



Roma Mothers' Experiences with Their Children's Schools *

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Abstract

This study revealed the meaning of the experiences of Roma mothers, having children studying at the primary education level, regarding their children's schools to contribute to the determination and solution of the educational problems faced by Romas in Turkey. This study uses a phenomenological design, which is a qualitative research method. The participants were 11 Roma mothers living in a Roma neighborhood in Istanbul. The participants were selected using the criterion sampling technique. Research data were collected through face-to-face and focus group interviews and analyzed using content analysis. The results revealed that Romani mothers experienced symbolic violence, discrimination, and microassault behaviors in their children's schools. Symbolic violence is institutionally practiced. School administrators and teachers as well as non-Roma parents and students practice discriminatory and microassault behaviors. Roma mothers, perhaps out of desperation, continue to see education as a means to escape from their poor lives.

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Introduction

The Roma are among the groups most exposed to discriminatory behavior in the societies in which they live (Bhopal, 2011). They face prejudices associated with notions of dirtiness, and using excessive violence and aggression (Bhopal & Myers, 2016; Cudworth, 2008; Derrington, 2016; Hamilton, 2018; Macura-Milovanović, Mundab, & Pečekc, 2013; Tor, 2017). In this context, the history of the Roma includes rejection, prejudice, exile, slavery, sterilization, far-reaching social exclusion, and even genocide (Murray, 2012; Symeou, Luciak, & Gobbo, 2009).

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) (2015) shows that Romas continue to face social exclusion, prejudice, discrimination, and intolerance, live in poor socioeconomic conditions, and are marginalized. According to the EESC (2009), even in Europe, which has limited problems with access to education, Roma children are vulnerable. They are exposed to malnutrition, poor housing, poor health, discrimination, racism, exclusion, and violence. Furthermore, high levels of absenteeism, child labor, low-quality education, school dropouts, and early marriages are common among Roma children (Bhopal & Myers, 2016; Gould, 2017; Hamilton, 2018; Humphries, 2017; Macura-Milovanović et al., 2013). Not going/not sending Roma children, especially girls, to school is one of the main problems which stems from the culture of Roma communities (Bhopal, 2011; Bedmar & León, 2012; Derrington,

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2016). Roma children face problems accessing education; a significant number of Roma children do not attend or drop out of school (EESC, 2009). Additionally, Roma children encounter unemployment and exclusion, even after receiving a high level of education, resulting in Roma families not sending their children to school; thus preventing the situation from improving (Bhopal & Myers, 2016; Gould, 2017; İlik, 2016).

A large proportion of Roma students attend ethnically-segregated schools or classrooms (Bruggemann, 2012). The academic performance of Roma children is also strikingly lower than that of other students (Boyle, Flynn, & Hanafin, 2020). Roma children are excluded from education systems (Helakorpi, Lappalainen, & Mietola, 2020) or do not go to school at all (Alexiadou, 2017). Moreover, when they go to school, they experience problems in systems that adopt a classroom-based education approach. Consequently, they are either seated in the back row or do not communicate with the teacher who think they are "dirty" (Kyuchukov, 2000). Studies indicate that Romas do not have the same educational opportunities as members of other communities (UNICEF, 2007). Given these problems, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) reminds the member states that education, in general, is an important tool in the fight against racism and intolerance and recommends that they reject all forms of direct and indirect discrimination in access to school (ECRI, 1998, 2011).

The Roma community experiences discrimination, inequality, and other problems regarding education in similar ways in different countries (Ugur Rizzi, 2020), including Turkey. Additionally, UNICEF (2012a, 2012b) suggested conducting quantitative and qualitative research on the educational needs of Roma children in Turkey to correctly identify and solve the problems.

Education of Roma Children in Turkey

The Roma in Turkey are divided into four groups: Doms, Loms, Nomads/Wanderers, and Roma (Marsh & Strand, 2005). However, the definition of who the Roma are in Turkey may change for different reasons, such as their relations with non-Roma groups and different governmental policies. In this context, the Roma are not a homogeneous group and share many characteristics with the people around them. More specifically, despite their marginalization, they are part of the society in which they live (Özateşler, 2014). For Romas in Turkey, being citizens of the Republic of Turkey is an indispensable part of their identity. However, they believe that they are seen as second-class citizens and are forced to live in degrading conditions (Marsh & Strand, 2005).

The Roma have been engaged in some traditional professions, including musicianship and blacksmithing (Özateşler, 2014). However, they are constantly impoverished as many of their skills related to these traditional professions have become obsolete owing to modern technology and lifestyles. Working in irregular, low-paying informal jobs, such as collecting scrap, paper, plastic, and porting (UNICEF, 2012a); they have to constantly struggle for food and basic needs (Diler, 2008). Further, challenges such as overcrowding, unsuitable housing, inadequate road and infrastructure services, worn-out public buildings, and poor quality services are noteworthy in places where Romas live. Additionally, these places are associated with crime (UNICEF, 2012b).

In Turkey, five years of primary school until 1997; eight years of primary education until 2011; and 12 years of primary, secondary, and high school education were compulsory as of 2012. Thus, preschool education was not compulsory. According to the statistics of the 2019–2020 academic year, the schooling rates were 54.36% for pre-school education, 97.96% for primary school, 98.64% for secondary school, and 89.19% for high school. The schooling rates of girls were lower than those of boys, albeit in insignificant proportions (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2020). In Turkey, precise information is unavailable for the level of non-enrollment, late enrollment, absenteeism, or early school leaving among Roma children as data disaggregated by ethnic groups are not collected regarding access to education (ECRI, 2011; UNICEF, 2012a). However, some study results provide various ideas about

Roma children's access to school. For example, in a wide-ranging study, some determinations have been made, such as the literacy rate among Roma is approximately 30%–40%, well below Turkey's average; illiteracy rate is approximately 90% in some places. Furthermore, it is a common to not send girls to school, and it is impossible to attend higher education institutions after completing primary education (Alp & Taştan, 2010).

Turkey expressly prohibits discrimination in education (Constitution, 1982; National Education Fundamental Law, 1973; Turkish Human Rights and Equality Institution Law, 2016). Public schools provide free education. The state pays the salaries of teachers and other employees. All children in primary education are enrolled in a certain school according to their residential address (Kaya, 2015). Students in secondary education are enrolled in schools according to their scores in the central exams or their residential addresses. A central examination is conducted for entrance to universities. According to legal regulations, a discriminatory policy in education is not aimed at any group in Turkey, including the Roma. However, although non-discrimination in education is provided as a fundamental right by law, various mechanisms such as anti-Roma prejudices, abusive behavior by educators, and the authorities' failure to take corrective measures prevent equal access to education for the Roma (Akkan & Buğra, 2021; Stark & Berlinschi, 2021).

Since the early 2000s, studies and projects that started with Turkey's candidacy with the European Union (Kaya, 2005) and reports of international organizations in which Turkey is a member, have revealed the problems faced by the Roma. Studies have shown that the education of the adult Roma in Turkey is generally insufficient (Marsh & Strand, 2005; Önen, 2013). Additionally, girls are more disadvantaged due to the patriarchal structure of society (Önen, 2013), there is a lack of permanent teachers in schools with Roma students. Moreover, teachers are not motivated to work in these schools, they have prejudices toward students and parents, stereotyped behavior, and low achievement expectations of some teachers, which prevents the success of Roma students (Kılıçoğlu & Kılıçoğlu, 2018).

Although the central and egalitarian education system in Turkey provides equal opportunities for many disadvantaged individuals, it can lead to discrimination as it ignores the problems specific the Roma (Ugur Rizzi, 2020). Additionally, under the central system, the school a child will attend is determined by the address-based population registration system. It allows students to go to school in their neighborhood, thus putting the Roma students at an disadvantage. For instance, some parents shift to a neighborhood with a better school, even on paper (Kaya, 2015); or the Roma children attend schools with the lowest academic achievement because they live together in certain neighborhoods (Kılıçoğlu & Kılıçoğlu, 2018) or causing Roma students to be congregated in the same class (Karan, 2017; Kılıçoğlu & Kılıçoğlu, 2018). The Roma people live in the same neighborhood almost in isolation and parents from high socioeconomic levels send their children to schools in other neighborhoods, and sometimes to private schools. This causes the students in schools mostly attended by Roma students to receive education with fewer opportunities and often in deprivation. This is because parents contribute to the financing of schools in Turkey and schools deprived of this contribution are unable to meet some of their needs (Karan, 2017).

Although it is generally believed that the Roma do not value education, Akkan, Deniz, and Ertan's (2011) study revealed that the Roma experience problems in several fields due to lack of access to education and poverty is one of the primary reasons for their disconnect with education. Another study supporting this showed that the obligation to take care of their younger siblings or contribute to the household economy prevents girls from being sent to school (Arayıcı, 2008). The Roma realize that poverty hinders their access to education (Önen, 2013).

Household poverty is at the center of economic barriers that may cause the exclusion of children facing challenges in accessing school education. While the poverty rate for children under the age of six is 24.4% across Turkey, this rises to 48.7% for children living in rural areas in the same group, and Roma children are more likely to live in poor households (UNICEF, 2012b). However, Marsh (2008) opposed poverty as the only reason for Roma children being unsuccessful in school, and it has been shown that prejudices, mostly negative attitudes of teachers, low expectations, schools and classes where most students are Roma, and demotivated teachers are at the root of the problem.

Noticing the issues faced by the Roma, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies prepared the Strategy Document and Action Plan for Roma Citizens (2016), covering the years 2016–2021. Regarding problems related to education in the prepared plan, it states that Roma children cannot benefit from educational opportunities adequately, their access to educational opportunities is low, and early drop-outs and absenteeism are high. This is because the Roma families cannot afford the education expenses of their children and the children must work to support their families. To solve these issues, the plan prevented early school leaving and absenteeism to ensure the continuation of education of those whose education has been interrupted, it aimed to raise awareness among families, inform them especially about social assistance, and improve the social ties of Roma parents and students with their schools (Strategy Document and Action Plan for Roma Citizens, 2016). However, the statement of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies regarding the studies and results needed to achieve the plan targets could not be reached. Concrete steps were not taken in line with the plan, and the results could not be achieved for Roma children's access to education.

Although studies have focused on issues related to Roma children's access to education, discrimination, poverty, and exclusion; studies focusing on parental experiences remain limited (Obrovská & Sidiropulu Janků, 2021). No studies have examined the experiences of Roma mothers, especially regarding Roma children's access to education, poverty, and exclusion. However, in Roma communities, gender roles direct the relationship that families establish with educational institutions. Romani women, besides being engaged in housework, also assume the main responsibility of raising children and shaping their educational opportunities more than men (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2019). This finding is also valid for Turkey. In her study, Akgül (2021) found that men in Turkey are indifferent to their children's education, which shows that women are the followers and significant decision-makers in their children's education compared to the men in the family, and they make a great effort to educate their children despite the economic inadequacy. The same study reported that men are completely uninterested in matters related to children's education and they may even be unaware about the school their children attend and the grade they are in. Therefore, it is important to focus on the school and education experiences, views, and thoughts of Roma mothers to identify the educational problems of Roma children and develop policies and targeted interventions to help reduce their risk of exclusion from education. In the only study available on this subject, 12% of the Roma in six countries in Europe reported that they felt discriminated against as parents or students when they contacted school authorities in the 12 months before the survey (FRA, 2020). However, there is no information regarding the occurrence of this discrimination. From this viewpoint, to contribute to the solution of the educational problems experienced by the Roma in Turkey, this study reveals the meaning of the experiences of Roma mothers having children in primary education, about their children's schools. For this, we sought to answer the following question: What is the meaning of the experiences of Roma mothers about their children's schools including (1) pre-starting school, (2) starting school, (3) attending school, and (4) graduating from school?

Method

This study uses a phenomenological research design, one of the qualitative research methods, to reveal Roma mothers' meaning of school experiences as parents with children in primary education. This approach aims to present an accurate understanding of the unchanging nature and essence of an experience based on phenomenological research experience (Moustakas, 1994). Patton (2015, pp. 190) stated that the purpose of the approach is "to gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our daily experiences." The phenomenon in this study is the school experience of Roma mothers as parents. This study applied the data analysis process consisting of bracketing, phenomenological reduction, imaginary variation, and synthesis suggested by Giorgi (2009), which is used in several studies carried out using the phenomenology method.

Participants

The participants were selected from among Roma mothers living in the Yakuplu neighborhood, located in Istanbul's Beylikdüzü district, which is the most populated province in Turkey. It is difficult to provide precise information about the neighborhood because no ethnic origin records were kept in the population records in Turkey. Additionally, detailed information about the neighborhood is included in the Intervention Suggestions Report of the Yakuplu Roman Campus Improvement and Social Capacity Building Research (Koca et al., 2015). According to the report, the Roma, who settled in 1997 through urban transformation, live in the neighborhood. In some households, two families live together. The neighborhood appears as a settlement sandwiched between sites built in the vicinity. The residents of the neighborhood earn their living by engaging in scrap, paper collection, labor, and cleaning. Neighborhood women generally do not work because they are engaged in childcare. However, they help their spouses in collecting paper and scrap to contribute to the family income. Contrary to the popular belief about the Roma people, the number of musicians in the neighborhood is quite low. According to a report by Koca et al. (2015), about a quarter of the Roma population in the neighborhood does not have any social security. The Roma living in the neighborhood spend almost 60% of their time in the neighborhood. Due to the address-based school registration system, there is one primary school and two secondary schools for children living in the neighborhood. A criterion sampling technique was used to identify the participants. The first criterion used in the study was that the participants were Roma mothers and that at least one of their children was continuing their education at primary school, and the other was in secondary school simultaneously. The main reason for this criterion was to determine whether Roma mothers have different experiences in these schools when their children's school-level changes (primary and secondary school) and whether their experiences change over time. The second criterion was that the participants were married. The third criterion included that the gender of the participants' children attending school was different. The fourth criterion was their willingness to participate in the study, being aware of what they have experienced as a parent, and being able to convey it as they make sense of it.

Descriptive information of the participants is presented in Table 1. In the table, pseudonyms are used instead of real names of the participants. To reach the volunteer participants, the Yakuplu Roma Culture and the Solidarity Association visited the neighborhood and the Roma people were informed about the study's purpose. During the three days following this, the Roma association building was visited at different times. During each visit, the purpose of the study was repeated, and the Roma's questions about the study were answered sincerely and without leaving any room for dilemmas. The Roma asked questions about how the study results would be used, with whom they would be shared, whether their private lives would be interfered with, and whether their children's difficult situations at school would become more difficult. They received direct, unequivocal, and clear answers to all their questions. During the visits, Roma mothers living in the neighborhood and wishing to participate in the study were reached through the Roma in the association's building. Further, interviews were conducted with Roma mothers who stated that they would voluntarily participate in the study.

Table 1. Descriptive information of Participants

Pseudonym	Job	Age	Child number	Child gender	Child grade
Zeynep	Homemaker	32	4	Girl	4 th Grade
				Boy	7 th Grade
Nurcan	Homemaker	38	5	Girl	3 rd Grade
				Boy	8 th Grade
Nihal	Paper collector	28	4	Boy	3 rd Grade
				Girl	6 th Grade
Sevim	Factory worker	34	5	Boy	3 rd Grade
				Girl	8 th Grade
Nergis	Paper collector	31	5	Girl	3 rd Grade
				Boy	7 th Grade
Filiz	Factory worker	32	3	Girl	4 th Grade
				Boy	6 th Grade
Sedef	Homemaker	30	3	Boy	3 rd Grade
				Girl	7 th Grade
Hacer	Scrap collector	40	4	Boy	3 rd Grade
				Girl	6 th Grade
Elif	Homemaker	37	3	Boy	4 th Grade
				Girl	8 th Grade
Ayten	Factory worker	35	3	Boy	4 th Grade
				Boy	7 th Grade
Zehra	Homemaker	41	6	Girl	4 th Grade
				Boy	6 th Grade

Data Collection

The data were collected in two ways. First, face-to-face interviews were conducted with six Roma mothers. Subsequently, focus group interviews were conducted with five Roma mothers, who were not interviewed face-to-face. A semi-structured interview form was used for both interviews. A literature review was conducted before the interview form was prepared. Following the literature review, the relevant studies were tabulated under the titles: the study title, author(s), journal and year of publication, study question, method, participants, data analysis, findings, results, and recommendations. Furthermore, seven questions were prepared based on the study's purpose. To test the intelligibility and usefulness of the questions, a pilot face-to-face interview was conducted with each participant. Audio recordings of the meetings were transcribed. Two researchers evaluated the first interview together, and although it was determined that the questions were generally understandable, they were revised. One more question was added to the interview form, and the questions were finalized. The questions directed at the participants required teachers and students, school principals, and other parents to describe their approach to them. Two of the questions asked were as follows: "How was the approach of the school administration to you during enrollment, considering the time you first enrolled your daughter or son in school? What was the situation when you enrolled your son/daughter in secondary school, what situation did you experience in enrolling there?"

After approval from the ethics committee, the first researcher conducted face-to-face interviews between March 31, 2021, and April 5, 2021, and the focus group meeting on April 8, 2021. Considering that the amount of available data obtained from the participants was high and that we learned what we wanted to know (Patton, 2015), the number of participants was deemed sufficient. All interviews were held at the Yakuplu Roma Culture and Solidarity Association building in the neighborhood where the participants lived. As the association is a center of attraction for the participants and a place they frequently use, they wanted the interviews to be held here. The participants were informed about their privacy rights and that this would be respected. Additionally, it was specifically stated that they could

leave the interviews at any time, that the interview data would only be used for scientific purposes, and that they would not be transferred to third parties. All focus groups and face-to-face interviews were recorded with participants' permission.

Validity and Reliability

In the phenomenological approach, it is important to obtain in-depth data on the meaning that the participants attribute to the phenomenon and the role of the researcher in reaching this data. At this stage, establishing a trust-based empathic relationship between the participant and researcher increases the data's reliability (Moustakas, 1994). However, Baltacı (2019) does not consider it possible to determine the precise reliability and validity in qualitative research, as in quantitative study. Keeping these views in mind, the first researcher visited Yakuplu Roma Culture and the Solidarity Association regularly for eight days before the interviews were conducted, to try to establish trust by communicating with the Roma parents. Walks were held with Roma parents in the neighborhood, and this was tried to be included in their daily lives as much as they allowed. These stages ensured the reliability and consistency of the study by providing a participant and researcher interaction. Moustakas (1994) described the participants as "co-researchers." He justifies this by including the participants at the core of the experience with the researcher because the answers to the study questions will be shaped around the participants' experiences. Therefore, one of the primary aims of the researcher should be to inform the "co-researchers" of their roles and situations. The first researcher informed the "co-researchers" about the research purpose and research questions before the interview. The researchers revived the phenomenon in the readers' mind by describing the parents' experiences in a detailed and rich manner, considering the data obtained. However, to ensure the transferability of the study, the neighborhood and characteristics of the participants were explained (Patton, 2015). Additionally, for internal validity, both researchers created themes separately and exchanged views on them. Further, the explanation of the meaning of their experiences was conveyed to the participants by the first researcher and their opinions were sought (Creswell, 2003). Participants stated that the meaning they shared defined their experiences. Data triangulation (face-to-face and focus group interviews) was used to increase the validity and reliability of the study.

Data Analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were converted into text using Microsoft Word (46 pages, 17174 words). The obtained texts were analyzed by a content analysis method using the NVivo program. The process suggested by Giorgi (2009), comprising bracketing, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis stages, was applied to analyze the study data. The bracketing phase begins with researchers writing a full explanation of the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1994). The researchers expected to read the statement of subjectivity, which includes the definition they created based on their own experiences of the phenomenon before data analysis. In this study, researchers suspended their prejudices and understandings, personal experiences and assumptions, interpretations and meanings regarding the phenomenon, and did not allow them to enter and guide the participants' experiences. In the second stage, the phenomenological reduction, both researchers read the transcripts of the face-to-face and focus-group interviews separately. The aim here was to determine the points at which the phenomenon differs. Statements describing participants' experiences of the phenomenon were divided into units according to their attributes. The two researchers exchanged views by comparing the meaning units and the obtained meaning units were used for the third stage, the imaginary variation. Additionally, structural themes were created using semantic units at the imaginary variation stage. At this stage, the phenomenon was explained using "textural description" and it was determined how the experience occurred with "structural description." Subsequently, the themes were compared with participant opinions, researcher observation, and literature. In the final stage of the synthesis, the meaning of the phenomenon was determined by synthesizing the units of meaning and structural themes.

Results

To the analyze data in line with the study's purpose, the experiences of the Roma mothers about the school within the framework of sub-problems, were presented under the headings before their children start school, at school starting, while attending school, and finishing school.

1. The Experiences of Roma Mothers Before Their Children Start School

The experiences integrated into the pre-school theme reflect Roma mothers' positive view toward school, education, and hope for their children. Romani mothers' expectations include thoughts on social integration, hope, caring, and security.

Social integration: Before their children start primary school, Roma mothers perceive school as a place where they can interact with other segments of society and where their children can intermingle with non-Romani peers. For example, Zeynep stated, "...our children only get together with other children at school, they are either in the neighborhood outside the school, or they sell handkerchiefs, water or scrap paper with their fathers..."

Hope: Romani mothers see school as a place where they can lift their children out of poverty before their children start school. Particularly, girls' desire to continue their education is evident. Sevim expressed the situation clearly: "... my parents let me until grade 4. When it was spring, we used to work in that field. Thank God my daughter wants to study. I hope she will not be like us..." Additionally, Filiz mentioned, "...I keep running around the factory all day, why not? Let them study have a job, be a man..." This showed that she did not think much differently from Sevim.

Caring: Romani mothers' hopes for school also led them to care about the school. Nurcan is clear on how much Romani parents care about the school, with the words "... before school time, mothers do not talk about anything but registration..." and "...we wait at the principal's door during registration. . .come to school time for registration, see how we are. . ."

Security: Roma mothers, especially those who work, see schools as a safe place as well. Knowing that their children will be at school provides their mothers a sense of security. This is how Nihal sees school as a solution to her children's security problems: "...send them to school...I know where they are when I am on paper. I feel comfortable when they are in the neighborhood, but at least I know what they are sitting on at school..."

2. The Experiences of Romani Mothers When Their Children Start School

The experiences of Roma mothers are basically "We don't want you or your children." This shows that Roma mothers face microassault. Although Roma mothers are unaware of it, the microassault messages they are exposed to are given to them in the following ways: Even if you do not come, your boys never come, you can come, but we are watching you, who are you (what are you?), your children will be in a separate classroom.

Even if you do not come: Roma mothers feel that school administrators and teachers do not want them or their children at school. Zeynep expressed her opinion "...if the state did not make it compulsory, these principals wouldn't let us through the school door..." Filiz stated, "...the state's school just now, I mean the school of everybody. But don't let everyone's school be our school..." mentioning that they are unwanted at school. Nergis said, "...I took the boy, our enrollment is already there. However, if it is not, they won't get it, I know it like my name. . ." She stated that they were not wanted at school. Similarly, Hacer expressed her thoughts about not being wanted at school, "...the principal says, even if the boy does not come to school, if he will work, he should go with his father, we can handle it..." and supported it with the statement.

Your boys never come: According to Roma mothers, it is more difficult for boys to enroll in school than for girls. School staff are worried that Roma boys will have more problems at school and Roma boys and their mothers face more difficulties in enrolling in school. Zehra explained her experiences, "...when the baby becomes a boy, it's hard for those at school... they look at the boys as if they will turn the school upside down. . . they look at mothers as well. . ." Ayten said, "...the principal does not want us and our children to go to school. He sees our children as a problem, according to him, our children go to school to fight, to smash, necessarily boys..."

You can come, but we are watching you: Roma mothers felt that the school administration would keep them under constant surveillance when their children started school. Hacer expressed this feeling as, "(the principal)...wants to see us, to show himself to us. At school, he keeps saying that I do not allow this, I do not allow this. He means that you know where you came from..." Nihal said how they will be kept under control, "... the principal says, it is middle school, meeting with friends, dropping out of school, damaging the school's furniture, talking about the teacher is not here. I will send him to discipline, I will have him expelled from school..."

The message "our eyes are on your boys" is given more emphatically to the boys' mother. Nergis shared the message that our eyes are on you regarding her son "... (principal) also said...the boy shouldn't cause any incidents while he was enrolling, or I would be expelled from the school..."

Who are you (What are you?): When Roma mothers enroll their children in school, unlike other parents, they receive the message relating to who are you? What are you? What are you doing here? By being forced to meet the school principal, and kept standing and looking at them by the principal. Elif expressed this message she received as "...you know, took us to her room. The officer does not register anyway, without meeting with the principal...as if we have committed a crime...he (principal) will see us and take a statement..." Sevim also expressed this message as, "...he (principal) took us to his room and made us wait and look at us for a long time. A person thinks we have committed a crime..."

Furthermore, another experience of Romani mothers within the scope of "Who are you?" is to be ignored and not respected. Zeynep explained her experience of being ignored, "...I said, is the class mixed or is it all ours? He didn't answer to me. They said, you'll see when the school opens..." Nergis experienced not being respected, "...oh my principal, what do you want from us? You do the same to us at every enrolment time. He makes us wait, he will not look at us, he will always talk about money..."

Your children will be in a separate classroom, but if you donate to the school, things will change: Roma mothers are uncomfortable with their children being placed in classes consisting of only Roma children. Nurcan expressed this situation as, "...our babies gathered in a classroom, our babies crammed into the classroom, the other babies sit in their classrooms wide openly..."

Another experience is that they must donate to get their children into mixed classes. Sedef explained this by stating, "...I tell the principal to enroll my babies in the mixed class, I'll help the school for a few cents... First, he said no, he looked like I will give the money, he said how much can you give. I said it will work..."

3. The Experiences of Roma Mothers While Their Children Are Attending School

The school experiences of Roma mothers as parents, as a basis for their children to attend school include, "We don't want you or your children" at the beginning. This is the continuation of the message. Roma mothers again face microassault. These microassaults occur from teachers to students and parents, students to students, and parents to parents.

From the teacher to parents: The messages Roma mothers receive from teachers are based on the idea that "I can't deal with you." According to the narratives of Roma mothers, teachers provide this message to Roma parents through prejudiced behavior, not providing educational support, and humiliating parents.

The primary experience of Roma mothers regarding teacher behavior is that teachers communicate with prejudice rather than knowing individual parents. In this context, teachers communicate with Roma mothers by evaluating their children as filthy, dirty, and smelly. Sedef expressed this situation by stating that the teacher constantly suggested they "...wash the children, dress them cleanly, let them smell good." Another experience is teachers' prejudice that all Roma are thieves. Nihal expressed this as follows: "Whenever I go, the teacher immediately collects what is on a desk. People understand. Because you see how she talks and treats other parents, how she treats you."

Roma parents have experienced that teachers do not guide or support them regarding their children's education. Although Roma parents do not express themselves, they have certain expectations from the teachers about guidance regarding their children's education, and they are disappointed when these expectations remain unmet. Hacer shared the educational support she needed but cannot get from her child's teacher with the following words: "...if the teacher tells me what I can do, I'll try doing it, but he just keeps shouting. . ." Furthermore, Nihal expressed her lack of educational support as follows: "I only saw the faces of the (teachers) at the parents' meeting. I say how my daughter's classes, they say, she will be fine if she studies. That's all his conversations with me."

Roma mothers also faced humiliating experiences with teachers, such as being embarrassed by their outward appearance, not getting answers to their questions or getting the last answer, being kept waiting longer than the other parents, and being shouted at. Filiz said, ". . .uhh, how should those who don't want our children want us? He used to hold a meeting, he would keep shouting at us..."

From teacher to students: According to the experiences of Roma mothers, the message teachers give to their children is based on the idea that "I can't deal with you," similar to their mothers. According to the narratives of Roma mothers, teachers convey this message to Roma students through their prejudiced behavior, low expectations, and lack of educational support.

Roma mothers realize that their children experience prejudiced behavior at school similar to them. According to the mothers, teachers treat their children at school with the prejudice that the Roma are dirty, thieves, or belligerent. Zeynep expressed this prejudice as follows: "...the teacher made the boy stand up in the middle of everyone, (teacher) go to clean the toilet, come wash your hands and face...no matter how much we wash, the color of our hands and faces does not change. My children are always clean..." Additionally, Zehra described this situation as "for them (teachers), we are all the same. They don't look at us, they can't try to get to know us. For them, all the children of the neighborhood swear, fight, steal, they are always to blame."

Roma mothers experienced low expectations from teachers regarding their children. Based on this experience, teachers do not expect Roma students to learn. Therefore, they believe that there is no need to try to teach them. Ayten expressed the teachers' low expectations of Roma students as, "...when they (non-Roma pupils) didn't attend classes, their teachers would call their mother and ask why they didn't attend, they would follow up on their homework, and when they didn't they would ask why they didn't. No one asks us anything..." Similarly, Sevim stated: "...the teacher does not look at us, only says don't worry about it, that's all he learns. . ." The low expectation has also emerged during the coronavirus pandemic. Zeynep explained this by saying, "...the teacher first called the children's mother (non-Roma) one by one and talked to them and said that the children should attend the lesson. Did he call me? No, he didn't. That's the lesson that my baby has learned when talking to other friends. You know, we entered those classes with our difficulties."

Roma mothers also experienced that teachers do not take responsibility for the learning of Roma students and do not support them in their self-development. Nurcan expressed this as follows: "The girl had barely learned to read, now if I do not teach her, she will forget it too. The girl says to me, are you, my mother or teacher? ... I can only write little. His brother teaches him to add and subtract." Sevim shared a similar experience: "... the girl already left a month after the school started. ... (teacher) says how will you close this one-month gap, how will you adapt to the school and classroom, your job is very difficult. I understood that I would also make the girl adapt to the class. What will the teacher do then? ..."

The experiences of parents show that teachers' prejudices toward the Roma result in low expectations and a lack of educational support for Roma parents and students.

From student to student: Roma mothers' experiences at school also include their children's interactions with other children at school. Accordingly, Roma mothers have experienced that their children face prejudiced behavior by other children.

Other children exclude and stay away from the Roma children, with the prejudice that they are dirty, belligerent, or musicians at school. Filiz said, "...but other children can't leave them alone. They used to hold their noses when they came together in the garden and the corridor. They didn't play much of our kids..." Nurcan explained: "The boy's name had already appeared at school. Whatever ... (her son's name) he did it right away. ... (his son) doesn't do anything, he just wants to play with them. If they take him to a game, it won't be a thing..." Other students at the school excluded Roma students due to prejudices.

From parents to parents: Roma parents also encounter prejudiced behavior from other parents. The prejudiced behavior of other parents toward Roma mothers appears in the form of humiliation and exclusion. However, fear appears to be the basis of behavior that can be defined as humiliation and exclusion. For example, Filiz said, "... other mothers hold their children in their hands and immediately cross over to the other side. It is as if there is an invisible line, they stand on one side, we stand on the other side..." and stated that other parents stay away from them. Nurcan mentioned, "...they talk in a corner, so I went to them. To speak, I say good morning, good morning, no answer. They shake their heads, they don't talk to me..." Sharing a similar experience, Zehra stated, "...they look at us strangely, they don't understand. They are also disturbed by what they do not understand. They think we talk about ourselves, but I swear we don't talk about them..." This statement reinforces the idea that other parents stay away from Roma mothers because they are afraid. In summary, other parents act with prejudice against Roma mothers, do not talk to them, and stay away from them, displaying humiliation and exclusion.

4. The Experiences of Romani Mothers While Their Children Are Graduating From School

The experiences of Roma mothers when their children are graduating from school show that their positive attitudes toward school and education at the beginning and hope for their children are lost owing to their microassault experiences. For Roma mothers, despair replaces hope as their children graduate. This situation is more pronounced for mothers of boys. However, they think that education is necessary, perhaps because there is no other way out.

Hopelessness: The hope that Roma mothers have for school before their children start their education turns into hopelessness during the education process. Roma parents are in despair that they will not receive the support they need from the education system or teachers for their children's education. Sedef angrily expressed her despair by saying, "I tell about the school, the principal, what they are doing, you ask me for their support..." Further, Ayten mentioned, "...the teacher doesn't make the girl talk, if she makes her talk, she will make her talk last. The boy and I try teaching the girl, you say that teacher or school will support..." Filiz clearly explained how hope turned into hopelessness:

"You don't know our children, they have many dreams before the school starts. Just because we can do this with the teacher, we can do that with the other children, but all of these are since the school opened. Do you know why, in the classroom, the teacher sees children a lot, when the teacher sees several other babies, their parents also see our babies a lot? As if they feed us, grow us..."

Hard to be a mother of a boy: Roma mothers with boys face additional problems. Sedef answered the problem that because of her child's gender, "...the girl's teacher just got used to me. It's like they see girls better. Things are more difficult when you become a boy mother..." Sevim expressed the challenges she faced because of her child's gender, "...it is difficult to be a Roma at school, it is even more difficult to be a Roma boy mother. When you are a girl's mother, you feel a little bit more comfortable..."

Education is a must: Although Roma mothers think that they cannot receive support from the education system and teachers, they still see education as a means of escape from their difficult life. They think that their children can be successful if they are not discriminated against. Zehra expressed this thought as follows: "...we always forcefully, neither the school nor the teacher does anything for our babies. Even if they don't do much, let them do what you do to other babies, that's enough..." Talking about the necessity of education, Zeynep said: "We know that our children don't want to go to paper scraps or flowers anymore. Education is their only remedy..."

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

This study revealed the meaning of the experiences of Romani mothers having children in primary education regarding their children's schools as parents. The findings reveal that although Roma mothers expect their children to interact and integrate with their non-Roma peers before their children start primary school, they encounter the message "You Roma is worthless and inadequate, so your children are unsuccessful and will not be successful," " We don't want you or your children." Roma mothers, especially mothers of boys receive the message of "We don't want you and your children" from teachers, non-Roma students, and parents throughout their children's school life. The meaning of this negative message that Roma mothers constantly receive is that they are exposed to discrimination and microassault after their children start school. The discrimination and microassault that Roma mothers are exposed to destroy their positive expectations before their children start primary school. Hope gives way to despair. However, perhaps out of desperation, they continue to see education as a way to ensure their children's better lives and social mobility.

Microassault experienced by Roma mothers means discriminatory, aggressive discourse and behavior based on prejudice, often unconsciously, toward a certain minority or a marginalized group (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). The discourse and behavior of the microassault are so common and innocent-looking that they may not even be noticed by perpetrators (Sue, Capodilupo et al., 2007). Sue, Bucceri et al. (2007) stated that a microassault has three dimensions: micro-insult, micro-assault, and micro-invalidation. Microinsults are behavioral/verbal remarks or comments that often unconsciously degrade a person's racial heritage or identity. This includes references to intelligence, acting as an insignificant person or group, the assumption of guilt, and the idea that values and communication style are abnormal. A microassault is an overt devaluation or humiliation characterized by the intentional use of nicknames, aloofness, and violent verbal or non-verbal attacks with the intent to hurt. Micro-invalidation is a verbal comment or behavior that excludes, denies, or ignores the authenticity of one's thoughts and feelings or experiences, often unconsciously, conveying the message that one's characteristics are worthless or unimportant. The findings reveal that Roma mothers are more exposed to micro-insult and micro-invalidation, which are displayed unconsciously. Exposure to microassault can cause confusion, anger, anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness, frustration, paranoia, fear, and dysfunctional coping strategies such as denial, withdrawal, and substance use (Williams, 2020). The

experiences of Roma mothers show that they feel more anger, helplessness, and hopelessness after a microassault, although there are no data on other symptoms. Considering that microassault is a tool of "othering" (Williams, 2020), their experiences at school remind Roma mothers that they are not considered a meaningful part of the social fabric. This situation can be evaluated as schools contributing to the marginalization of Roma individuals, although they are expected to do the opposite. Based on this assessment, it becomes clear that Roma mothers, who do not give up on education for their children, must struggle with microassault.

The functionalist paradigm of the school expects it to help the most competent enter important professions by providing all groups with the opportunity to participate in the race on equal terms. When expectations are fulfilled, a more meritocratic society is created where talent and effort, rather than privilege and origin, determine an individual's status. The conflict paradigm sees schools as tools that serve the elite, reinforce existing inequalities in society, and promote acceptance of the status quo (Hurn, 2016). According to Bourdieu and Passeron (2015), who criticized the functionalist paradigm, societies are hierarchically organized into upper and lower layers that support social inequalities. In this hierarchical society, schools secure the privileges of the powerful. The content taught in schools legitimizes success and failure by appealing to the selection of socially produced principles. Bourdieu and Passeron (2015) defined the use of force that supports power and manages to impose it legitimately by hiding power relations as "symbolic violence." Therefore, it is possible to say that Roma parents, who are assumed to be at the lowest strata of society hierarchically, are also exposed to symbolic violence, which is the institutional level equivalent of the microassault they are exposed to by the school staff. Exposure to symbolic violence is an indication that the school is an institution that alienates Roma students, ignores their cultural capital, and implements a discourse that suggests that their low achievements stem from the Roma culture. To confirm this judgment, Gezgin (2016) found that Roma attribute their failures in education to their inadequacies. Consequently, although they cannot name it themselves, the institutional symbolic violence that Roma mothers are exposed to at school, combined with individual microassault, gives mothers the message that they are not the main element of this society and enables them to internalize this message. In this respect, schools contribute to the marginalization and academic failure of Roma children.

The prohibition of discrimination in education in Turkey and the compulsory registration of all children in a certain school according to their residence addresses (Kaya, 2015) indicate that the discrimination experiences of Roma mothers as parents are not the result of a systematic discrimination process applied to Romas by the state. However, even if services are available for socially and culturally marginalized individuals, discrimination can hinder access to them (UNICEF, 2007). One of these issues may be the implementation of a one-way training program, which, as explained above, is institutionally implemented by the powerless without considering the values of the Roma. UNESCO (2019) recommends inclusive education practices that consider the differences among students, increase respect for and value differences, and aim to combat discriminatory attitudes both in the classroom and in society, instead of one-way educational program practices. However, educational programs in Turkey do not fully consider individual and cultural differences (Şimşek et al., 2019). Therefore, a source of discrimination experiences of Roma parents may be the education programs implemented and the "symbolic violence" as explained above.

Teacher training and qualifications may explain the discrimination experiences of Roma mothers as parents. In a recent systematic review in Turkey (Amaç, 2021), it was revealed that teachers either did not receive any training on inclusive education or the education was insufficient. It is difficult for a teacher who has not been trained to implement the current curriculum, ask to implement the curriculum, and has not received adequate training on discrimination, to consider the differences among students, and to struggle with discriminatory attitudes both in the classroom and in society. In

this context, it is difficult for a teacher who has never heard of microassault behavior to not engage in microassault behavior or to give up such behavior by analyzing their behavior. For example, to the parent who said that he is a Roma, if the teacher who says "I don't care that you are Roma," does not know that his/her discourse is aggressive behavior in the dimension of "micro-invalidation," he/she can continue with similar discourses without paying attention to their differences, with the peace of seeing everyone as equal. More specifically, they may unconsciously continue their microassault behavior.

It is indisputable that school-family relations are one of the important determinants of students' academic achievement. However, some parents persistently refuse to observe their children's academic processes, do homework together, participate in school activities, discipline their children, and provide the necessary tools for their academic achievement (Smith, 2008). Furthermore, as the education level and socioeconomic status of families decrease, their participation in school also decreases (Keskin & Sezgin, 2009). Therefore, Roma families with low educational and socioeconomic status do not attend school effectively and cannot provide their children with the support expected from school at home (Karan, 2017). Therefore, schools should support parents in their children's education without waiting for Roma families to participate spontaneously. In this context, schools are expected to create environments that welcome families, encourage them, raise concerns, participate in the decision-making process, and train them to participate in their children's education (Funkhouser & Gonzales, 1997). The interviewed Roma mothers, without exception, said they receive the message, "We don't want you" from administrators, teachers, and other parents from the moment their children start school until they finish school. Even the teachers give the message, "I can't deal with you". From the beginning, teachers and administrators give the message, "We don't want you" or "I can't deal with you" showing that they do not want to operate with Roma mothers. It is difficult for Roma parents to cooperate with the school, even if they want to. The lack of school-family cooperation can also cause academic failure for Roma students. As stated by Obrovská and Sidiropulu Janků (2021), this possibility is worrying for Roma children.

A well-known issue with exclusion is that poverty puts people at high risk of social exclusion (UNICEF, 2007). Being a Roma is also being "poor" and even the Roma exclude those who are poorer (Özateşler, 2014). Being poor, inability to afford education for the family, the opportunity cost of going to school, for a child, being in a family with several children, late enrolment in school, child labor, absenteeism, and leaving school early means the risk of exclusion from education (UNICEF, 2012a). For Roma, poverty is intertwined with their identity (Obrovská & Sidiropulu Janků, 2021). Research has shown that the widely-accepted idea that the Roma do not value education as a requirement of community norms is wrong, and that the primary reason for the education problems of Roma children is poverty (Akkan et al., 2011; Önen, 2013). Additionally, non-Roma parents in Turkey also have concerns arising from distrust of the education system, schools, principals, and teachers, the difference in success between schools, the inadequacy of school-family cooperation, and the lack of adequate resources for education (Ateş & Ünal, 2020). More specifically, there are general problems in Turkey's education system, and the poor experience these problems more intensely. Therefore, discrimination based on prejudice and low expectations that Roma mothers experience regarding education stems from being poor and Roma. The finding in this study that Roma mothers can enroll their children in any class they want if they donate to the school is an indicator that the real problem is poverty.

The explanations of Roma mothers while describing their experiences again revealed the following problems the Roma face in education: educators' prejudices toward Roma students and parents, low academic achievement expectations, abusive behavior (Akkan & Buğra, 2021; Kılıçoğlu & Kılıçoğlu, 2018), and ignoring Roma-specific problems (Ugur Rizzi, 2020). Furthermore, poverty is the main cause behind the fact that the application of registration with the Address-Based Population Registration System causes Roma children to attend schools with the lowest academic achievement or

to be in the same class as Roma students (Karan, 2017; Kılıçoğlu & Kılıçoğlu, 2018), (Akkan et al., 2011; Marsh, 2008; Önen, 2013). Different from previous studies, this study reveals a finding that despite the microassault they are exposed to and their despair for their children's education, Roma mothers see education as an important way for their children to lead a better life. Strataki and Petrogiannis (2021) arrived at a similar conclusion in Greece, revealing that Roma mothers see education and school for a better career, improvement of living standards, and upward social mobility. Another finding, different from previous studies and unlike previous findings of girls being more disadvantaged in education, is that Roma families, at least mothers, attach importance to the education of their daughters. The interviewed mothers' lives were very difficult; they lived in poverty and financial deprivation, which led them to believe that education would free them from dependency on their poor husbands. Both findings may indicate that Roma mothers realize the importance of attending school and its positive impact on the lives of their children, especially girls. This finding may also mean that Roma has confidence in the state, other individuals in the community, and educators for their children's education. While it is possible for both viewpoints to be correct, it is also possible for both to be incorrect.

This study contributes to the literature on Roma education in two ways. First, it reveals the problems that Roma face in education according to the experiences of Roma mothers. Second, it demonstrates the discrimination experienced by the Roma living in the Yakuplu neighborhood in Istanbul's Beylikdüzü district. The former chairman of the Human Rights Commission, Tomaševski and UN. Commission on Human Rights (2002), complains that unbelievable silence prevails regarding the Roma. Therefore, the results obtained are important in terms of revealing the discrimination that the Roma experience in education, even if they are repetitions of what is known.

The results of the study are a repetition of the problems that Roma parents and students experience, except that Roma mothers consider education as a means for their children to lead a better life despite their experiences of discrimination and that Roma mothers attach importance to their daughters' education. Therefore, the implications of the study results for practitioners do not differ from those of the previous studies. Despite everything, mothers believe in the necessity of education and that their children can succeed if they are not discriminated against. Practitioners must support this belief and provide supportive environmental conditions. To ensure these conditions, the behavior that causes the discrimination experiences of Roma parents at school is within the scope of "harassment" behavior that is prohibited by the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey Law (2016) and is defined as "any intimidating, humiliating, humiliating, or embarrassing behavior that violates human dignity or has such a result." To eliminate discrimination in education by practitioners, education, as determined by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) (1999) regarding the obligations of states regarding the right to education, it is important to try to make them suitable for existing, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable features. The ECRI General Policy Recommendations and Reports can also guide practitioners (ECRI, 1998, 2004, 2007, 2011, 2016). Additionally, the Strategy Document and Action Plan for Roma Citizens prepared by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies should be removed from being a show and serious implementations can be an effective step toward solving current problems in Turkey.

Akkan and Buğra (2021) emphasized that education policies combating inequalities prioritize the financial allocation of resources, government spending on education, and access to free compulsory education for all. However, there are indications that the budget allocated to the schools attended by Roma children is insufficient (Alp & Taştan, 2010). In this context, although excluded from the statistics, more investments should be made for large schools and places with crowded classes by determining the regions where Roma students are located and the schools they attend. Thus, by increasing the number of schools and classrooms in the region, the number of students in schools and classrooms can be reduced and their administration can be facilitated. Additionally, sports and social facilities to be

built at or near schools in places where Roma lives can make schools more attractive for these students. Furthermore, these problems cannot be solved by building schools and facilities. To ensure that education is truly free, necessary funds should be sent to schools, and the ugly negotiations between the school administration and parents, which were also mentioned in this study, should be prevented. The problems experienced at the beginning can be avoided in this manner.

During the interviews, some parents stated that they did not have the knowledge or time to help their children at home, nor an environment for their children to study at home. More resources are required to solve this problem. In regions with large Roma population, libraries with internet connection or study centers can be opened where students can go safely when they leave school, where educators can support students when necessary, where both parents are working, and where the child can stay until his parents come home.

It is perhaps easier to allocate more resources to areas with a high concentration of Roma students. Educators will increase or decrease the discrimination experiences of Roma mothers and their children. The study findings show that school principals and teachers can experience discrimination against Roma parents and students, albeit unconsciously. Some other parents and students exhibit discriminatory behavior, but they receive support from the school administration and teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the teacher, which is the most important element in education, and the quality of the teacher. However, as emphasized before, teachers did not receive sufficient or qualified training in inclusive education (Amaç, 2021). Since the experiences of Roma mothers are discussed in this study, it seems important to train teachers who will respect the differences in Roma before and during the service. In addition, the proposal by Stark and Berlinschi (2021) to employ Roma teachers who are sensitive to the Roma lifestyle and to be recruited as positive role models can be considered.

There are two limitations to this study apart from the method. First, the discrimination behavior of teachers against their children, which Roma mothers hear from their children, is used as mothers' experiences. Although these experiences were not directly experienced by them and were based on their children's narratives, they were evaluated as part of the school experience of Roma mothers. This can be expressed as a limitation for a phenomenological study.

The second limitation is that both researchers have some assumptions about Roma as a member of the average Turkish culture. Although we tried to manage the process by placing ourselves in brackets and considering our prejudices throughout the research process, it is possible that our presence in the data collection process affected the answers of the participants, and we could not evaluate these answers correctly.

Although the findings cannot be generalized because the data were collected using qualitative methods in this study, the external validity of the results is high because the experiences of the participants are almost the same and the findings are compatible with the results of previous studies. However, Obrovská and Sidiropulu Janků (2021), in their study, concluded that despite numerous dramatic narratives of Roma children being subjected to hostility and racial oppression in the educational setting, data from quantitative research concluded that there was general satisfaction among parents about the way their children were treated, regardless of ethnicity. In other words, qualitative and quantitative data are not fully compatible. Although it is difficult to conduct quantitative research since there are no statistics on ethnicity in Turkey, revealing the prevalence of experiences of discrimination and exposure to microassault identified in this study with quantitative research may facilitate a more reliable interpretation.

Based on these findings, it was determined that the source of discrimination experiences of Roma mothers as parents is their poverty. However, Obrovská and Sidiropulu Janků (2021) found that the negative schooling experiences of Roma mothers and their children oscillated at the intersection of race, ethnicity, and social class. In other words, the discrimination experiences of Roma mothers may be caused by one or all of them, apart from their poverty, such as ethnicity, and lifestyle. For this reason, a similar study can be conducted by including Roma parents and students with high socioeconomic status, whether educators discriminate based on ethnic origin, and their skills and attitudes toward multicultural education.

This study was conducted in the Yakuplu neighborhood, located in Istanbul's Beylikdüzü district. If similar case studies are conducted in the neighborhoods where Roma students live and in the schools they attend, regional or inclusive solutions can be produced to improve Roma students' education. Thus, it is hoped that more information produced over time will contribute to change.

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