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**Title of paper:** Crossing the Threshold in the Margin

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**Abstract:** In this paper I would like to illuminate how the critique of ideology and visiting households, places of otherness can support teachers' transformative learning and their engagement with the school's social environment. I argue that the parallax shift from mystifying the domination of the 'Other' to understanding this domination as not given, necessary or inevitable is the precondition of transformative teacher learning and transformative, emancipatory pedagogical praxis - namely engaging in social struggles, social conflicts.

**3-5 keywords:** critique of ideology, therapy, spaces of otherness, emancipatory pedagogy

Since my research is about education and ideology, I would like to start with an anecdote that is used by Slavoj Žižek in his book, the 'Parallax View' (2006) to describe how ideology works today. A friend visited Niels Bohr in a countryside house near Copenhagen and noticed a horseshoe above his entrance X, the superstitious symbol that is supposed to keep out the evil spirits. Bohr's friend was totally shocked 'My God, I thought you are a scientist, do you really believe in this superstitious crap?' I think here Niels Bohr gave a wonderful answer, he said X, 'Of course I don't believe in it; I only have it there because I was told that it works even if one doesn't believe in it!' (Žižek, 2006, pp. 352–353)

This is I think how ideology works today at its purest. What this paradox makes clear is not only that one can believe and also not believe one's own beliefs, but also how a belief can function even if one does not believe in it. And this is precisely how I try to approach the European context, for instance, how European democracy works today: we simply practice it, as if we were living in a democracy, even if it is not a democracy, and we don't believe in it. But the real paradox of Niels Bohr's answer also shows how ideology (the obscure object of the horseshoe) constitutes us as subjects in relation to the 'Other' (the evil spirit, which is kept out by the horseshoe) in such a way which we don't even recognize. This is why it is not enough in itself to cross the threshold, to get out from Niels Bohr's house and realize that there is no evil spirit outside, one has also to deconstruct the symbol of the horseshoe. So one has to cross the threshold on multiple levels. And this is precisely the object of my research – crossing these thresholds. X

The focus of my research is how teachers relate to the 'Other' – the poor, the excluded, the marginalized and so on – which is embodied in my dissertation as a synecdoche by a Czigian settlement in Poland and a Gypsy segregatum in Hungary. I work closely with teachers from two schools now in Poland, where the children from the settlement learn. Some 20 Czigian children attend one of the schools close to the settlement. They are segregated in a 'compensating', 'catching-up' class in a remote area of the school. 5 Czigian children attend another school, they go to regular classes. X

Together with the teachers and with members of a local NGO, who work with the Czigian community we meet every week or every other week in the schools for 2-3 hours and form what Freire (1993) called 'Culture Circles', which is a shared space for dialogue and reciprocity. X Drawing on the ethnographic works of Francisco Silva Cavalcante (Cavalcante, 2000), Eric Gutstein (Gutstein, 2013) and Norma Gonzalez et al. (1995) I do ethnographic research, which is participatory, highly contextual and considers research as a long-term, egalitarian and empowering praxis of co-researchers, co-investigators.

The object of investigation in these circles with the teachers is the image of the ‘Other’ and the different ways teachers articulate the image of the Czigian people. In these articulations I’m looking for ideological articulations of course. But ideology is a highly contested term, especially in discourse theory which is one of the theoretical foundations of my research, therefore X I attempt to reformulate the concept of ideology drawing on the political theory of hegemony as developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) In the political theory of hegemony I understand ideology as those articulations, which mystify dominations in such a way, which prevents their subversion, their contestation, thus maintains and reproduces them. Let me give the example of the two totally contradictory discourses that emerged during our meetings with the teachers to make it clear. X

One of the discourses depict the Czigian people as dirty, uneducated, who can not cooperate, who do not appreciate the school, whose children have to catch-up with the Polish children and adapt to cultural norms. For instance, to avoid the use of Romani language in which these children communicate with each other in the breaks, the teachers play Polish cartoons on a TV, which of course attracts the children’s attention.

In the other school the discourse is completely different. It is characterized by the proto-liberal sentiment, that these Czigian children are just like the Polish children, ‘We shouldn’t talk about education in these distinctions,’ ‘These children have to strive for good achievement just like everyone else in the society’ and so on.

Both of these discourses are ideological, not in terms of their truth-references (for instance there is nothing false in saying that the Czigian children are often dirty). These articulations become ideological in their relation to the domination of Czigian people, which relation mystifies domination. The first example, which articulates the predicament of the Czigian people as a way of life, often referring to cultural customs (it is their culture that they don’t attend school) mystifies domination as something inevitable (as if being uneducated and dirty would have been their way of life), while the second example from the other school, where children are ‘equal’ in their responsibility of what they achieve, structural domination is mystified and allocated to the sphere of individual responsibility, thus domination is ideologically terminated. So this is the first level of crossing the threshold, on the level of the discursive account of ideology, not by deconstructing ideology at this level, but simply acknowledging these hegemonic articulations. X And of course these articulations are part of a deeper discourse analysis and genealogy in my research with a particular focus on the post-socialist stabilization of the neoliberal hegemony in Hungary and Poland, where I try to understand how such discursive practices emerged, with a historico-critical focus on how power operates, that is how

we are ‘constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations.’ (Foucault, 1984, p. 49)

The second level of crossing the threshold is in its literal meaning: visiting households of Czigán families and encountering the ‘Other’. Here I would like to refer quickly to the tensions between the socialist and post-socialist eras in education with a wonderful example. The very idea of household visits triggered a general refusal from the younger teachers, saying ‘Come on, this is not a part of our profession,’ ‘We were not trained to do that,’ ‘We don’t have the proper competencies’ and so on. It can be already seen from these statements how the educational discourse of neoliberalism constitutes the self-constraining, self-disciplining subject of the ‘professional’ teacher. So after a while the older teachers started to share their experiences from the ‘socialist’ times, when visiting households was a regular practice for them. As one of them argued, she would have never learned that the cause of her former Polish Roma student’s lack of concentration and tiredness is that they had actually no beds at home. And this was the sublime moment when the younger teachers finally agreed to visit households.

X So the second level of crossing the threshold is precisely of encountering the ‘Other’. This part of the fieldwork is based on Spindler’s *cultural therapy*. (Spindler, 1999, p. 466) Drawing on Spindler’s concept, I understand therapy as a praxis, where people make a joint effort to bring a discursive landscape to a level of awareness that changes the way they see this landscape and permits them to perceive the relations of domination inscribed in it as historical, contingent and not inevitable.

So how is therapy of household visits capable of bringing one’s own discursive landscape to that level of awareness? I’m not talking here about the common crypto-liberal sentiment and romanticism of getting astounded or shocked by poverty, distress, hunger and unworthy circumstances. Of course this is your first shock when you enter a Roma settlement. And it is necessary in a sense. There is an old humanist quote from Edward Bond, English theatre director that ‘if you can’t face Hiroshima in the theatre, you’ll eventually end up in Hiroshima itself.’<sup>1</sup> And I agree, of course, we have to confront these horrors in the most brutal way, we must be hurt by the horror. But the real tragedy what you find in a Roma settlement or a segregatum is not the drama of exclusion, marginalization or deprivation. I argue that the spaces of otherness cannot be merely described with this negativity (excluded from, deprived of, lack of blabla), but the understanding of these spaces needs a certain positivity in a philosophical sense, of how they function as included, integrated spaces of otherness. X These are the spaces

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2001/02/18/theater/theater-an-english-playwright-with-very-mixed-notice.html>

that Foucault calls *heterotopias*, places that are simultaneously *linked with* and *in contradiction to* other emplacements. (Foucault, 2008, pp. 16–17) These places are not primarily characterized by exclusion but by inclusion, they are included as excluded places, what Foucault called ‘inclusion par exclusion’ or as Žižek put it, ‘paradoxically, their exclusion itself is the mode of their inclusion: their ‘proper place’ in the social body is that of exclusion.’ (2009, 101) And this is how I look at the European context and European integration as such: with a focus on the institutional incorporation of exclusion, the inclusion of exclusion, the inclusion of places of otherness. The Czigan settlement and the Gypsy segregatum are precisely these places of included exclusion, territories without borders, localizations without address, but also included in the variety of institutional, organizational and legal practices and deeply embedded in space and discourse. The Jehovah's Witnesses, the Catholic Church, the police, the press, the Counseling Service, several NGO's, start-ups and artists, the Amnesty International, the Helsinki Foundation, embassies, and many other organizations are present there for almost a decade, without achieving any significant change.

And this is precisely the phenomenon what Maria Mendel summarizes in the notion of the ‘indispensable redundant’ which refers to ‘the ambivalent nature of marginality as being outside the centre—outside of all places—but at the very same time also needed by the centre. (...) [The redundant people are] at the same time necessary for the creation and maintenance of institutionalized social practices.’ (Mendel, 2011, p. 164)

The therapeutic moment of the household visits of the teachers thus lies not only in making the strange familiar - like in Clifford Geertz's (2005) Balinese cockfights -, but also in making the already familiar, the included, the integrated, *the indispensable redundant appear*. Crossing the threshold in the margins, and understanding the predicament of Czigan people as included exclusion thus lays the foundation of a transformative, educational praxis which consequently is not only engaged to make the sites of exclusion visible, but also ‘to cease obscuring their indispensability,’ (Mendel, 2011, p. 166) to cease obscuring how social, institutional, discursive practices – such as the school for instance - participate and engage in the active construction and reconstruction, maintenance and development of these places of otherness.

Visiting households become ‘educationally meaningful by showing the “other places” for (...) developing forms of educational action that aim (...) [not at building further inclusion but] at building critical distance towards ritualized social practices that organize the space of “our-ness,” of which we are both producers and products.’ (Mendel, 2011, pp. 166–167)

X For me this parallax shift from mystifying the domination of the ‘Other’ to revealing it as not given, necessary or inevitable is the precondition of transformative teacher learning and

transformative, emancipatory pedagogical praxis - namely engaging in social struggles, social conflicts. That is the commitment on a long-term basis to a form of solidarity with social groups exposed to domination. I understand transformative learning as a critical praxis per se, as Lotar Rasiński put it a critical praxis ‘which we could call, using Marx’s expression from one of his letters to Ruge, a “reform of consciousness” (...) the only possible revolution today, a “peaceful revolution” (...) a process of exposing traces of ideology in our thinking.’ (Rasiński, 2016, p. 11) The critique of ideology is the prerequisite of radical democratic and emancipatory education, where the school can become a place for political contestation, which is I suppose conducive to ‘better student learning’. In the present dislocation of the European historical bloc, education has to become something radically different than what the mainstream neoliberal/neoconservative hybrid policies prescribe, we all know that. Education has the potential to contribute to a new foundation of a democratic imaginary, through recognizing and rearticulating those discursive practices, which mystify the relations of domination and contribute to the re-emergence of discourses like the far-right and post-fascist imaginaries. X And of course, I’m not crazy, I don’t believe in this overestimated transformative potential of the school, teacher learning and so on. But I was told that it works even if one doesn’t believe in it.

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