010 and Theodosiou 2011.
5. I discuss the ethnonym ‘Ursari’ in more detail in chapter 1.
6. I refer to this point further in chapter 1.
7. For a recent reconsideration of this argument that regards Roma lives as happening ‘in the present’ and disconnected from notions of past or future, see Tesăr 2018.
8. The title of Péter Berta’s recent book is *Materializing Difference: Consumer Culture, Politics, and Ethnicity among Romanian Roma* (2019).
9. ‘Things’ is meant here in the broad sense as a category comprising not only material objects, but also animals, plants, atmospheric phenomena and all entities that can become totems.
10. This does not mean that ordinary objects cannot become sacred, but quite the opposite. Collective representations have the force to sacralise objects and assign significance that does not derive from the material properties of certain objects conventionally established as valuable.
11. Here the word ‘Roma’ is used as an adjective.
12. Cortorari (see Berta 2019: 179).
13. These quotation marks are intended to distinguish between those instances where the word ‘Romanians’ refers to non-ethnic-minority citizens of Romania (as used by

- my Roma and non-Roma interlocutors) and those cases where the same word refers to Romanian citizens in general (I refer to this distinction further in Chapter 1).
14. I started thinking about the wall-carpets in an early analysis of these items' potential to 'tell' stories about the lives of Roma individuals (Racleş 2014).
 15. Christopher Tilley is well known for his endeavours to bring a phenomenological perspective to material culture studies.
 16. Anthropological research that addresses the human sensorium (e.g. Geurts 2002) has shown that the model of the five senses is not universal. This model reflects only Euro-American conceptions about bodily sensations that are based on the Aristotelian classification of senses. According to this classification, sight and hearing are essentially linked to reason and knowledge, thus being considered superior to the other sensorial modalities – smell, touch and taste – regarded as 'lower senses' (Smith 2007: 28; see also Classen 1997).
 17. Chapter 8 discusses at length the methodological implications of this approach.