

The Politics of Engagement: The influence of identity on the experiences of
activists involved with the Roma community in Serbia

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“submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for The Balkans: Gender,
Transformation and Civil Society, SIT Study Abroad, Fall 2007

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Abstract

Debate and mystery surrounds the origin and culture of the Gypsies¹ in Europe; however, there is no question that the space they inhabit today reflects their position of marginalization and discrimination. During the last five years, there has been a surge of activism and interest in the experiences of the Roma, largely due to the implementation of the Decade for Roma Inclusion². The Decade is a commitment among governments, intergovernmental, non-governmental organizations, and Romani civil society to address the inequality of Roma in Europe by focusing on employment, education, health, and housing within the specific context of each participating country³. Today in Serbia, there are thousands⁴ of activists engaging in various efforts to empower Roma, but sparse literature exists on the subject of the activists' identity and its implications. In order to develop a holistic understanding of activism around Roma issues in Serbia, one must explore the experiences of modern day activists, including both those who identify as Roma and those who do not⁵, working for the empowerment, protection and support of the Roma community in Serbia. This study will investigate activists' motivations for activism, the limitations they face, and the methods they consider most effective to

¹ This group is referred to by various terms including gypsy, Roma, cigani, and singeuner among others. Member of this group prefer their ethnicity to be referred to in differing ways. For the purposes of this paper I will refer to this group as gypsies and Roma, but this is not to assume that this is how they would identify themselves, nor is this an attempt to force this identity on them.

² Referred to hear on out as the Decade

³ The participating countries are Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia (DRI 2007).

⁴ This number was mentioned by several of the activists I interviewed. They explained that there are hundreds of NGOs working with Roma issues, however, many of these organizations are small and unrecognized. There exists no accurate count of the Roma NGOs in Serbia, nor an official count of the individuals involved with Roma issues.

⁵ Throughout this study I will refer to activists who are not ethnically Roma as non-Roma or not ethnically Roma. This however does not mean that they are not working with Roma. Similarly, when I speak of activists who are ethnically Roma, I will refer to them as Roma activist. The assumption is that all the activists I am speaking of are some how involved with efforts to empower Roma, thus this does not need to be reiterated.

empower Roma in order to develop an understanding how to effectively, respectfully, and appropriately engage with a community which is not ones own.

About the Researcher

While I recognize that women should not be perceived as belonging to homogenous category, I believe that women should engage with one another in a fellowship of responsibilities and interests. I say this as a feminist, and I adhere to this identity because gender has been the way in which I have experienced marginalization.⁶ I came to the former Yugoslavia unfamiliar with its political history and present day reality. I was unaware of dominant problems faced by individuals in this part of the world, and I had only a minor suspicion of which groups of women were disproportionately marginalized. I did, however embark on this journey in hopes of better understanding the experiences of women in this part of the world. I am drawn to communities of women who are the most vulnerable and I originally intended to research human trafficking in Eastern Europe⁷. This intention quickly changed when I began to develop an awareness of the experiences of Europe's largest minority, the Roma⁸.

As I read more and more about Roma women, I was struck by both admiration and sadness. I read stories of their will, perseverance and survival strategies, but I also learned of the ways that suffering still plagues many of their lives. With this knowledge, I intended to research the experiences of Roma women in Serbia. This intention;

⁶ I grew up in a small town in Kentucky, where the general consensus was that women were supposed to spend their time in the kitchen and raising children. While I was not subjected to physical abuse or denied entry into a job or university because of my gender, I was unrelentingly teased by the boys I grew up with because I excelled in school and had no interests in activities they considered appropriate for women.

⁷ I spent the previous summer working with an U.S. based organization that works predominantly with women who are survivors of trafficking. This organization recommended that former Yugoslavia would be an ideal region to investigate this problem beyond the borders of the U.S.

⁸ This minority is also unique because they are identified by the color of their skin, a basis for discrimination in a formerly "white" Europe.

however, also was altered after a consideration of my personal identity and research capacity.

While I am a woman, this might be one of the only things I have in common with the group I intended to research, because in addition to being a woman, I am Western, liberal, and in a position of privilege; all of which factors have significant implications on the relationship that would exist between myself and those I intended to research. First and foremost, I do not speak the Romani language, thus communicating with these women would present an enormous obstacle. In contemplating my role as “researcher,” I recognized that because I am in a position which allows me the opportunity to travel across the world and observe the experiences of a group who could never imagine leaving their country, this in itself presents an obstacle. Following this awareness, I began to contemplate my western ideas, and the western environment which I have developed my personal conception of feminism⁹. With these considerations in mind, I approached my research accordingly.

About the Research

Evaluating my identity and recognizing my inaccessibility to certain resources has molded my research in two primary ways. First, I have decided to work with the activists who are involved with the Roma community in Serbia, rather than the Roma beneficiaries themselves. Speaking with activists will facilitate an understanding of the Roma

⁹ At home I am fighting for individuals to develop an awareness of issues including the plurality of gender, the reversal of gender roles, and the ways linguistics reflects patriarch. Some might criticize that I am “nit-picking,” however I see this as a personal commitment that makes sense to me within the context of the United States. I am not, however, ignorant enough to overlook that encouraging my ideas of gender equality and civil society on individuals within an environment that I am not as familiar with might not make sense and might not be warmly welcomed. I do, however, consider my awareness of the necessity of contemplation of my feminism as an actual reflection of my feminism. While I see the influence of Western ideas on my identity, as a feminist, I believe that one must approach a community that is not their own with caution, intentionality and humility, learning from the individuals there rather than enforcing ones ideas on them.

community from a position which respects my personal limitations as one who cannot fully communicate with Roma themselves.¹⁰ *This I hoped would lend to a discussion on the appropriate way to “help” a community, and how this differs depending on if an individual is a part of that community or an outsider. I recognize that to this question there exists a very complicated and fluid answer; however, I hope this case study on activism in the Roma community will provide insights and recommendations as to what kind of engagement this might be.*

The second way my research diverged from my original intent resulted from the lack of organizations which focusing specifically Roma women. While I still intended to address the issue of gender in the Roma community, I recognized that my research would benefit by additionally looking at the experiences of activists in NGOs not exclusively focused on Roma women’s issues. I intended to highlight the diversity of approaches to working with this community, and I recognized that I could only do so if I broadened the domain of my study. Interviewing individuals at a variety of organizations would be valuable because I wanted to understand the role of *identity* in the experiences of activists, and the majority of activists working with Roma in non-Roma focused organizations are not Roma themselves.

I intend for this study to map Roma activism against the broader background of the history, experiences, and international initiatives directed toward Roma in Serbia today, as well as highlight the diversity of actors involved in these initiatives. This study will investigate the personal side of activism, rather than generalizing the identity of activists. *Through interviewing activists involved with Roma today in Serbia, I hope to*

¹⁰ This is not to say that all Roma speak Romani, or no Roma speak English. While I had the opportunity to speak with several Roma activists who could speak English, the majority of Roma beneficiaries do not.

understand the influence of their personal identity on their motivations for activisms, methods of engagement, and limitations when working with this community

Methodology

In order to better understand the implications of identity, motivations and limitations experienced by activists working with Roma in Serbia, I conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with activists involved with Roma. To facilitate a broad perspective of the various aspects of identity which might affect the experiences of activists, this group was constituted of men and women, Roma and not, who either work at an organization that focuses exclusively on Roma issues or at an organization that has specific programs which address Roma. The organizations included international organizations involved with the administration of the Decade, local NGOs who are participating in the implementation the programs described by the Decade, Roma NGOs working independently of the Decade, and NGOs unaffiliated with the Decade plan who are addressing the needs of the Roma community. The approaches taken by the activists I interviewed included psycho-drama, art, policy, administration, research and counseling.

The organizations the activists are involved in are located in Novi Sad, Niš and Belgrade¹¹, the three cities in Serbia in where there is the most focus on Roma activism. The majority of activists I interviewed are currently involved in organizations in Belgrade, but for some of them, Belgrade is only a base, and the majority of work they conduct is outside of the capitol. In Belgrade, I spoke to activists involved with the Minority Rights Center, Dah Teatar, an NGO that focuses on trafficking, an NGO that

¹¹ These are also the three largest cities in Serbia, with the most significant political influence.

works with street children¹², the OSCE mission, and independent activists. In Novi Sad, I spoke with individuals involved in the School for Romology and the Human Rights Center, and from Niš I spoke with a woman involved in the Roma Women's Network. At the majority of these organizations, I interviewed at least two individuals who have different responsibilities in the organization.

The interview questions I prepared for these individuals address their experiences as an activist, their experiences in their particular NGOs, the way they have personally been involved with Roma, as well as their perceptions of activism around Roma in Serbia. The set of questions slightly differs depending if the interviewee is Roma or not, and whether or not they are involved in an organization that focuses exclusively on Roma issues. The differences in the questions, however, are slight and still aim to obtain the same insights into the experiences of the activists (See Appendix).

I intended to interview all the activists at the offices their respective NGOs for two reasons. Firstly, I identified that the organization would be an environment they were comfortable in as well as convenient for them to meet with me. Secondly, I wanted the opportunity to observe them in the environment where they first and foremost activists. I suspected that this environment might contribute to an air of professionalism on their part, however, I did not weigh this as a substantial obstacle standing in the way of the quality and honesty of the material I would obtain.

One of my interviews required a translator, and for this interview I made sure that this was an individual who worked at the same organization as the individual I was interviewing. I did not want the communication barrier to have a negative impact of the

¹² The names of these two particular organizations have been omitted for the protection of the individuals working at them as well as the individuals they work with.

comfort level of the interview, potentially altering the results. I suspected that it would be much more comfortable for my interviewees to have the authority of deciding who would serve as the third person present.

I approached all my interviews as a student/learner rather than as someone with authority on this topic. This is primarily because I am not an authority on this topic and my eagerness to learn from the experiences of my interviewees is authentic. Neither did I present myself to them as a feminist¹³, or elaborate on my personal background; I rather presented myself as a humble unbiased student with little knowledge beyond what I had read in texts available to the public. I did, however, present myself as an activist, and I explained to each interviewee that I am participating in a program which focuses on gender, transition and civil society in the Balkans, and through this theme and my travel during the semester, combined with my personal identity as and activist, I have been directed to research the experiences of activists working with Roma in Serbia. I approached my interviewees in this manner to avoid creating an uncomfortable power dynamic, hindering their answers by suggesting I might not agree with them, but establishing a level of basic comfort by voicing my interest in their role as well as the commonality we share as activists.

Assumptions

Going into my interviews I suspected that the experiences and motivations of activists would be primarily shaped by their ethnic identity. I believed that Roma would

¹³ Although I consider many identity as a feminist is important, I have encountered a lot of ambiguity around the meanings individuals associate with this term, particularly while in the former Yugoslavia. I have encountered women that I would assume were feminists however, they personally would not identify themselves as feminist and take offense at the association. While during my interviews I would express that I was interested in empowering women, human rights, and activism, I made the conscious decision to avoid using identifications which could generate confusion.

have the best ideas of how to work with this community and they alone could identify the most effective approach for working with Roma¹⁴. My conception of this “common identity” was not one which meant that all Roma share the same culture, but rather that most Roma have a shared identity in the way they have uniquely been marginalized. Through this marginalization I suspected there would stem group cohesion which would not be effectively penetrated by someone considered an outsider by the beneficiaries. While I recognized that other factors contribute to the identity of the activists, the way they engage with the community, and the way they are perceived, I suspected that none would be as significant as ethnic identity.

Background

History and contemporary reality of Roma and in Serbia

The most widely supported hypothesis is that Gypsies are of northern Indian origin, and that they left this land between 800 AD and 950 AD. From here, they migrated west dispersing throughout Europe (Čvorović 2004:14). Today the European Gypsy population is around 8 million. Between 400,000 and 500,000 live in Serbia (MRC 2007:7) where they constitute a recognized ethnic minority (Čvorović 2004:31). The majority of Gypsies live in the southern regions of Serbia; however, they populate all regions of the country (Čvorović 2005:32). To this day, the rate of intermarriage has remained extremely low, allowing them to remain a separate ethnic group. As is the case in all of Europe, Gypsies in Serbia are among one of the most segregated ethnic groups. Along with the processes of assimilation and manipulation, many Gypsies have denied

¹⁴ This assumption was formulated based on the literature I engaged with about activism in the Roma community, but not from personal experience.

their heritage, while others prefer terms “Cigani¹⁵” or “Singeuner” over “Roma.”

Language also divides Gypsies in Serbia. While some retain their mother tongue, others now speak Serbian or German¹⁶.

The differences among Gypsies in Serbia create communication problems which prevent joining with one another to advocate for their needs. “Gypsy culture in general is extremely diverse and difficult to pinpoint. Their ethnicity is also disputed and complex issue, coming from the fact that most Gypsies do not regard themselves as members of a cohesive group, but identify instead with the subgroup to which they belong” (Čvorović 2005:34). A Roma activist reinforced the importance of not forcing all Roma into one category¹⁷, because you will find few Roma who will accept this. Even in Belgrade, Roma in one settlement often deny access to Roma in another.

Today the situation experienced by Roma in Serbia is affected by the country’s past. Roma too, have been severely impacted by economic and institutional corrosion caused in large part by the wars, isolation and sanctions (Čvorović 2004:47), thus “the general socioeconomic condition of the Gypsies in Serbia can be described as one of poverty: extensive, acute, and typified by massive unemployment, poor education, inadequate health care and poor quality housing” (Čvorović 2004:46). Roma are subject

¹⁵ While some Roma will refer to themselves using this term, it is extremely derogatory for someone who is not Roma to refer to a Roma individual as a Cigani. Comparisons can be made between the use of this word and the use of the word “Niger” in the United States when referring to someone of African American heritage.

¹⁶ The majority of the population of German speaking Roma in Serbia are those who were fled the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s and the fall of communism. A 2006 study done by the migration education center estimates that of the 40,000 individuals who have been forced to return to Serbia, 63% are Roma. They estimate that between 50,000 and 150,000 individuals will be forced to flee by the end of the ordeal (MCE 2006)

¹⁷ Roma usually view themselves as part of a particular specific community of Roma rather than as part of the larger ethnic group.

to institutional discrimination¹⁸ and lack many essential civil rights because their lack of personal documents (MRC 2007:7), and this is intensified by the poor treatment of Roma by public institutions including schools and hospitals. Legislation forbids discrimination toward any individuals because of ethnic origin, yet “deeply rooted social prejudices are still an obstacle to the implementation of the proclaimed principles” (MRC 2007:7). On the brighter side, as of November 2006, the first two Roma parties entered the parliament which serves as a source of new hope for the Roma communities in Serbia (MRC 2007:8). The problems faced by Roma today are complex and abundant, and not easily resolved, however, the future of Roma in Serbia is gradually looking brighter because of the many actors advocating for this community.

Roma Activism in Serbia

This relatively new surge of activism stemmed from the implementation of the The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015¹⁹, an international commitment to bring Roma out of their situation of poverty, exclusion, and discrimination within a regional framework. The main objectives of the Decade include speeding the process of the improvement of Roma interests by including Roma in the decision-making, and “to

¹⁸ According to the individuals I interviewed, Roma are often denied services by professionals including doctors and lawyers because of their ethnicity. In cases when they are given services, they are the last helped and receive minimal care.

¹⁹ “The idea of the Decade emerged from ‘Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future,’ a high-level regional conference on Roma held in Budapest, Hungary, in 2003. Prime Ministers of the participating governments signed the Declaration of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in Sofia, Bulgaria, on February 2, 2005. The nine countries taking part in the Decade are Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. All of these countries have significant Roma minorities, and the Roma minority has been rather disadvantaged, both economically and socially. Each country participating in the Decade has developed a national Decade Action Plan that specifies the goals and indicators in the priority areas. The founding international partner organizations of the Decade are the World Bank, the Open Society Institute, the United Nations Development Program, the Council of Europe, Council of Europe Development Bank, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Roma Information Office, the European Roma and Traveller Forum, the European Roma Rights Centre, and the Roma Education Fund.” (Decade of Roma Inclusion 2007)

review such progress in a transparent and quantifiable way.” The Decade aims to bring Governments, intergovernmental, non-governmental organizations, and Romani civil society together to execute the following objectives.

- “a. launch initiatives to strengthen Roma inclusion as a high priority on the regional and European political agendas;
- b. learn and exchange experiences;
- c. involve Roma meaningfully in all policy making on matters concerning them;
- d. bring in international experience and expertise to help make progress on challenging issues
- e. raise public awareness of the situation of Roma through active communications. (Terms of Reference 2005)”

The Decade focuses of four primary areas: employment, education, health, and housing, but in addition to these priorities, the Decade requires that each respective government take into account the issues that are specific to them such as poverty, discrimination, and gender issues. (Terms of Reference 2005:3). The activists I interviewed explained that since the implementation of the Decade, there has been larger funds available for Roma focused projects, thus more activism has centered on Roma issues. The individuals I interviewed shared that some of these funds come from the government who has been forced to take accountability for these issues, while other funds have come from international donors.

In Serbia, the implementation of the Decade Action Plan (DAP) falls under the governance of the Secretariat for Roma within the Agency for Human and Minority Rights, launched as a part of an OSCE project²⁰. Under the Secretariat works four

²⁰ The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has 19 field operations in Southeastern and Eastern Europe which focus on “early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation in its area.” In Serbia, the OSCE declares that its mission is to “to assist Serbia in building independent, accountable and effective democratic institutions, of rule of law, human rights, media, law enforcement, economy and environment. We also aim to support civil society and foster regional co-operation and reconciliation, contributing to a sustainable, secure and stable society for all

individuals, some of whom are Roma themselves, reflecting the plans recognition of the importance for including Roma in the plan (Decade Watch 2007:120). Unfortunately, there is no official monitoring mechanism for the actions taken for the Roma decade for inclusion, and thus a challenge is encountered in monitoring the action coordination among actors in this efforts as well as the actual success of the initiatives (Decade Watch 2007:121).

Not all Roma focused projects have been initiated as a result of Decade for Roma inclusion. There are hundreds, and some even suspect thousands of NGOs working on the needs of Roma. These organizations include those who both do and do not exclusively focus on the needs Roma. While the DAP discusses the importance of including all players: NGOs, the government, and Roma civil society, it is important to question the effectiveness of this plan, and look at this at a more personal level including how it is received by the communities, as well as the actual experiences of activists involved in this movement.

Contemporary Discussions on Identity and Activism in the Roma Community

Peter Vermeersch in his essay “Marginality, Advocacy, and the Ambiguities of Multiculturalism: Notes on Romani Activism in Central Europe,” discusses how activist who take up the “cause” of Roma often find themselves in an ambiguous position, and in attempt to gain support and articulate their claims risk essentializing the experience of all Roma and reinforcing their position of marginality (Vermeersch 2005:451). This results in descriptive generalizations that are detached from the actual experiences and identities of the individuals in question (Mohanty 2004:33-34). The weaknesses of non-Roma

citizens of Serbia.” One branch of this mission focuses exclusively on Roma local initiatives by working with local NGOs and Roma civil society (Facts and Figures 2007).

activists was similarly endorsed at a 1992 gathering at Stupava in Slovakia for members of their Diaspora the following comments were made by Rudko Kawczynski, a Roma leader from Hamburg:

“Roma are sitting, *gadje*²¹ are speaking. They are telling us what to do, which language to speak. They want to teach us how to speak our own language. What are they *doing* here?...Ten miles from here gypsies are starving. This is not a concern for the *gadje*. It is our problem. They don’t want to help us. They want to quell us, or else expel us or maybe to kill us. Europeans try to make our life so difficult that we will leave voluntarily. They drive us to think that they are all alike. Brothers, Don’t think that the *gadjo* is more clever than you are. You must help yourselves. We cannot expect any kind of help from anyone” (Fonseca 1995:298).

This comment suggests that some Roma are not receptive to the action plans of those outside their community. Thus, by working with Roma as a group, in addition to reinforcing a marginal identity that neglects to respect the complexity of the many varieties of Roma identity, non-Roma activists must also grapple with the potential power dynamic that might be perceived between them and the community they are working with. This challenge is in addition to not speaking the Romani language and the lack of trust they might risk receiving from Roma as a result of their skin color.

Neither, however, is it accurate to immediately conclude that non-Roma are unfit to be activists in the Roma community, and that all Roma share the same identity and thus are skilled activists. “The Handbook on Participatory Local Action Planning to Combat Poverty and Roma Exclusion” explains that “Trust is the most important when a partnership crosses many boundaries—interpersonal, inter-institutional, cross cultural—at the same time” (Tanaka 2007:10). The study, however does not suggest that a particular identity of an activist is most effective for working with Roma, but rather that common

²¹ “Most Roma refer to themselves by one generic name, *Rom* (meaning “man” or “husband”), and to all non-Roma by the term *gadje* (also spelled *gadze* or *gaje*; a term with a pejorative connotation meaning “bumpkin,” “yokel,” or “barbarian”)” (Rom 2007).

ground must be established with the group that is being empowered and that local actors must be involved in the decisions being made which concern them²², because ultimately “efficient communication is crucial for increasing mutual trust” (Tanaka 2007:9).

Roma are not free from potential obstacles when working with Roma. There are debates that it is incorrect to assume that they share a similar identity, however, as explained by Richard Clewett in his essay “Constructing New Political and Social Identities among Roma (Gypsies) in Central Europe” suggests that while Roma might not all share the same identity, through the opposition that have similarly faced they are able to establish some common ground (Clewett 1999).” Still, these are only hypothesis, and in order to understand the experiences and limitations of activists working with the Roma in Serbia, only the activists themselves can paint an accurate picture of the effects of personal identity.

Results and Analysis

Motivations for Activism

One of the first questions I asked the activists I interviewed, regardless of whether or not they identify as Roma was “How did you find yourself in this work?” There was not a consistent answer and every individual found this a challenging question.

Additionally, there was not a correlation between the answers to this question and the

²² At a theoretical level, the Decade plan reflects the ideas of the feminist text I have engaged with. Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* discusses the importance of not neglecting to recognize individuals’ personal and communal histories as well as how this affects their identity (Mohanty 2004:104). She proposes that activists participate in a “politics of engagements rather than a politics of transcendence” (Mohanty 2004:122). By this, she is suggesting that the organizations best at recognizing the identity of the woman in question as well as her specific needs, history and desires, are those which arise from the environment inhabited by the women herself. This implies that the most qualified individual to identify the needs and identity Roma are Roma; however, a close second would be the grassroots organizations working with these groups (Mohanty 2004:166-167).

activist's ethnic identity. While the specific answers differed among the activists, after thorough consideration, the majority of activists attributed their desire to work as activists to their personal experiences. One interviewee, a Roma woman who had grown up in Niš, told me "ever since I was a little girl, I noticed that my mother and I were victimized, we were not treated as equal to men, nor to Serbians, and I wanted to do something about this." A Roma gentleman, working on Roma issues at the OSCE mission to Serbia similarly shared personal reasons for his involvement with Roma activism. He had grown up in Kosovo, and had watched the way that "his" people were treated as marginal to other groups and now he was in a position to take accountability for this problem and thus pursued a career working with minority rights. Another Roma woman, now an activist at the Minority Rights Center (MRC) was also directed to Roma activism because of her position of marginality, however from a different angle. She explained that she found herself working in as an activist because it was the only employer that would hire her, despite her being qualified for many different jobs.

Among the non-Roma activists there was also variation among how and why they became activists. All of the non-Roma activists I interviewed were women, two of whom explained that they had been raised by open minded parents who taught them that they were responsible to confront a problem if they noticed one. One woman explained her activism as follows: "It is a mixture of my personal and professional interests...I usually feel the need to protect people who are being persecuted and who are feeling bad. Anybody who needs help I want to give help." One woman, working with a NGO in Belgrade that works with survivors of trafficking explained that she believes that everyone is responsible to confront the problems they see in society, and that it is her

personal responsibility to support this society to change for the better, help it become a place where all individuals can live safely and freely. Another woman explained that as a lesbian, she too knew what it felt like to be marginalized, and sought to uplift individuals who also experienced this marginality. The exception to a personal interest in activism held by these individuals was a woman at MRC, who explained that she merely became involved with Roma issues because it was a good opportunity to strengthen her legal skills as an aspiring activist.

While most of the individuals were challenged to identify the reason they were activists aside from a personal conviction, individuals were able to identify why as activists, they were involved with Roma issues. Individuals involved in both Roma focused organizations and those with programs addressing Roma, identified that they were interested in supporting marginalized communities, and in Serbia, Roma are the most marginalized community. The young man I interviewed at the OSCE explained that, “I find myself involved in this work very easily because I am familiar with the issues, the steps and procedures to be implemented to improve the lives of minorities, and Roma happen to be the minority I am most familiar with because of my personal identity.”

When speaking to individuals who worked at non-Roma focused organizations, it was the specific problem they focused on that directed their interest to Roma. A woman involved with a NGO that works with street children explained that “the majority of individuals who lived in poverty and the conditions that we were looking at are Roma. We were more focused on the situation in which somebody lived or the problem which he or she faces, but this now means Roma.” Activists involved with organizations that

focused on women's issues including a human trafficking NGO and Women's Space, a group which works with minority women, explained that they work with Roma women because while Roma are disproportionately the targets of discrimination, Roma women face even more extreme opposition. A female activist at the OSCE who focuses on gender explained the reason for her activism with Roma as follows: "I am more focused on issues with Gender, but Roma are the most discriminated against minority, and by default I end up working a lot with Roma women's issues such as the empowerment of Roma women in politics and economics." Thus, while many Roma activists did not identify Roma as the group they would work with, their interests in specific issues have directed them to this community.

The motivations of the activists were diverse and not strictly the result of their personal identity. The most predominant commonality among the activist was that they had experienced a form of marginalization, and this directed them to use their skills and energy to empower individuals in similar situations. This experience of marginality, however, did not only stem exclusively from being Roma. While all of the activists were hard pressed to identify why they were activists and initially reacted to this as an awkward question, activists were able to identify why they were working with Roma. Whether involved in a Roma focused organization or an organization focused on certain issues Roma issues, activists attributed their work with Roma to their intentions to empower the most oppressed groups in society.

Various approaches

Just as the motivations for activism among the activists were varied, so are the ways they are engaging with the Roma. Activism around Roma issues is not only

approached by NGOs that focus exclusively on Roma, but by organizations which have either noticed a need they wish to address or by organizations which focus on a problem predominantly experienced by Roma. The diversity of organizations focused on Roma issues contributes to the large population of non-Roma activists deeply involved with Roma. The various ways activists are involved with Roma issues include art therapy, drama workshops, grassroots discussions, fieldwork, policy, law, and administration. These individuals represent a variety of approaches to working to empower the Roma community. Each activist I spoke with is engaged with this community in a way which takes into account their personal identity and professional abilities.

The two women activists I interviewed at Dah Teatar identified first and foremost as artists, and because of this identity believed that they are uniquely able to empower the Roma community through a method not often utilized. One of the women told me that when looking through her office window one day, she noticed that children on the playground were playing in two divided groups. One group was Roma and the other group was Serbian. As an actress, feminist, and theater workshop director she knew that there existed a way to confront this division through which she could utilize her strengths. She with her partner designed a theater workshop which would bring Roma and Serbian children together to work on a performance. Her intention was that “this whole working and collaborating through artistic process is essential for changing relationships between people, developing understanding, overcoming differences—through a joint venture and joint product.” After she worked with these children for a year she was able to see the results because the children were playing together outside her window. Her partner in this process explained the results as follows:

“This process you see is not like talking about theory, you just see it. You can’t theorize about it, you just see the children interacting and know that something has changed. This is the highest achievement that any activist can hope for. You see here there are a lot of prejudices, a lot of xenophobia, ideas that Roma are dirty, poor, uneducated, second class people, and people even in their homes don’t mix with Roma kids. Through this process, we were able to help the children understand how diversity is beautiful.”

While there are places for artists in the pool of Roma activism, so are there positions for field researchers, lawyers and administrators. The individuals involved with the Roma focused organizations I interviewed have initiatives directed at Roma alone and these individuals are involved predominantly in field work and policy. They are working less on aid projects and more on creating substantial lasting change in Roma communities in coordination with large donors who significantly impact their project. In the Roma focused NGOs I looked at, both Roma and non-Roma activists were working along side one another to empower the Roma community. Within these organizations, however, I observed how the roles on the individuals reflected their ethnic identity. While non-Roma activists were in roles of administration and policy, the Roma activists constituted the field research team. Both parties, however, recognized the importance of working along side one another, but approaching their roles in a way that acknowledged potential limitations they might encounter as a result of their identity.

Supporting the efforts of many of the smaller NGOs working for Roma interests are international organizations such as the OSCE. At this organization I interviewed two activist, one non-Roma woman involved with administration and gender issues and a Roma gentleman involved in overseeing Roma focused Projects particularly dealing with field work. The OSCE acts as both a supporter and participant in the efforts to empower Roma, and their current programs focus on the four elements of the decade. While the

OSCE also works closely with many NGOs that work with Roma, they also partner with organizations that are not working exclusively with Roma on projects to address this community. Projects participated in by the OSCE include round table discussions to facilitate dialogue among police and Roma, workshops to empower Roma women politically and economically, as well as traveling to municipalities to identify the needs of Roma there. The OSCE works closely with the Decade initiatives and commitments, including keeping Roma involved with the work to support Roma. While there are non-Roma involved in policy, administration and research, non-Roma are predominantly responsible for field work.

There then are the organizations that focus on Roma because they make up the largest group of individuals who experience the problem the organization works with. The gentleman and woman working at the OSCE identified that some of the non-Roma focused NGOs are among their strongest partners working for Roma empowerment and they are able to expertly deal with specific issues. These individuals I spoke with were involved at organizations which work with street children, human trafficking and family counseling. They all shared the belief that an organization should work with whoever experiences the problem they focus on whether the individual is Roma or not. At these organizations I observed individuals utilizing their strengths of counseling, administration, social work, and art therapy where they saw the greatest need. One activist I interviewed explained that she sees herself as a Roma activist because she facilitated discussions with young primary school students intended to make them aware of their own discriminatory attitudes. While she is not directly working with Roma, she believes that the fruits of the efforts do support the Roma in Belgrade. These activists

shared that while they were not initially interested in the Roma community, their professional interests and heart for activism has directed them to this community, and in doing so has raised their awareness and compassion for these people.

Focusing on the Community versus the Problem

A reoccurring point of divergence which arose during the process of interviewing the eleven activists was whether they endorsed the belief that the specific community needed to be approached or the specific problem. For example, the Roma activist I interviewed at the MRC explained that:

“You must not focus only on a specific issue but on the community as well, poverty is not the same for Roma and Serbians. For different communities there are different causes. Health issues for example. Roma will face different problems, like reproductive health. If you don’t focus on the specific community you cannot find the answer.”

The belief of the need to focus on the specific community was similarly endorsed by the other two Roma activists I interviewed. The gentleman from the OSCE explained the problems faced by Roma are “are not balanced and they are different everywhere.” This he explained requires working with specific communities to identify their needs and the correct approach rather than developing a generic approach for all marginalized individuals. The young woman from the Roma Women’s Network similarly suggested that the experiences of Roma women are unique and thus they must be looked at as a separate group. The idea of focusing on the community was not only endorsed by Roma activists. The non-Roma woman I interviewed at the OSCE explained that “The initiatives must be different for the Roma because the structure of the communities and their experiences are different. It is important to look at the way a specific community is affected by issues,” and the woman working with Roma in Novi Sad also believed that

because the situation of Roma is unique they must be addressed separate from the rest of the community.

All of the activists who believed that the effective approach to Roma issues is found in addressing specific problems rather than the specific community are involved with organizations which embody this approach, thus it can be speculated that the position an activists takes reflects the mission of their organization. A non-Roma activist involved in anti-discrimination workshops as well as counseling survivors of trafficking explained her ideal approach as follows:

“This organization works mostly with Roma women, but not exclusively. I think that this is good because it shows that the women’s activist scene is not looking at Roma as a separate group, but as one that is integrated. With Roma, some of the problems are larger and harder to take care of but we approach each woman as an individual. Yes they may be Roma, but they are also a woman. First we need to think about what is going on with women here. One of the primarily the problems we are dealing with is segregation and I don’t see how addressing Roma and Serbian women separately can do anything helpful in this respect. It is destructive and reinforces their [Roma women’s] otherness.”

The activist involved with the street children NGO described the work of Roma focused organizations. “In most Roma organizations, they are closed societies and they will only work with Roma. But there are individuals who are in similar situations as Roma who also need help. It is very discriminating.” This idea was also shared by the individuals who worked with Roma women through their focus on trafficking. Thus, there is division among activists as to whether or not focusing on the community reinforces there otherness. While some endorse this belief, others fear without the specific focus on the community, an accurate addressing of Roma’s needs will be neglected.

All of the ethnically Roma activists were quick to say that Roma issues must be addressed independently, it was however the non-Roma activists who appeared to be hindered by their fear that they might be reinforcing the marginality of this group by focusing only on Roma through their efforts. The ethnically-Roma activists²³, however, believed that they were addressing the “uniqueness” of the situation experienced by Roma, but because their situation is unique, this does not imply that they are saying negative things about this community. This led me to wonder if the effectiveness of non-Roma activists is potentially hindered by their perceived need to remain politically correct. Additionally, the individuals most concerned with potentially reinforcing the otherness of the Roma, all identified as feminists, causing me to question if the application of theory when working with Roma might not make as much sense in the current climate.²⁴ In summary, the sensitivity harbored by feminists I spoke with as well as several of the non-Roma activists transformed their approach into one that was so cautious that it risked recognizing that the experience of the Roma is actually different from non-Roma. This recognition, however, explained Roma activists, does not mean that Roma are lesser. He shared that “Roma did not end up in this marginal situation because they are Roma, but rather society has forced them there. But only through recognizing the grave reality of their unique experience can their problems actually be effectively addressed.”

²³ This belief was also shared by several of the non-ethnically Roma activists who worked at NGOs that focused exclusively on Roma issues.

²⁴ To elaborate on this a little more extensively, several of the activists I spoke with told me that working with this community is “not something you can theorize about.” I wonder if the sensitivity that some activists are approaching this community with is actually preventing them from confronting the needs of Roma in the most effective and critical way.

The Effects of Identity

When discussing the effect of personally being Roma, the three activists I interviewed shared that while yes it is helpful for establishing the first communication with a beneficiary, none of the individuals believed that it is the primary factor that qualifies an individual as an effective activist. The gentleman from the OSCE shared that:

“I personally think that Roma working with Roma is much easier, you understand them because maybe you have experienced the same things even though you have overcome them. You have better access, communication, understanding, and probably the most common approach. Non-Roma can also work with Roma communities. It is not about identity, but more about the trust.”

The Roma woman activist from the MRC center similarly believed that the benefit of Roma identity lies in the trust however; she did not put as much emphasis on the need for Roma identity when working with Roma. She explained:

“Roma identity is important, but only for the first communication with a Roma, but as an activist gets more involved and interested in the problems and willing to find solutions, that is really why the trust grows. The most important thing is that one is or isn't Roma, it is that they get involved.”

When the Roma activists were asked what makes them effective activists, the qualities and strengths they identified were similar to those identified by the non-Roma activist! The primary factor identified by all of the activists before education, identity, and experience was the way that they treat people. The Roma activist at the MRC shared that “it is the way that I treat people, especially the Roma in the settlements. I treat everyone decently, and because I treat them with respect they are willing to accept me, be open with me, and invite me into their homes.” The activist counseling women who have been trafficked shared that she believes that she effectively engages with this community

because of her attitude toward them, treating them exactly the same as she would any other woman, “with interest and respect.” Following the way individuals treat one another came qualifications. The gentleman from the OSCE relayed that an effective activist is “well trained, well educated, and knows how to organize people.”

When speaking with Roma activists about the limitations faced by non-Roma activists in the organizations they work in they believed that there are obstacles for their coworkers. The woman from the MRC shared that “those who are not Roma have obstacles with this initial establishment of trust (and just note that we are talking about these Roma who are the poorest of the poor). The gentleman I interviewed at the OSCE similarly believed that he is able to more effectively engage in field-work than his non-Roma coworkers, but this is the only area of working with Roma that is largely affected by an individual’s ethnic identity:

In some places you will have Roma say that because you are not Roma we do not trust you and will not work with you, but because you are Roma we will speak with you. I faced this issue a billion times with one of my colleagues. We would go places together, and they would never speak to him, so I would have to ask his questions for him, and then turn to him to tell him the answers

The Roma woman I spoke with at the MRC shared that if you come with good intentions, whether or not you are Roma, they will accept this. Following up on this, the woman from the Roma Women’s Network shared that it is not necessarily being a Roma that she thinks makes someone an effective activist, but one must personally know and understand marginality. Without this understanding and experience, there cannot be the appropriate sensitivity working with this community. While perhaps it is not being Roma which makes an individual an effective activist, the understanding of marginality which

can come from being Roma can lead someone to activism with this community²⁵. The consensus among activists I spoke with, however, was that this understanding can come from various sources.

Roma activists shared that they are not free of the limitations presented by their identity when engaging with Roma. While they are Roma, they are in a socio-economic position dissimilar to that of the individuals they are working with. A female activist from the MRC described that her Roma co-worker is looked at differently by the individuals she is working with. These differences however, she explained are not just the result of social status. Even Roma in Belgrade are divided into groups, explained an activist at the OSCE. Even if Roma activists were in similar socio-economic positions as the beneficiaries, they would not completely be accepted by the Roma from a different settlement in the same city. There is little group cohesion, thus when working as an activist with this group, the color of your skin has little to do with the way you will be perceived. The Woman I spoke with from the Roma Women's Network asked me "So what is 'Romaness' anyways?" She discussed how often times she becomes frustrated by Roma getting caught up on believing in an identity which in many ways she does not think even exist. However, while it does not make sense to look at Roma as a group with a similar cultural heritage, activists did reiterate that they are looked at as a group because of their position in society.

²⁵ While both the Roma and non Roma activists I spoke to emphasized that an individual is a more effective activist if they have experienced a form of marginality, I think it is important not to generalize the experience of marginality, and assume that the experience of a lesbian is identical to that of a Roma. Additionally, I did not speak with individuals from a wide variety of marginalized groups thus to assume that all individuals who have experienced marginality are well equipped to work with Roma is an ignorant assumption. The activists I interviewed did however share (and I agree with them on this) that to have experienced discrimination because of your identity does have the "potential" to heighten your consciousness of how you treat others and develop a sensitivity to their needs.

Non-Roma activists were faster to say that they believed that they faced obstacles based on their identity, but only in that they encountered a challenge when first establishing trust with an individual. Activists at the Minority Rights Center explained that because this first establishment of trust is critical, the individuals who go into the settlements to work directly with the Roma need to be Roma. This same idea was held by the Roma and non-Roma activists interviewed at the OCSE. They explained that the primary way they identify the needs of Roma is by sending Roma facilitators to the municipalities with the largest Roma populations. The facilitators visit the settlements and speak with individuals there about their needs, concerns and experiences. They both believed that it is important for these individuals to be Roma. An exception to this however, was a non-Roma activist who worked with the Humanitarian Center in Novi Sad. She shared that “I did go to the settlements and they really appreciated it. The problem is that they don’t have a feeling that people respect them, so in this context you speak with them and they learn to trust you.” This, however, was the only individual I interviewed with this belief. The woman from the street children NGO shared that:

” I think it is important to be Roma when working with Roma, and sometimes not being Roma is difficult especially when working with the adults. These individuals have really adopted the identity of Roma. In Serbia Roma are usually not proud of being Roma, they do not know the things they should be proud of, because in Serbia when you say Roma a lot of negative things are associated with this word. So if you are not Roma they will accuse you that you don’t understand them and you not in their position. And sometimes I cant.”

But after saying this, she still reiterated that being qualified takes precedent over sharing a common identity, and this belief was similarly endorsed by all the activists I interviewed. There was not a single activist who expressed that ethnic identity should

take precedent over professional qualifications. They rather perceived it as a benefit, but not necessity.

The majority of non-Roma activists I interviewed were involved in NGOs which do not exclusively work with Roma, but rather predominantly with them because of the issues they deal with. The reasons that these individuals identified that they were effective at working with Roma including understanding the feeling of marginality, but for different reasons, but also professional interests, and personal inclinations. The activists at Dah Teatar shared that their artistic abilities qualified them, the counselor shared that because of her personal interests and training, and the law student working at the MRC shared that because of her legal skills she could empower this community. She explained that “I don’t really care the reasons someone is involved, I think it is more important that you get the job done well.”

Additional limitations faced by activists/NGOs

There was not a single activist who shared that the primary limitation they faced was the result of their identity. The activists rather were situated in positions and within organizations where their personal and professional strengths were utilized. All of the activists demonstrated a level of self-awareness which respected their personal limitations, but also was aware of and confident in their strengths. There were however obstacles which were experienced by all of the activists, many of which were similarly shared in both the Roma and non-Roma focused organizations. The primary obstacle identified by every activist was the lack of funding available and this caused tensions among NGOs because all are competing for the same funding. Rather than working together on the same issues and encouraging one another in their efforts, they grow to see

one another as competition. Another obstacle faced by activists is the restrictions they encounter from the donors. Every activist interviewed explained that the expectations of donors often limit the capacity of the work done by the NGO because it is detached from the action issues affecting the community.

Aside from fiscally related limitations, several activists at non-Roma focused NGOs believed that many of the smaller Roma focused and Roma administered NGOs lack individuals who are qualified to effectively address the problems. An activist from Dah Teatar shared that “The problem with the Roma organizations, is that unfortunately many of them do not have skilled staff and they are just now starting to have developed experts.” The other activist I interviewed from this organization explained that because many Roma NGOs do not even have office space to work, they will likely do something like buy new windows for a building if they receive funding rather than using the money for something that will generate concrete change. The general conception of weakness was also shared by the non-Roma woman working at the organization which works with street children. Her opinion was that Roma organizations usually have an attitude about maintaining the problem in order to maintain work, and keep getting support. “There is this psychology of the victim.” While she did not directly say that this positions Roma as less effective activists, she did voice the fear that as long as some Roma will benefit from the communities position of marginality, she does not believe that the issues faced by Roma will effectively be addressed by this group.²⁶ She personally believes that this creates a struggle in working in partnership with Roma focused NGOs.

²⁶ To elaborate on this, when I discussed this comment with her further, she explained that she was referring specifically to the small NGOs run exclusively by Roma. Some of these are family owned groups that are able to financial benefit by the funding available for Roma focused initiatives, and without this funding, they would lack a way to sustain themselves.

Recommendations to activists

Based on the activists different experiences they had different recommendations to contribute; however several recommendations were reiterated by the majority of the activists. They all discussed how this is not easy work, and because there are many obstacles that stand in the way, one must be persistent and not gauge their effectiveness only on the day's accomplishments. The changes, they explained come slowly, but this is not a reason one should not still try. Another recommendation was that activists and NGOs need to find a way to coordinate their efforts. The gentleman from the OSCE recommended the following:

“The only problem here is that there are countless Roma NGOs with billions²⁷ of Roma activists. They all have different action plans, and a lot of them are not addressing the main needs of the community. Right now we are facing some very serious questions (the four), personally my thought is to organize a sort of umbrella that will work for the benefit of Belgrade city. We will have some sort of organization community, and they will have meetings monthly about a certain topic. They should then receive funding from the state. Having many Roma NGOs is not the answer because they are focusing on too many different things, without any coordination. Lack of coordination is the major lack here. NGOs working on their own initiatives, you just cannot coordinate their efforts.”

Another recommendation was to work on initiatives to get Roma youth involved with issues. The Roma woman from the MRC explained that often times once Roma go to university, they become detached and disinterested in the Roma problems. There needs to be efforts to gain the support and energy of these individuals because they are going to be the ones that really bring about change for this community. The Gender specialist at the OSCE explained that “The body of educated active Roma must continue to increase because they are those who can best advocate for the needs of the Roma. It is

²⁷ This is not the actual number of Roma activists, however he was emphasizing the over-abundance of individuals involved with Roma issues.

these individuals that the Roma look up to, trust, and hope will bring about a better future for the Roma community. This does not mean that I think that only Roma should be involved, but without them, there will be no change.”

A final recommendation, however, only supported by some of the activists was the need to focus less on ethnic identity. This discussion came up in the literature I read in preparation for this research and was supported by individuals working at non-Roma focused NGOs. These activists believe that to truly work towards Roma integration, there must be a shift of consciousness from looking at Roma as a separate group. The majority of these activists identified as feminists, thus while they believed in this at a theoretical level, and identified this sort of approach as ideal, they were hesitant to say if Roma issues would continue to be addressed effectively if this community was only dealt with through specific problems they face. While these individuals suggested that civil society should be what changes so that there need not be organizations to specifically focus on Roma, there is a large discrepancy between what “should” happen and what is the current situation.

Conclusion

A large group of individuals are involved with Roma issues today. Some speculate that this interest is because of available funding while others believe that Roma issues have become too severe to ignore any longer. Regardless of what the cause may be, it is apparent that the group of activists addressing Roma issues reflects a diversity of identities, professions, and motivations.

Through the process of interviewing activists engaged with Roma issues in Serbia, I have come to understand that there is not one best approach or one ideal identity

for working with Roma issues. A Roma activist at the MRC put it well saying “The only way to be successful is to work together. Roma have access to certain things that non Roma do not, and non Roma have access to things that Roma do not. So when you put our efforts and knowledge together, only then are you able to effectively work with the Roma community.” While Roma are faster to gain the trust of this community, even Roma who are activists still risk being viewed as an outsider because of their socioeconomic status compared to the beneficiaries. The activism of the many of the non-Roma activists is affected by elements of identity such as their experience of marginalization, their gender, and their personal and professional interests. And for Roma activists, many other elements of identity also apply, thus determining someone’s effectiveness, experience, and motivations as an activist is impossible based on ethnic identity alone.

Among the elements which formed the identity of the activists, ethnic identity is not the strongest element affecting the experience of an activist involved with Roma, nor the way they are perceived by the community. The most effective activists appear to be those who engage with Roma in a way which respects the culmination of their personal interests, professional abilities, as well as identity. Identity not limited to ethnicity, however, is not turn the strongest factor affecting the experience of activists working with Roma. Aside from activists engaged in field work, the qualities which qualify an effective activist appear to be the way they treat the group they are working with, their intentions and there skills. This means that there is a spot for many actors in the effort to empower Roma.

While some individuals are breaking down prejudices through round table discussions, counseling, and theater, others are working on policy and field work. A holistic approach appears to be the effective way to address the problems of this community, and the different angles these activists are approaching the issues of Roma are all effectively empowering the community. Although there is necessity for this holistic approach, the question, is how to coordinate the efforts of such a divided group of activists, and how to generate communication among all the actors who are competing for funding, while convinced their approach is most effective. So the question still remains of how to generate communication among the individuals working with Roma issues. While identity is not creating the divide I had suspected, funding, lack of communication, and differing opinions on effective approaches is generating a rift which is slowing the process of Roma integration. Further research needs to investigate methods of resolving these discrepancies. There are however, activists who are making realistic recommendations for generating this communication, thus another question which arises is why have these ideas not yet been implemented? While qualified activists are abundant and many their approaches are making positive changes, until there is a more unified fellowship of responsibilities, competition will continue to stand in the way of Roma empowerment.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

- Please tell me a little about yourself, your upbringing, education, where you are from
- How exactly did you become involved as an activist in the Roma community?
- What factors do you consider vital for an NGO to effectively work with Roma from one who is not as successful in its efforts?
- How does your personal identity play into/affect your role as an activist working with Roma? Does this determine the role you have in the organization? Is your effectiveness hindered by not being Roma yourself?*
- What are your feelings/thoughts on working as an activist in a community which you are not a part of? * °
- In what ways have you made personal connections with members of the Roma community, established some sort of common ground? °
- What opinions did you have of the Roma community before you were an activist and what sources contributed to the formulation of these ideas? How have your views of Roma changed, what has contributed to these evolution of opinion? * °
- Within a Roma focused NGO, do you feel that certain positions and responsibilities should be allocated based on an activists identity (for example as a Roma or a Woman)? Why or why not? And how so?
- What elements of your experience as an activist do you consider unique to working with the Roma community versus say, working as an activist in the GLBTIQ community, women in black, etc.
- Are there any commonalities you have identified among Roma activists?

- Are there resources you lack which you believe would be beneficial to your efforts as an activist in the Roma community? °
- Do what degree are the Roma asked what they want/need versus it being decided for them? Do you think that NGOs are in a position to make authoritative decisions regarding the Roma community? What do you believe is the appropriate relationship between and NGO and the community it works with? °

* questions which have an alternate version for Roma activists

° questions also designated for activists involved in an organizations not working only with Roma

- What are your thoughts/feelings on working as an activist in a community which you are a part of? Does this facilitate accessibility? Are there any particular problems which arise from being a member of the community you are working to empower?
- What are the major obstacles you perceive are encountered by your fellow activists who are not Roma when working with the Roma community? Have there been any ways that you have helped them better understand this community?
- What is the value of having activists both from the Roma community and those who are not, involved with (NGO), if any?
- Do any common conflicts arise between Roma activists and non-Roma activists in (NGO)?
- (potential question if seems appropriate). Have you personally faced any obstacles as a Roma?
- Questions specifically for individuals involved with an NGO that does not

specifically focus on Roma?

- How/Why has your organization become involved with the Roma community?
- What would you consider the responsibility of activists in Serbia to the Roma community even if this community is not the primary group they are focused on?
- What sort of communication have you observed among NGOs concerning Roma issues?