**A Study on the Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and Conducting Social Research with Gypsy / Roma Groups**

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**Abstract**

In social science discourse, both historically and currently, the dichotomy between agency and structure tends to dominate debate pertaining to identity construction. However, it is clear that in any debate which omits to explore the dialectic relationships between agency and structure; the holistic, relational and subjective nature of ‘reality’ as perceived by actors engaged in ‘identity construction’ tends to be overlooked. When complex social facts are viewed through a simplistic prism of either individual activities or dominant structural impacts is likely to lead to research conclusion, - particularly when the subjects of research are members of communities at risk of vulnerability which are merely two-dimensional; omitting essential elements and interplays of circumstances, agency and structures which can rapidly shift dependent on both personal and external contexts and stressors.

Within this paper[[3]](#footnote-3), we try to discuss the ways of utilising Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical modelling to explore the potential for creating a more nuanced alternative theory of identity construction in the context of case studies focused on Gypsy/Roma(ni) people whose identity construction depends both on internal identification and that of other (dominant) groups amongst they live. We argue that revisiting Bourdieuian discourse so as to explore the circumstances of these communities ‘identity practices’ does not require that we relinquish any core elements of ‘lived reality’ by reifying the implications of external structural pressures, but instead, use of this theoretical framework enables complexity of debate.

In this paper we also aim to consider how in two widely contrasting international contexts – that of Roma people in Turkey and Gypsy/Traveller communities in the UK – use of Bourdieuian analysis provides appropriate tools which enables us to analyse the daily living activities and associated sense of active agency of these populations without minimising or excluding the structural effects which impact them; enabling a nuanced relational sociological approach to understanding Gypsy/Roma(ni) groups’ identity construction in its entirety, whilst taking account of the specific geographical context in which the populations reside.

**Key Words:** Bourdieu, Relational Sociology, Gypsy/Roma(ni) people, Inequalities, Identity, Research.

**Introduction**

Increasingly sociological research has focused on the necessity of moving beyond focusing on contrasting narratives of structure and agency when examining the lives of marginalised populations; with a shift in recent decades towards examining the complex interaction between the subjective and objective dimensions of individuals’ and communities’ social realities and increasingly, a recognition that actors are located in a complex web of relations with which they interact according to a variety of stressors and opportunities (Burkitt, 2015). Whilst the turn to ‘relational sociology’ (Archer, 2010) has referenced the work of influential scholars such as Giddens (1984), Habermas (1972) and Goffman (1974) who have each explored the interaction between the objective and subjective dimensions of social realities, this field of work has more recently been heavily influenced by the Italian theorist Donati (2012), often apparently overlooking or discarding the critically relevant work of Pierre Bourdieu whose modelling of the interrelationship and interplay between agents as they seek to comply with (or subvert) structures; and the concurrent impact on structures and effect of agents on systems has in its initial form both preceded and influenced later scholars. Accordingly we have elected to revisit the relevance of Bourdieu’s work on structural constructivism (1977; 1989) which has both reached out to a very broad international audience as well as contributing significantly to the field of sociology and broader related academic areas such as management theory (Nord, 2005). Using the most simplistic form of explanation, it can be argued that Bourdieu used the analogy of ‘game theory’ as a proxy for describing social interactions, arguing that no one individual is able to exclude themselves from the complex network of social life within which they operate. By extension, when applied to one’s professional field of study, it is not possible for a social scientist to exclude themself from the subject that they study as the ‘game’ involves all of us (irrespective of our social position or access to a variety of capitals) and thus as a researcher, a participant, or a critical viewer of the academic project as we are all part of the process. Bourdieu’s model is located around three key strands: “the three Rs.. . reflexivity, relationism and research” (Maton, 2003: 53). Utilising structural constructivism to analyse the daily lives and activities of specific groups without diminishing awareness of the structural exclusion which impacts them, firmly locates Bourdieu at the centre of research into the lives of marginalised minority groups.

In this discussion on identity formation and Roma(n)i/Gypsy populations we seek to offer a reflective insight into the scope offered by Bourdieu’s sociological approach to understand identity construction of social groups; with particular reference to the situation of Gypsy/Romani people experiencing discriminatory attitudes in diverse international settings. We argue that the identity ‘choices’ and ‘performance of identity’ undertaken by these communities at particular moments in time represents a perfect example of how Gypsies/Roma(ni) people incorporate and make use of ‘game theory’ through positioning themselves in varying roles at different times; utilising existing networks and available forms of capital (predominantly social and cultural) to engage with structural forces in a way which maximises agency and responds creatively to both threats and opportunities so far as possible given the ‘field’ (or fields) in which they operate and abut state mandated actors and agents engaged in their own ‘game’.

It is worth noting that because of their speacial historical position[[4]](#footnote-4), Gypsies/Roma(ni) communities have perhaps more than most populations, been subject to externally imposed identifications/ethonyms (see further Matras, 2014; Taylor, 2014) which locates these diverse communities as being and behaving in a particular manner regardless of culture; ethno-linguistic group or socio-economic background. Moreover in recent years with the intra-EU transfer of concepts; National Roma Integration Strategy requirements and pre-accession requirements for states seeking to join the UK, we have seen an increasing transfer of internationalist policies which despite lip-service to the contrary (and some beacons of good practice throughout diverse nations) tend to presuppose a single effective model of engagement and an increased coalescing of different communities under the same broad policy labels (of Roma, Gypsies and Travellers) regardless of ethnic, cultural or geographical origins or even whether they nomadise or are sedentarised. It is not possible within this paper to reflect upon the substantial and well-developed critiques of the development, administration and implementation of ‘Roma policy’ within the EU but at this point, it should be noted that growing disquiet, often discussed using post-colonial development studies critical analytical tools, does exists internationally in relation to how Gypsy/Roma(ni) people are framed in policy narratives in a manner which all too often denies their agency and relational place in trans-national networks and national societies (i.e. O’Hanlon, 2016; ERRC, 2014; Guy, 2012).

Accordingly, using a Bourdieuian perspective to explore the interplay of State engagement with typically (or potentially) marginalized groups such as Gypsy/Roma(ni) people would appear to provide a counterbalance to over-generalisation and stereotyping. The contextual model advocated by Bourdieu provides social scientists with the opportunity and theoretical tools to “discover the social behind the individual or specific behind the common” (Çeğin, 2007:511) and in so, doing support the development of more nuanced understandings of the positionality and skilful use of ‘field’ and habitus operationalisation by Gypsy/Roma(ni) people. In consideration of the points mentioned above, this article aims to introduce a theoretical discussion focusing on the suitability of Bourdieu sociology while studying any minority group -like Gypsy / Roma people as in this example-.

**On The Role and Position of Social Scientists**

Bourdieu indicates that one of the biggest challenges of sociology is “to think in a completely astonished and disconcerted way about things you thought you had always understood” (Bourdieu, 1991: 207). A social scientist is thus required to uncover the myths and question the relations beneath the apparently smooth and obvious surface of a phenomenon. “It is an approach to search that attempts to dig beneath surface appearances, asking how social systems work, and how ideology or history conceal the processes that oppress and control people, in order to reveal the nature of oppressive mechanisms” (Harvey, 1990). Because such modes of research requires the researcher to critically analyse and question a range of power relations and the ways in which field, habitus and capital are utilised by diverse players Bourdieuian theory can create or reveal unsettling and disrupting narratives and as such may be viewed as a rebellion against the existing system (Ünal, 2007: 162-163). Indeed Bourdieu welcomed such critiques noting that sociological analysis can assist in making power relations overtly visible and therefore open to change; suggesting that this kind of sociology “may become an instrument of social struggle, capable of offering freedom instead of chains of domination” (Navarro 2006: 19). Accordingly, given its potential to unveil a significant number of discriminatory or racist applications of power which may (depending greatly upon the geographical and political context of the research locale) lead to conflict with authority figures or institutions, it can be claimed that his approach is a suitable way to undertake research with Gypsy/Roma(ni) groups.

Regardless of these difficulties - and despite the fact that social science research may be regarded ambivalently in terms of bringing about unequivocal improvements in the circumstances of disadvantaged groups – using Bourdieuian theoretical approaches and sharing the findings with research, participants can at least “give the groups the opportunity to see the underlying effects of social facts on their unfair [suffering](http://tureng.com/tr/turkce-ingilizce/unjust%20suffering), and bring some relief from feeling responsible for their situation” (Ünal, 2007: 183). Susan Sontag also draws attention to the importance of revealing the processes and contexts which underpin deep rooted and persistent inequality or exclusion: “To designate a hell is not, of course, to tell us anything about how to extract people from that hell, how to moderate hell's flames. Still, it seems a good in itself to acknowledge, to have enlarged, one's sense of how much suffering caused by human wickedness there is in the world we share with others.” (Sontag, 2002 :272).

**On Reflexivity**

Bourdieu was clear that “socio-analysis simultaneously requires reflexivity, that is, a systematic and rigorous self-critical practice of social science” (Swartz, 1997: 11). Accordingly, although reflexivity has been most commonly associated with phenomenological or postmodern approaches; Bourdieu has reframed the concept of reflexivity, drawing attention to the process “as a means of underwriting rather than undermining scientific knowledge” (Maton, 2003: 57). Because Bourdieu foregrounds a relational approach to understanding social facts, he simultaneously questions the possibility of objective scientific knowledge and requires the position of social scientists to be subject to similar scrutiny as all other elements of research. Thus, to understand the ways ‘others’ perceive and interpret social realities, a social scientist must first be critical of their own position (interests, beliefs, thoughts, power, motivations and status etc.). Being sceptical about everything and questioning every single detail - including the researcher’s own ways of thinking - are important components in field research undertaken in this way, as it means that field research becomes a site of mutual interaction between researcher and the participants.

Hattatoğlu (2009) invites researchers give up the ‘boastfulness’ of science and be ‘sensitive’ enough to build field research among equals. Because “to be against racism is not enough; especially researchers must find ways to act and live without consolidating it” (Hattatoğlu, 2009: 146). This postulate of co-production requires researchers to be very focused on what a participant really says, means and needs rather than on a pre-conditioned interpretation of the researcher’s favoured outcomes and model. Thus within research undertaken from a Bourdieuan perspective, it is necessary to hear the voice of participants equidistant from the effects of both presumption of full agency (voluntarism) and structuralist standpoints.

If we apply Bourdieuian models to Gypsy/Roma(ni) studies, this approach invites researchers to both reflect more on their own position as a researcher and simultaneously to ensure that a more collaborative and less hierarchical approach is embedded into the research process. The imposition of external structures and (often) discriminatory formulaic ‘misrecognition’ occasioned by external (and on occasion internal) identity and policy constructions which fail to engage with the heterogeneity of the Gypsy/Roma(ni) populations can both be a politicised tool consciously operationalised as part of a project of Roma-political identity construction (Gheorghe, 1997) or act as a carrier of symbolic violence (see further below). Regardless of both the processes through which such labelling occurs and the purposes for which it is used, it is critically important to be able to analyse the phases through which such actions and perceptions pass, and the impacts of this process on multiple players. We assert that explicitly applying Bourdieuian analytical frameworks which engage with the relational and rapidly changing context in which such developments occur, enables us to frame and isolate counterproductive essentialising constructions whilst exploring the use of multiple techniques and the uses of ‘game theory’ through which subaltern groups are able to assert their agency and belonging to both transnational and ethnicised national minorities according to the field in which they are operating.

**Discrimination, Essentialising Discourse and Symbolic Violence**

As is well recognised, Gypsy/Roma(ni) groups have historically and in much policy discourse been associated with the concept of nomadism. Accordingly, despite their deep-rooted historical association with the many countries in which they reside they can be seen to operate across trans-national and international modes of engagement and simultaneously frequently forced to comply with being ‘othered’ in a manner which foregrounds sedenterisation as the normative model of residence. In this way generally accepted principles and rules of countries in which they live and which supposedly supply a degree of respect and protection for their ethnic characteristics and mode of life are still bound up with and predicated on assumptions of nomadic lifestyle and temporality within a given nation-state; forcing them to engage with structures and perform their ‘Gypsyness’ in a manner which may or may not actively meet their needs or preferences. Despite a widespread tendency amongst Gypsy/Roma(ni) communities to seek to comply with the legislation of countries in which they reside, – often which has imposed sedentarisation against the will of the populations concerned (for example in the UK) - it is not possible to say that compliance with the law equates to the absence of discriminatory attitudes towards Roma(n)i/Gypsy groups.

To this end, there is a clearly identified problem of discrimination against these populations whether or not nomadic or sedenterised and regardless of their occupation or social status within their country or origin; residence or social group. Thus Romaphobia is found throughout the Northern and Western world typically leading to the adaption and adoption of particular mandated or ‘preferred’ practices/performances considered by surrounding populations and government agencies as ‘typical’ of Gypsy/Roma(ni) behaviours. The extent and degree to which these adapations are utilised (the habitus and fields within which Roma(ni)/Gypsy groups participate, and the range of capitals which they operationalise in particular circumstances) represent both agency and the relational aspect of their participation in and engagement with mainstream society.

One of the significant facts about all Gypsy/Roma(ni) groups is the extent of the *symbolic violence* – one of the most significant Bourdieuan concepts which helps us to understand the subaltern group’s role in the circumstances of their discrimination – which impacts their relationships with the state and neighbouring populaces. This type of violence is, (per Bourdieu and also Wacquant) “a set of fundamental, pre-reflexive assumptions that social agents engage by the mere fact of taking the world for granted of accepting the world as it is, an of finding it natural because their mind is constructed according to cognitive structures that are issued out of the very structures of the world.” So, “being born in a social world, we accept a whole range of postulates, axioms which go without saying and require no inculcating” (Wacquant, 1992:168).

Thusaccounting for and embedding awareness of *symbolic violence* is an important element of field research which embraces minorities precisely *because* it provides a more concrete base for understanding the various forms of exclusion; especially the hidden or ignored ones; to which they are subject.

This concept signifies that powerful groups “allow the naturalisation of domination, thus creating passivity and conformity to a given social order” (Navarro, 2006: 19). Indeed it is recognised that on many occasions, minorities tend to submit to the oppression because of this naturalisation and even in some occasions, may take on characteristic of ‘self-hatred’ and ‘misrecognition’ seeing themselves as responsible for their community’s marginalisation and in extreme cases leading to a rejection of their own cultural and ethnic characterisations or a repudiation of ‘bad Roma(ni)/Traveller’ characteristics which are contrary to how they wish to be seen but which may be essentialised in both intra- and inter-ethnic discourse.

For instance, during a field research undertaken in a Gypsy/Roma(ni) neighbourhood in Turkey; it has been frequently seen that high numbers of Gypsy/Roma(ni) community members articulate self-blame for being uneducated or poor (Gezgin, 2016).[[5]](#footnote-5) In particular, when participants were talking about their very limited educational period, they used statements like “I was fool”, “I was unsuccessful” etc. – clear examples of accepting and perpetrating symbolic violence[[6]](#footnote-6).

Greenfields longitudinal body of work with Roma(ni/Gypsy and ‘Traveller’ communities in the UK has similarly identified findings pertaining to both acceptance of symbolic violence (particularly as part of a process for those Roma(ni)/Gypsy/Travellers who have entered into ‘mainstream/professional’ roles) as well as a strong and developing body of ‘resistance’ through the formulation of alternative counter-narratives which frequently demonstrate community agency via utilising, subverting and engaging with policy formation whilst foregrounding (and performing) the structural inequalities which have been overcome by individual actors to permit of active challenges to normative conceptions and symbolic and enacted violence perpetrated against them. Thus for example; one serving police officer who is of Romani origins and who has family members pursuing typical and traditional residential patterns (caravan dwelling) and occupations had this to say:

‘I think that the hostility [towards GTR people] is so great and so accepted that there is a tendency to just join in – have you heard the term a “self-hating Traveller”? – to differentiate yourself and the people you know and your family from “those Travellers” the ones who commit crimes or do bad things and then if you tell yourself often enough that you aren’t like them [the ‘bad’ Travellers], then you can go along with it, agree, take on those attitudes and even find yourself mentally agreeing that yes Travellers are thieves, and violent and not to be trusted and that there isn’t any reason you shouldn’t stop and search them or take down number plates or know that someone keeps a family tree which even includes names of small children living on a site. But when you stop and think you know that this isn’t happening for other communities. It’s horrible really it’s a sort of schizophrenia.’ (Interview with police officer, Roma(ni) ethnicity)

This officer in fact has become extremely active in developing a police association for serving officers who are of Gypsy/Roma(ni)/Traveller origins and which came into being precisely because of the desire of these officers to complicate the narrative of ‘criminal’ and ‘lazy’ populations. The Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association (which has international membership beyond the UK) has successfully activated a range of capitals and transferred their locus of activities across fields, foregrounding their habitus and transferable knowledge to the extent that as both ‘professionals’ and trusted agents of the state they are welcomed into a range of policy and practice contexts as well as working directly with their communities. Accordingly the GRTPA has become active in a range of UK and international consultations and programme development which pertain to their communities, including providing input into delivery of tailored services which support diversionary models for young people potentially at risk of becoming criminalised and hence feeding into the negative discourse and symbolic violence perpetrated on Roma(ni)/Gypsy/Traveller communities.

**Representing and Deconstructing Knowledge**

As the case studies above demonstrate, being able to identify and challenge the relationship between subject and State and contemplate and analyse underlying reasons for young people being ‘educationally unsuccessful’ or essentialised as a criminal minority is an essential requirement to asserting the right to a place in the public forum. As such this form of awareness is as important as the implementation of policies and programmes designed to support marginalised Gypsy/Roma(ni)/Traveller populations, but which often fail, or merely deliver short-term and non-sustainable gains if adequate account is not taken of the situational position of disadvantaged groups. Whilst we’ve shortly touched on two small case studies, there are multiple examples of other interiorised hierarchies that are adopted by subaltern groups as a result of various (and subtly distinct) types of symbolic violence; examples which become more publicly accessible and open to examination only when high quality critically analytical field research is used as a tool to enable such personal and political tragedies to be heard and recognised. Because the majority of negative hierarchical conceptualisation are mostly interiorised, frequently the outside world only has limited opportunities to hear about the realities of experience from the ‘subordinated’ or subaltern communities themselves. As such, not only does the relational sociological approach require reflexive researcher practice but it also carries a strong moral requirement that the researcher must collaborative equally with communities in order to grasp the dialectical relationship pertaining between external domination and inequalities.

Representation of subaltern communities is a highly conflicted area of discourse, but it is impossible not to refer to this aspect which is key to collaborative research and the deployment of Bourdieuian theory when working with marginalised groups. From Gramsci (Green, 2011) to Althusser, (1971), hegemony and the position of subaltern have been discussed at length. A substantial amount of these discussions pertain to the issue of informed consent of subordinated groups to engaging with research and their influence on representations. Edward Said (1977) has entered into these discussions and both substantially influenced and drawn attention to the Western oriented perspective which it has been argued persuasively has influenced perceptions of the ‘exotic’ Gypsy/Roma(ni) (Okely, 2014). Indeed Said’s work has opened up various aspects of ‘exoticised’ identities for discussion and required the social science world to be aware of the orientalist discourse they both interiorise and export through the processes of pedagogy and research practice:

I will not deny that I was aware, when writing the book, of the subjective truth insinuated by Marx in the little sentence I quoted as one of the book's epigraphs: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented", which is that if you feel you have been denied the chance to speak your piece, you will try extremely hard to get that chance. For indeed, the subaltern can speak, as the history of liberation movements in the twentieth century eloquently attests. But I never felt that I was perpetuating the hostility between two rival political and cultural monolithic blocks, whose construction I was describing and whose terrible effects I was trying to reduce. On the contrary, as I said earlier, the Orient-versus-Occident opposition was both misleading and highly undesirable; the less it was given credit for actually describing anything more than a fascinating history of interpretations and contesting interests, the better. (Said, 1977: 336-337).

For Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1995), any representiion of the subaltern group may be problematic and potentially the cause of epistemic violence. “The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as other.” (Spivak, 1995: 24-25). Thus, even a well-intentioned effort may end up by creating a degradation of a heterogenous voice into a homogenous one, thus once more proferring violence to the subaltern individual or community. A further area of conflict and contradiction within the theoretical literature on this subject concerns the debate over whether and how subaltern is both simultaneously a subject and is not; given the subaltern individual is the one who must try to survive under the aegis of dominant groups (Çağan and Özay, 2010: 707).

Thus despite the variety of formulations and range of arguments, it seems that as long as there is a superior/subordinate relationship in existence between some groups, subordinated groups will require representation. The challenge being in ensuring that such representation is transparent, fair and co-constructed with the subaltern group. Thus, in the words of Said, ‘the necessity on an intellectual to operate against the status quo, loads him/her with the charge of representing the subordinated [other]’ (Said, 1995: 24 ).

**The Direct Applicabilty of Bourdieu’s Structural Constructivist Approach to Field Research**

Applying Bourdieu’s structural constructivist approach to social science research accordingly highlights the relational dimension of findings and enables the researcher to interrogate the complex symbiotic relationship between individualistic tendencies and structural effects separated from overly simplistic dualistic debate. Thus, for example, a researcher is enabled and empowered to listen to a Gypsy/Roma(ni) individual reflecting on the contextual, social and historical background of the place where s/he has lived and has been living; and able to recognise and build into the emergent theoretical model the impacts of both structural and individual circumstances.

Bourdieu’s sociological conceptualisations thus “reflect his very well directed glance which helps to distinguish the subtle and powerful social distinctiveness, presenting significant opportunities for a well focused and inclusive field research” (Swartz, 2011: 201). As outlined above, it is clear that this nuanced perspective is particularly useful when studying the circumstances of Gypsy/Roma(ni) groups as such a perspective free from the limiting effects of the binary of determinism and voluntarism offers the potential to be used in carrying out nuanced research into the complex realities and negotiated choices inherent in residing in a Gypsy/Roma(ni) neighbourhood in which identities are simultaneously (re)framed and calibrated against mainstream actors and State agencies’ expectations; narratives and policy implementations as well as internally debated and performed dependent upon the field in which the participant operates at any given time.

A researcher who is not constrained by the necessity of framing their arguments to fit to one model or ‘side’ of commonly identified dichotomies may thus exploit the chance to move continuously (and in a non-linear fashion) between agency and structure, theory and practice, enabling the research to proceed in a far more flexible manner which able to comprehend and interpret the dialectics inherent within the observed phenomenon. Utilising this method means that during field research it is possible to elide the processes of data gathering and data analysis as concurrent analysis and emergent awareness of multiple dimensions are granted space to reshape and refine subsequent interviews and observations. Thus utilising Bourdieuian modelling means that the researcher goes to the field with an empty frame and empowers the participants to complete the picture during the process of co-producing research findings; ensuring that contextual features of the field and its mutual relations with other domains, habitus, fields and capitals will not be ignored.

We thus assert that a research field should only be studied while overtly considering the historical, cultural and structural position of residents. Indeed in common with Bourdieuian principles we believed that to understand Gypsy / Roma people and to analyse the data which emerges from our interactions with them; it is necessary to undertake an analysis of the geographically and morally defined space in which they live (Picker et. al. 2015; Chiesa & Rossi, 2013). A definition of identity which takes account of the liquid contextual and dynamic nature of this quality means that ‘identity’ is highly impacted and affected by the environment in which it takes place; and the power relations which surround the identity as performed. In the context of this paper we have framed identity construction as the processes through which an individual *becomes* a member of a given society through learning the ‘habitus’ ‘game’ and ‘field’ to which they have access (Nagel, 1994; Spencer, 2014) i.e. identity construction not purely through accident of birth but through living in a particular manner and defining themselves as a constituent part of a particular culture or community. It thus follows that observing the daily lived experience of Gypsy/Roma(ni) groups is important when seeking to understand elements of their identity and modes of engagement with the domains of existence and agencies with which they come into contact. Accordingly observations and co-constructed narrative interpretations may be used to gain a better understanding of what precisely respondents are articulating; the meanings of such discourse; and how (and in what ways) the communities’ structural position and the degree of symbolic violence which they have experienced differentiates them from other marginalised groups.

 A focus on these elements inevitably opens up debate on whether the meaning and interpretation of their experiences (for example reflecting on the case study examples of the young people in Çanakkale who internalised the concept of educating failure, attributing this to their own failure) has a role in diminishing a belief in personal agency and reinforcing the inequalities they encounter in the encounters with broader society and those with access to a wider range of fields and capitals. To labour this point further, it can be seen that the process described above can be seen as a cultural class analysis; gaining traction at the intersection at class/status and cultural analyses.

In order to fully understand the dialectical relationship between external structure, fields of social activity and individual agency, it is necessary to calibrate the modelling through consideration of access to and utilisation of economic, cultural, symbolic and social capitals, the four key elements or domains of power which support access to mobility across and between fields and which determine an agent’s position within a specific social field of Bourdieu (1986).

Thus, while engaging with the issue of the situation of Gypsy / Roma(ni) peoples it is clear that the debate must not be allowed to degrade into a binary discourse which focuses purely on the economical or cultural situation impacting the communities as all of these elements are integral parts of their sui generis position and the domination and status subordination they typically encounter.

Bourdieu further considers that to provide a fully nuanced discussion of the complex nature of social groups (and individuals) and their circumstances, (and moreover for our purposes particularly pertinent in understanding the significance and processes of identity constructions) the interplay between ‘capitals’, ‘field’ and ‘habitus’ offer a more relational perspective than that typically offered by classical identity or class discussions.

While Bourdieu was trying to answer the question “what makes a social class?” in his 2010 article of that name, he defined a social class as a group of people having similar social positions and externally imposed similarity of living conditions and who are as a result, encouraged to follow similar practices and lives (Bourdieu, 2010). Thus by interrogating the dialectical relations between groups externally located in popular discourse as belonging to a particular social class and their ethnic, national, occupational, cultural and other contextual circumstances, it is possible to gain a more granulated over-view.

Bourdieu consistently revisits the concept of *field* to explain the contradiction positioning found between social classes as the interplay of capitals leading to the discrete shaping of fields is overtly impacted by access to power relations and structures. In turn the concept of *habitus* which determines the observable preferences, behavioural tendencies and practices of individuals and groups are both products of (and derive from) their class position (or for our purposes ethno-social identity) and through these dynamics’ reproduceexistingstructures of power. *Habitus* can be defined as a complex combination of the effects of free will and structures which surround the individual but it should be emphasised that *habitus* is created “without any deliberate pursuit of coherence” and thus interiorizing a habitus is an unconscious process (Bourdieu 1984: 170). In this way we see again the centrality of Bourdieu’s analogy of social positioning and power as a ‘game’ in which individuals engage with, as they predominantly without question accept the rules of the game and struggle to perform to the best of their ability within the position they have been afforded. Individuals, thus, act according to these unacknowledged rules, utilising the forms of capital they have access to maximise the benefits they are able to achieve in return for participating in the game through daily struggle. These elements of Bourdieuian theory can thus be seen as cornerstones of a social order which in the main is seen as normative (even natural). And which as is demonstrated in our case studies can lead to self-blame for failing to achieve, regardless of whether the ‘player’ does not have access to the correct ‘games kit’ to enable them to transfer across fields and play with a higher league ‘team’. Thus the *field* within the Bourdieuian perspective is defined as a force field “which imposes its own rules upon its residents” (Wacquant, 2007:63). The precise limits of a field indeed may be regarded as ambiguous precisely because every field has its own contextual and dynamic background and as such effective social science research necessitates regularly reviewing and taking into consideration both the background of the researcher and potential impacts of a specific researcher working in a specific fields of activity (reflexivity), and the contextual conditions of the subject and their field, access to capitals and habitus.

Thus, when a Gypsy/Roma(ni) neighbourhood is centered for research purposes , it can be assumed that the researcher will encounter a different senses of belonging or identity, peculiar to the neighbourhood as well as typically socio-spatial limitations which disconnect the area from surrounding neighbourhoods. Accordingly, various types of exclusion such as transport; geographical boundaries etc. (Picker et. al., 2015) will often reinforce the ‘difference’ between the neighbourhood and outside space. By the nature of taking a relational approach to the research we are able to take account of diverse aspects of this segmented and yet potentially entwined relationship between the Gypsy/Roma(ni) place of residence and neighbouring locales as the research field becomes a two dimensional place which is both limited by external effects and within which its residents often struggle unceasingly (Göker, 2007: 545) whilst simultaneously partaking of a rich set of cultural and social capitals in connections with their neighbours and peers within the community. Given that research results frequently focus on Gypsy/Roma(ni) groups’ high level of social exclusion and the limitations they face by engaging in multifaceted reflexive research analysed through a Bourdieuian lens, we can both examine the effects of external elements and how they contribute to social exclusion and the importance and range of internal resilience and capitals which support social inclusion within the social field within which actors operate within their neighbourhood. As such, Gypsy/Roma(ni) people are not seen as impotent agents who are only able to submit to external effects as the field within which actors and agents ‘play the game’ become a place of observation with regard to its residents’ coping techniques, strengths, operationalised agencies and potentials..

We therefore would summarise some basic points a researcher should reflexively contemplate before field research can be analysed through a Bourdieuian framework: “Firstly, the position of the field should be analysed according to [overt and existing] power domains. […] Secondly, the relationship among agents or institutions competing in this field should be analysed. Third, systems of tendencies agents adopt via interiorising habitus should be analysed” (Bourdieu qua Wacquant, 2014: 90). As is seen, Bourdieu places a particular importance on emphasising the phenomenon of power within field analyses enabling this approach to be seen as a tool for questioning the potential hierarchy and superiority of relations affecting the position of those groups being analysed. In this way and through a close focus on the complexities of both overt and covert, internal and external power relations; it is possible to reveal the inequalities experienced by individuals within groups engaged in hierachical relations as well as being able to grasp the individuals semantic worlds. For example, to be born into a field (for which read ethnic group or sub-group of an ethnic group) which has a ‘negative’ reputation automatically brings the individual disadvantages which they may not even be aware of until they come into contact with the outside world. Thus, in our case studies, the Gypsy/Roma children secure in their neighbourhoods, confident in their cultural and social capital participate in the dominant habitus learning how to act, dress, speak and ‘perform’ Gypsy-ness. However when they reach school age they may feel like ‘a fish out of water’ for not having access to the cultural and symbolic capitals or familiarity with the dominant habitus within the school milieu. During the field research in Turkey (Çanakkale), one of the most common words Gypsy / Roma participants have used was related to being in ‘an aquarium’ (Gezgin, 2016: 201) with most participants describing their feelings when outside of their neighbourhood or being in another part of the city (nearly nobody had actually been to another City) as being ‘drowned’ or ’vulnerable’; thus illuminating the core importance and security with which they associated their residence within a particular familiar secure location amongst their community and neighbours. Interestingly, the core importance for these Gypsy/Roma (ni) respondents of being in close proximity to their locale was not replicated for other groups in their wider neighbourhood. In contrast, in our second case study, we demonstrate how membership of a stigmatised community was found to demote the status of an individual within a skilled role, operating within the same professional habitus, and with access to an identical set of economic, cultural and in-work social capitals as his peers. This could occur as the symbolic (negative) capital associated with his ethnicity effectively demoted his standing within the ‘game’ until such time as he and his Gypsy/Roma(ni) colleagues utilised their agency to empower themselves and their community through creating and operationalising a new and effective field of activity (the police association) which made use of their multiple habitus and cross-cutting sets of social capitals (including networks of access to activists; politicians and policy makers) pertaining to social justice and Gypsy/Roma(ni) equalities. By viewing these two contrasting case studies through the prism of Bourdieu’s sociology we are thus able to gain a rounded picture of how the same set of characteristics can be used within the ‘game’ in different ways depending upon the ‘field’ in which the agent or actor is located at any given time.

**Conclusion**

What we tried to accomplish in this work-in-progress paper is to offer a short presentation on the usage of basic concepts of Pierre Bourdieu including habitus, capital and field and how this approach has relevance and applicability in field research with Gypsy/Roma(ni) communities. Whilst this example has touched upon case studies from both Turkey and the UK, we assert Bourdieu’s theoretical modelling enables social scientists to present a multifaceted analysis of minority groups such as Gypsy/Roma(ni) people resident in any socio-geographical context in the world, freeing us from the struggle to engage with and explain the mismatch between externally imposed policies and apparently contradictory behaviours in the ‘field’ given the focus on relational and contextual narrative within this framework.

Accordingly, applying Bourdieuian approaches to the study of Gypsy/Roma(ni) groups, steps away from dichotomic positioning and the requirement to handle data in a two dimentional way, and in contrast permits of interweaving participants’ habitus (traditions, daily lives, tastes, occupations etc) and the external effects of structural constraints such as poverty, capitalist economic policies, racism etc. It should however be underlined that it is impossible to say that both structure and agency have equal importance in the daily lives of Gypsy/Roma(ni) people given the social exclusion many face and the complexities of their individual circumstances. As such it is clear that the social fields and relations are too complex to be able to explain in linear relation networks. As such the relational approach as delineated by Bourdieu is a ‘must’ in order to fully support engagement with contextual details while revealing these groups’ unjust suffering, limited access to social justice, and to permit of ‘speaking to power’ whilst celebrating their agency and engagement with the complex if at times limited choices which exist in their daily lives.

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3. This paper is partially adopted from the oral presentation “Studying Gypsy / Roma Groups' Identity Construction Through the Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu” which was made in the *4th Turkish Migration Conference* on July 14, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. One of the main reasons of their special position is that they have never identified themselves with a territory. They are ‘without a land’, and “thus by definition without a state, not only because they have no history of attachment to a particular territory, but because Gypsy culture does not value attachment to place”(Appelbaum, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Aforesaid research’s spatial framework is limited with Fevzipaşa Mahallesi in Çanakkale, Turkey which is widely known as a Gypsy/Roma neighbourhood. After the six month long field study which is supported by participant observations, 54 interviews have been conducted and identity construction of the research group was tried to be understood via the gathered qualitative data. In the research, neighbourhood dynamics, significance of space, relationship with the others in specific and media, education and job opportunities in general have been under focus and all these relations have been evaluated through the Bourdieu sociology perspective (specifically the habitus concept), which is accepted as a suitable way to investigate the dynamic and dialectic relationships between the individual, the structure and the space. The gathered and analyzed data indicate that the neighbourhood still goes on struggling with social exclusion in both social and economical fields. As a result, it seems that they try to develop their own survival strategies with respect to their specific living conditions. Thus, it can be claimed that this adaptation resulted in a micro identity that can be called “Fevzipaşalılık” and in a tendency to draw themselves apart the rest of the stigmatized Gypsy/Roma group by using this specific micro identity (Gezgin, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. At this point *doxa* -another significant concept of Bourdieu- should be introduced. *Doxa* is a concept which expresses a form of common sense (a kind of interiorized and taken-for-granted norms and beliefs). *Doxa* can be defined as ‘an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident’ (Bourdieu 1984: 471). Gypsy/Roma(ni) students in Gezgin’s sample referred to above, feel that they are inferior and responsible for their being ‘unsuccessful’ at school. Analysing these perceptions through a Bourdieuian lens it can be seen as a product of Romaphobic socialisation because, in common with everyone in any society, the vast majority of Gypsy/Roma(ni) children tend to believe what society (through the agents of the state such as teachers; figures of authority and media representations) tell them is correct. By utilising deep Bourdieuian analysis and reflexive questioning through field study numerous other factors (such as poverty; discrimination; poor implementation of policies and ineffective service delivery, potentially resulting from inappropriate policy transfer) can be identified which may lead to this ‘unsuccess’. Once these are questions and identified the primary premise of ‘unsuccessful’ Roma or a pathologised view of Roma(ni)/Gypsy cultures and suitability for particular roles or activities can be brought into question and reconstructed through a process of co-construction with participants.. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)