

SYNOPSIS OF THE DISSERTATION IN ENGLISH

Synopsis of the Dissertation

My dissertation focuses on the community of Romanian Roma who have lived in Wrocław since the 1990s. This community is best described as a radically marginalized group susceptible to exclusion due to a combination of multiple factors, such as their descent, skin color, language difference, low education level, and poverty. Additionally, members of this community are exposed to numerous prejudices entrenched in Polish society. I employ the concepts of meritocracy, hegemony, and emancipation and build on discourse theory, the theory of agonistic democracy, and the insights of critical race theory and public pedagogy in order to critically analyze educational interventions for the Romanian Roma carried out by two Wrocław-based non-governmental organizations: the Nomada Association for the integration of Multicultural Society (Polish: Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Integracji Społeczeństwa Wielokulturowego Nomada) and the House of Peace Foundation. The research question that I have constructed is: how are the power and hegemonic relations reflected in the socio-educational interventions for the Wrocław-Based Romanian Roma Community conducted by the above-mentioned NGOs? The aim of the dissertation is therefore to present the ways in which these programs are shaped for minority, marginalized groups, and the effects that they may cause, especially in the context of inequalities and hegemonic relations existing in the social world.

The issues of inequality and education that I predominantly address are not specific to this population group alone. Questions around relegation to a peripheral position in democratic systems (physically in space, linguistically in communication, culturally in modes of conduct, socially in relations, economically in living conditions, and politically in agency) are also relevant to other communities face marginalization as a result of their race, ethnos, religion, economic status, and or origin.

In Chapters One and Two, I depict the theoretical underpinnings and methodological toolbox of my dissertation. The first one outlines the ideas of discourse theory, recounts considerations around agonistic democracy, and highlights a movement within critical pedagogy that has been labeled as public pedagogy. My reasoning is founded on the assumption that the social world is produced through language, because neither a thought nor an action can take place without being named in language. Because language is socially produced and actively contributes to the formation of the social world, I do not regard it as an abstract system

of signs. In terms of discourse theory, I fundamentally rely on the concepts developed by Michel Foucault (1972), Jürgen Habermas (1999; 2005), and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2007). Laclau and Mouffe's framework is actually the most productive of insightful interpretations in the context of my dissertation. The Belgian-Argentinian duo of theorists insist that social reality is produced in and through discourse. In their definition, discourse comprises both linguistic and non-linguistic elements, with language itself not being an autonomous sphere, as it is subject to social influences. More precisely, language is socially produced, and it changes depending on the historical moment, geographical area, social organization, cultural formation, etc. Consequently, senses and meanings are neither predetermined nor imposed top-down, nor given once and for all. In Chapter One, I also refer to the ideas of agonistic democracy and radical democracy, which contend that, rather than being symptoms of crisis, conflicts are an intrinsic part of the social world (Mouffe 2005). Tensions between or among opponents do not unsettle the system. Actually, by accepting the notion that stability and prosperity are premised on consensus, we inevitably impair the interests of one group or another. In this context, conflict is not a negative phenomenon. Rather, it inheres in social life. In Mouffe and Laclau's view, democracy is founded and hinges on pluralism.

In the last part of Chapter One, I present public pedagogy as part of a broader development of critical pedagogy. I build on the insights of Henry Giroux (2000; 2004) and Gert Biesta (2011; 2012), essentially focusing on the public sphere and on the interrelations of the political and education. This section of the dissertation also dwells on Biesta's (2008) concept of emancipation, which stems from the repudiation of the distinction between the emancipator and the one being emancipated.

The second part of my dissertation centers on the concept and, in particular, critique of meritocracy and on critical race theory and its uses in the study of education. In the meritocratic model of thinking, good education (confirmed by recognizable credentials, such as certificates, diplomas, and degrees) is a key to achieving a prominent social position (as well as economic success). Given this, whether an individual "makes it" in life or not is supposed to be unrelated by his/her social background, skin color, gender, etc. Education is considered to be the only factor that matters in this respect. According to the critics of meritocracy (Littler 2018; McNamee, Miller 2009), such a standpoint results in the normalization of social inequality and obscures its systemic nature.

The critique of meritocracy is also salient in the context of critical race theory. In the section of Chapter Two where I discuss CRT, I revisit its foundational theoretical inspirations and sketch the ways in which it has developed (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Delgado, Stefancic 2001;

Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman 2011). Although critical race theory was founded and primarily expanded as a field of inquiry pertaining to American society, many of its ideas are universal and applicable to processes unfolding outside the U.S. CRT researchers view race as a human-produced social construct that can be harnessed in the pursuit of multiple goals, including negotiations within the hegemonic game. While critical race theorists do not link race to genetics and biology, they highlight the fact that social divisions are constructed on the basis of differences between social actors defined in terms of skin color, type of hair, physique, shape of the nose, eyes, etc. The practitioners of CRT are crucially committed to exposing the latent mechanisms rooted in the institutions of power that contribute to maintaining and worsening racial inequality. Among the various fields and processes that lie within the orbit of the interest of CRT scholars, education is counted as a key area. Symptoms and manifestations of race-based systemic inequality are traced, for example, in curricula, assessment system, and desegregation practices. Towards the end of Chapter II, I also address racist mechanisms targeting Roma minorities in the school systems of East and Central Europe.

Chapter Three of my dissertation is devoted to the socio-political situation of Roma, depicting which I focus on the Romanian Roma community that has been living in Wrocław since the end of the 20th century. My depiction offers a short overview of the history of this group and glimpses into an array of cultural cliches and stereotypes that have sprung up and amassed around its members over centuries. In doing this, I build on the findings of researchers affiliated with critical Romani studies (Kledzik, Pawełczyk 2014; Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2014; McGarry 2017). I offer an alternative to the approach that traditional Romology adopts relating the historical genesis of Roma, reflect on the ascription of a set of features covered by the umbrella term of “Roma-ness” to people of Romani origin, and look into the phenomenon of “Romaphobia,” which Aiden McGarry regards as “the last acceptable form of racism” (2017). I also point to the causes of the contemporary socio-political situation of Romanian Roma, which is bound up with their centuries-long experience of violence, ranging from various systemic exclusions to such extreme brutalization as forced sterilization and the Porajmos.

In the last part of Chapter Three, I sketch the history of the Roma groups that came from Romania to Wrocław. I relate their deportations (in the 1990s), the illegal dismantling of a Roma settlement in Paprotna Str., which resulted in the lawsuit filed by the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community to the European Court of Human Rights, and a court case concerning the eviction of the Roma from the Kamińskiego barracks, which were finally demolished in connection with the House of Peace Foundation’s “Program for Romanian Roms and Romnis, the Residents of Wrocław.”

Chapter Four is based on the data generated in the empirical research I carried out. The chapter analyzes and interprets narratives contained in the ten semi-structured interviews I conducted with members of the Wrocław-based Romanian Roma community and the current and former members/workers of two NGOs: the House of Peace Foundation and the Nomada Association for the Integration of Multicultural Society. The data collected in these interviews are combined with the information derived from publications released by these two NGOs. In this section of my dissertation, I also depict the research techniques I employed and describe the general pursuits of the Nomada Association and the House of Peace Foundation. Further, I offer a critical analysis of the goals inscribed in the programs for the Romanian Roma community implemented by these two organizations. I describe their methods of work with the Roma community, whereby I especially attend to the housing-first method and family assistance, as well as recounting the genesis of the “Program for Romanian Roms and Romnis, the Residents of Wrocław” launched by the House of Peace Foundation. In my explorations, I critically assess the phenomenon known as “projectosis,” which involves transferring the market logic into social, educational, and cultural ventures undertaken by, among other actors, NGOs. In the last part of Chapter Four, I address issues related to the educational experiences of the young Roma. I provide an account of the educational program for the Romani children conducted by members of the Nomada Association and relate the process which made it possible for the youngsters to use their right to education. My inquiry into these issues and developments is geared to identifying and understanding the hegemonic relations, systemic inequality, and exclusions at work in the social world and to revealing how the “correct” involvement of individuals in today’s society – a democratic and capitalist one – is envisioned.