Methods and methodology

*Participants and procedure*

Informed by ethnography, Participatory Action Research (PAR) and employing visual methodologies fostering knowledge co-production and transformative action, this qualitative research re-engaged some of the LGBTIQ Roma research participants from my doctoral research (Fremlova, 2017) and engaged new ones.

The research participants self-identify as LGBTIQ Roma and/or Roma with multi-faceted, intersectional identities and are aged 18 or over. The prospective participants are unaffiliated individuals, as well as representatives of organisations, European cultural and intergovernmental institutions that the candidate has previously collaborated with. The research involved eight LGBTIQ Romani participants from the UK, Czech Republic, Romania and Hungary who are visual activists and/or artists aged between 18 and 50. I recruited them through my existing contacts with LGBTIQ Roma, with whom I have cooperated for over six years as an ally-identified, non-Romani, queer researcher doing research with LGBTIQ Roma (Fremlova, 2018). The participants came from well-situated, more privileged backgrounds, spoke multiple languages, had access to the Internet and were able to travel abroad. This is an important aspect of their intersectional positioning within society in terms of class, as well as an important limitation that needs to be acknowledged. For reasons related to the participants’ safety, the names of some of them were anonymised and, unless specific participants request to be named. references to specific places were removed so that the participants could not be identified

*Data collection*

The data, both textual and visual, were generated as follows:

* through participant observation at two creative methods workshops held at the University of Brighton (28-29 March and 10-15 September 2019),
* in four in-depth semi-structured photo elicitation interviews (17 May; 24 May; 6 June, 22 July 2019);
* during one focus group (13 September 2019);

The textual and visual data, consisting of photographic self-representations and videos, were generated at a 1.5 day visual methods workshop (March 2019) and a week-long visual methods workshop in Brighton (September 2019). In line with the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR) fostering knowledge co-production, I organised the creative methods workshops with a view to bringing research participants together to generate and refine visual self-representations of LGBTIQ Roma. I recorded impressions and took notes from observation and photo elicitation interviews in her reflexive diary.

The first visual methods workshop brought together eight participants: one non-Romani trans man, one Romani Gypsy queer woman; one Romani lesbian woman; and five Romani gay men. At the workshop, I facilitated a discussion among the participants relating to the importance of self-identification; the advantages and pitfalls of using the ‘ordinary’ and ‘everyday’ to challenge stereotypes, tropes and misrepresentations; analysing photographs from several viewpoints, including genre; the context; the target audience; composition (focusing on how Roma are routinely portrayed in photographs in terms of their positioning, being portrayed as passive ‘objects’ in very specific, often poor settings; the assumed positioning of the spectator); what the photo actually portrays (denotation) and what it may allude to (connotation). The discussion also touched upon Barthes’ (1980) concepts of ‘studium’ and ‘punctum’, the former referring to what captures the spectator’s attention based on their interpretation of the photographs, and the latter referring to what are the details that stay with the spectator by catching their eye and jogging their memory. Awareness of these important aspects ended up guiding to a certain extent the process of creating photographic self-representations during the first and second workshop.

A set of photographs was generated at the workshop, visually challenging an iconic photo of Roma (Koudelka 1968) that many of the participants considered stereotypical. The first theme, ‘The Present versus the Past’ and ‘Myth versus Lived experience/reality’, started to emerge. The participants also stated specifically that they wanted to tackle issues related to their experiences of antigypsyism, lesbophobia, homophobia and transphobia (as well as their intersections), possibly through the visual trope of the Romani/Gypsy fortune teller who would recast (or ‘queer’) their experiences of intersectional oppression and offer alternative, ‘queer’ readings of their future. Following the first workshop, two of the Romani LGBTIQ visual activists and artists worked conceptually on one of the photos from the ‘Present v. the Past’ series, refining it, as well as using contemporary visual techniques such as photoshopping. At a later stage, during the photo elicitation interviews, this process enabled us to explore how the meaning of the photograph changes when certain elements are removed (i.e. the Koudelka photo) and new ones are introduced, such as a romanticising background.

The second workshop lasted a week and brought together three LGBTIQ Roma visual activists and artists. This enabled the participants to work in a much more concentrated manner, as well as to speak to issues experienced by trans Romani women whilst showcasing the diversity among the different national subgroups of Roma and Romany Gypsies in terms of sexualities and gender identities. In the course of the second workshop, the participants produced a video and over 200 photos. This intense manner of working enabled the participants to create new visual self-representations, including photos and videos, which drew on the first set of photos, especially the topic of Past ‘myth’ v. present ‘reality’ (i.e. visual interventions made in front of the Gypsy trailer and the Gypsy fortune telling machine on Brighton Pier) but covered a much wider range of themes: e.g. On my skin; Escaping self-representation; Everyday life; Playing with f(l)ags; Nudes; Queer Fortune Teller; Lost in the Future. Of those, the participants first selected 30 high quality, meaningful and visually well-executed photos. Approximately three weeks after the workshop, the participants finalised the selection of 15 photographs for the exhibition entitled Visualising the Lives of LGBTIQ Roma, enhancing the technical parameters and resolution of each of the photographs. On the last day of the workshop, I held a focus group with the three participants. We took stock of the work produced during the week and also discussed the processes that had taken place between March and September 2019. I gauged how these changing processes and approaches impacted the way the participants thought about the self-visual representations produced at each of the workshops; and how these visual self-representations challenged stereotypical representations, misrepresentations and tropes.

*Data analysis*

After collecting all the data generated through observation at the two creative methods workshops, during which I took notes, interviews and the focus group, I transcribed all the audio-recorded material from the photo elicitation interviews and the focus group. Transcription has been hailed by some as ‘a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology' (Bird 2005, 227), during which the researcher familiarizes themselves with the data. Initial coding and categorisation determined key preset, as well as recurrent and emergent constructs, patterns and themes that were revised throughout the research process (Willms et al 1990; Miles and Huberman 1994), using different sources of themes (Bulmer 1979). This is a reiterative process, which allows the researcher to identify and continue to identify themes; to review themes; and to name and define them.

In coding the notes from observation, the transcripts of the photo elicitation interviews, the focus group and the photographs themselves, I used the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) NVivo 11: one of its features enables to process the labelling of the content of each photograph which can then be generated into broader ‘themes’, along with the transcripts and notes.

I identified problems and concepts that appear likely to help in understanding the situations. As part of the analysis, I regularly went through my data and notes recorded in her reflexive diary; and made notes to identify important statements and to propose ways of coding the data, listing the concepts reflected in the notes and diagramming the relationships among concepts (Maxwell 1996, 78–81)).A robust, transparent, detailed, ethical data analysis is central to fulfilling the aims of this research project. It is required both to ensure ethical approaches are interwoven throughout the research project, as well as to render the data well to inform a wider audience as envisaged in the project’s pathways to impact (maximizing the impact of the research and making it available to academics, policy makers, NGOs and other stakeholders.) Thanks to its flexibility (Braun and Clark, 2006), I used thematic analysis at a latent level, sensitive to critical, queer research-informed theoretical concepts such as queer assemblages (Puar 2005) and queer intersectionalities (Fremlova 2017, 2019). Latent thematic analysis looks beyond the individual themes by examining the underlying ideas, assumptions, ideas that are likely to emerge particularly during the photo elicitation interviews. This means that the development of themes is already interpretive, theorised. This approach to data analysis (i.e. the process of going between the empirical accounts and theory) enabled me to develop a theoretically informed methodology – ‘socially located, positional knowledge that can be deepened and marshaled for theory construction’ (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012: 172) – attuned to my positionality and reflexivity as a non-Romani queer researcher (Fremlova, 2018).