

Bare peripheries. State retrenchment and population profiling in segregated Roma settlements from Romania

Presentation at the 2014 Annual Conference of the Hungarian Sociological Association, November 27-29, Cluj-Napoca

Cristina Rat

crat@socasis.ubbcluj.ro

The conference paper and presentation were completed within the research “Spatialization and marginalization of social exclusion. The social and cultural formation of ‘Gypsy ghettos’ in Romania in a European context” (www.sparex-ro.eu), supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0354.

State retrenchment and population profiling

- Processes of state retrenchment in contemporary Romania, as endorsed by the historically embedded profiling of the Roma as a “distinct and subversive” population in conjunction with the racialization of extreme deprivation as a “Gypsy problem”;
- The formation of “bare” (Agamben, 1998) peripheries where state policies merely exercise population control and citizenship is disentangled.

“Gypsy Ghettos”

- Wacquant’s conceptualization of the *ghetto*, as defined by “(i) stigma, (ii) constraint, (iii) spatial confinement, and (iv) institutional parallelism” (Wacquant, 2011:7).
- **BUT:** The state that creates the ghetto and, simultaneously, the means to dissolve the ghetto, is essentially incongruous and diffuse: border-reinforcing mechanisms colonize social policies designed for “inclusion”, and informal-networks corrupt or emancipate, i.e. ultimately erode the bureaucratic boundaries in charge of exclusion.

Population profiling and categories of “suspicion”

- Thorburn’s (2012) distinction between *identification, surveillance* and *population profiling*;
- Strong and historically enduring profiling of the Roma as a “category of suspicion” (G.T. Marx, 1985)
- BUT: Weak state capacity to exercise surveillance

- Regulations over obtaining **identity papers** and their intertwining with social citizenship constitute key-mechanisms of **population sorting** (Lyon, 2002; Hintjens, 2012) within a larger biopolitics (Foucault, 1978; Agamben, 1998) conducive to effects of **adverse inclusion** for the most impoverished Roma.
- They are rendered by these policies as a **subaltern *population*** subject to profiling and sorting, while their ***individual identifications as citizens*** and **protection** by the surveillant welfare state are **seriously hindered or denied**.

Dividing identifications

- By dual-standards or *dividing identifications* I mean the institutionalization of a substantial differentiation between identity papers *of the same sort* (e.g. national identity cards or passports) through *the incorporation of a social difference* in the very form of these documents, and consequently creating or reinforcing a social division (Anthias, 2001).

Identity papers of the inhabitants above 14 years old from the four settlements in the Cantonului and Pata-Rât areas, Cluj-Napoca
(Percentages of inhabitants by settlement)

Identity papers of inhabitants above 14 years old (<i>Percentages</i>)	Canton	Dallas	Colina (Coastei)	Landfill
Identity card with address from Cluj	62.3%	64.1%	87.2%	19.1%
Identity card with address in another county	3.4%	6.0%	2.6%	45.8%
Temporary identity document, without domicile	28.8%	11.4%	6.8%	18.3%
None, but remembers having CNP and birth certificate	4.7%	14.1%	3.4%	6.9%
Never had identity papers	0.8%	4.3%	-	9.9%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>

Source: UNDP and UBB, 2012.

Sorting-out, moving away, and watching over

1977 study of the National Commission for Demography, and the 1978 report of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) on the “problems raised by the Gypsy population in our country” attest not only the indeed worrying social and economic situation of “traditional” Roma, but also the incapacity of the state to handle this “problem”.

The measures recommended in the study, which were to a large extent included in the PCR document as well, propose de-segregation, workplace integration, education, and improving access to health-care services.

Eventually, the underlying principles and headline recommendations are very similar to those of current ***National Strategies for the Roma***, except from the fact that the letter also emphasises the cultural rights of the Roma as an ethnic group.

Selective non-surveillance

- In her study on undocumented migrants in the UK and France, Hintjens points out that state's *selective non-surveillance* of marginal and vulnerable groups highlights exactly their “unwantedness”, and it may be applied to full citizens as well (Hintjens, 2013: 89).
- Our fieldwork revealed that this non-surveillance within settlements, that suspends basic citizenship rights such as personal safety and property, combined with high-surveillance of the inhabitants once they go outside “in the city”, weakens irrevocably any trust in local authorities.
- This is not to say that authorities, most notably the police, do not intervene at all in order to settle conflicts within the settlements; rather, that they hardly prevent these conflict to occur.

The paradox of selective non-surveillance and dividing citizenship identifications

- Out at the peripheries, dwellers of these settlements are expected by local authorities to **“organize themselves”**, to elect representatives, to refrain from any “disturbing” activity in the city (such as collecting recyclable waste from trash bins or begging), and to **“wait” until local authorities will manage to solve “their” problems.**
- **Appeal to any “outsider”**, especially international organizations, and **disclosing the situation is sanctioned as a shameful betrayal.**
- At the same time, **internal surveillance of the settlement is delegated to the “leader”**, elected by the dwellers or appointed by authorities or Roma organizations, but in any case endorsed by local authorities.
- For outsiders, they are **gatekeepers** that protect the inhabitants from abuses of journalists or “money-hungry NGOs” that “exploit the plight of the Roma”. For local authorities, they are the “trustworthy and civilized”, **who know how and what to speak about the “community”**, i.e. how to *represent the population*.

Percentage of Roma and non-Roma families living in their proximity who received social benefits in 2011

	Roma	Non-Roma
Earnings from labour or economic activities	44.0%	48.9%
Unemployment benefits	2.1 %	2.6 %
State pensions (old-age or invalidity)	27.5%	66.0%
Social assistance benefits	26.8 %	6.9%
Child allowance	68.4%	32.6%

Source: UNDP/WB/EC Survey 2011. Author's calculations.

Biopolitics at the margins

- **The state** is not one coherent apparatus capable to enact extensive and intensive surveillance, but rather a weakly-tied assemblage enacting policies of dividing identifications and population sorting, boundary-setting and unfavourable inclusion, but **ultimately unable to control the ghettos it creates.**
- State biopolitics confronts the **biopolitics of economic entrepreneurs** aiming to incorporate inhabitants of segregated settlements into exploitative labour relations, the **biopolitics of faith-based organizations** with energetic conversion and community-building programs, the **biopolitics of NGOs** promoting discourses and practices from a supra-national level that often replace citizenship-conditionalities with the universality of human rights etc.

Social citizenship?

- The shallow presence of the state at the margins cannot be separated from the general state-retrenchment that leaves increasing room for neoliberal economics and merely corrects market failures.
- Thus the abandonment of “bare” peripheries cannot be separated from the abandonment of the citizenship project, which was seen as emancipation from population policies.