

Constructing “Roma ethnicity” through politics and policies for Roma

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Ethnic and religious conflicts, nationalist discourses and inter-ethnic tolerance in the 20th century. A comparative approach

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I.

General considerations
about politics and policies

Late “20th century”

The context within which the construction of “Roma ethnicity” by **politics and policies for Roma** goes on, is marked by complex processes of transformation:

Fall of communism (economic collapse and ideological delegitimization)

Promise of democratization, liberation of the individual from the oppressive state, practicing individual civic and political rights and freedoms

Identity-based recognition politics, politics of (ethnic) difference

Neoliberal restructuring of the state, market, and society across all EU member states

The reality of market economy, denial of socio-economic rights, marketization of all domains of the societal life

The state-dominated government is replaced by multiple actors of governance beyond and below the state

Emergence of new forms of European governance

Configurations and failures of the European social agenda

Resurgence of nationalist right wing populism

Forms of racism directed towards internal others (racializing citizenship)

Economic crises and austerity measures, anti-immigration politics

Construction of “Roma ethnicity” as two-directional process

- 1) The construction of “Roma ethnicity” by politics and policies for Roma is a **reaction to** the larger socio-economic and ethno-national order that places (self)perceived Roma in particular positions
- 2) The construction of “Roma ethnicity” by politics and policies for Roma is a **constitutive element of** the way in which Roma are placed in the larger societal order and are acted against in relations where ethnicity matters

In both cases “politics and policies for Roma” define in particular way “the problem” and “the solution”, while being informed by particular knowledge and by a particular perspective explicitly or tacitly assumed (see Huub van Baar, 2011)

Huub Van Baar (2011). *The European Roma. Minority Representation, Memory and the Limits of Transnational Governmentality*. Amsterdam: F&N Eigen Beheer.

“Why a problem and why such a kind of problem, why a certain way of problematizing appears at a given point in time” (Foucault, 2007)

Governmentality approach:

- Technical activity of governing (government)
 - Ways in which we think about governing (mentality)
- = the relation between the technical and rational dimensions of government

Developing programs and policies aimed at improving the conditions of populations – backed up by the problematization according to which these conditions are improvable

Distinction between politics and policies

POLITICS: processes of achieving and exercising positions of governance, including the elaboration and promotion of views, and the creation of the political subject in the name of whom this politics is exercised

POLICIES: instruments of problem-solving on different domains, including laws, institutions, and different regulations

Policies are seemingly neutral, while politics is ideologically driven. In reality, policies are instruments of putting into practice particular politics, so they are:

- forms of discursive power that name, regulate, control, define problems and their solutions;
- discursive formations, which produce subject positions, subjectivities and social hierarchies;
- tools in the hands of policy-implementers to reproduce or change the socio-economic status quo;
- vehicles of empowerment, or contrary of reproducing inequalities, having material consequences on people's life

Shore and White, (1997). *Anthropology of Public Policy: Critical Perspectives on Governance and Power*. London: Routledge

Policies organize society and structure the ways people perceive themselves and their opportunities, and have a contribution to empower some people and silence others

Wedel, Shore, Feldman and Lathrop (2005). Toward an Anthropology of Public Policy. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 600: 30-51

Policies shape the society, create new categories of individuals to be governed, connect desperate actors in power relations, and most importantly masks the political under the cloak of neutrality

II.

Politics and policies for Roma

From politics of culture and rights to de-politicized policies for social inclusion

(1) Actors – fragmented, multilevel space

Nation-states (central and local governments and legislative bodies of member and non member states of the European Union)

European institutions (European Commission, especially DG Justice and DG Employment and Social Affairs; Council of Europe; European Parliament, etc.)

OSCE

Country based civil society organizations (human rights-oriented activists, social service provider NGOs, grassroots)

International organizations (human rights, development, faith-based and charity)

Roma political parties

Other political parties

Roma positions within the governmental structures

(2) Understandings of “*Romaniness*”

(a) politics of culture

(b) politics of rights

(c) politics of policies for social inclusion

(they are overlapping to different degrees, however some of them are predominant in particular times)

(a)

Politics of culture

From the utopia of Romanestan to Roma as non-territorial nation through Romanipen

Roma as ethno-cultural group lacking its “own” nation-state → Roma political movement (world congresses of 1970s, 1980s, up to 2013, totally 8)

- adopting the Roma national emblem, flag, anthem,
- creating international organizations representing the "Roma" community and acting on their behalf on the stage of international politics
- the use of “Roma” as an umbrella, political name bringing together a diversity of ethnic groups including Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Gypsies, Gitanes, tsiganes, Manus (diversity languages, dialects, customs, religions, citizenship over five continents)
- utopianisms: plan to build a Romanestan (motherland)
- nation-building efforts: Roma as non-territorial nation , internationalist cosmopolitanism (combination between nationalism and internationalism)

Everything that we do will bear the mark of our own personality, it will be *amaro Romano drom*, **our own Gypsy way... Our people** must plan and organize action at local, national and international level. Our problems are the same everywhere: we must make use of **our own models of education**, maintain and develop **our Romani culture**, encourage new dynamism in our communities and forge a future compatible with **our lifestyle and beliefs**. We have been passive for long enough and I believe that we can succeed – starting today

(Vanko Rouda, Presidential address, First World Romani Congress, 1971)

- debates around contested historical origins (India, Egypt), exoticism, non-Europeanism
- political mobilization, global Romani activism: becoming actors of world politics without conventional sources, such as state
- cultural mobilization around a set of values and supposedly shared culture and lifestyle (Romanipen – gypsiness, gypsy soul; nomadism, rules of cleanliness, cult of virginity, standardization of Romani language)

Creation of International Romani Union

The call to recognize the Porajmos, the Roma Holocaust

Declaring the International Day of Roma (April 8)

2000. Declaring of the Romani non-territorial nation

Addressing issues surrounding women, families and children.

2009. Releasing the Roma Nation Building Action Plan, a document which outlined plans for the development of Romani nationalism and representation

The Declaration of a Nation, 2000, 5th international congress

“We the Roma Nation”

Individuals belonging to the **Roma Nation** call for a representation of their Nation, which **does not want to become a State**. The Roma *are a nation*, and have always been, because Romani people **share a culture and language**. Roma has to be recognized as a nation.

The **nation state**, as a mode of political organization, has failed the Roma in the past and is, in the current global circumstances becoming **obsolete as a unit of political organization** in general.

The **trans-territorial non-State Romani nation** is a better way to organize individuals in the contemporary world than the nation-state.

Individuals, nations, and international institutions should recognize the Romani Nation and provide it with representation in the international sphere.

(b)

Politics of rights

Roma as rights-holder persons

Roma as rights-holders, subjected to human rights violations discrimination and racism in their home countries → Roma civic movement (1990s, 2000s)

- Focusing on civic and political rights as universal rights
- Defining Roma rights as human rights, including the right to non-discrimination
- Reactions to human rights violations (signaling cases to country-based and international organizations, litigating cases) – sustained by national and international human rights (including anti-discrimination) legislation
- Organizing at international level (the role of Soros Foundation, and other American organizations in generating and developing the Roma civil society)
- Civic organizations as actors on the international public stage (critical attitudes towards the state for not offering sufficient protection)

In Europe:

1993, Council of Europe: “a special place among the minorities is reserved for the Gypsies. Living scattered all over Europe, not having a country to call their own, they are a **true European minority**, but one that **does not fit into the definitions of national or linguistic minorities... they are a non-territorial minority**”

1993, EU declaration: **protection of minority cultures and respect for their rights** is one of the accession criteria that countries need to meet (criteria used in the front of CEE)

1994, Council of Europe: appointed a Coordinator for Roma Issues

1994, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe: established the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues within its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

1995, Council of Europe: established the Specialist Group on Roma, Gypsies and Travellers

1996, EC: roundtable meeting, “**The Roma: a truly European people**”

2000, Racial Equality Directive

DG Justice – fundamental rights

The European Union is founded on the **principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law ...** The right to equality before the law and protection against discrimination **for all persons constitutes a universal right.**

Discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin may undermine the achievement of the objectives of the EC Treaty, in particular the attainment of a high level of employment and of social protection, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life, economic and social cohesion and solidarity. It may also **undermine the objective of developing the European Union as an area of freedom, security and justice ...** To ensure the development of democratic and tolerant societies which allow the participation of all persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, **specific action in the field of discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin should go beyond access to employed and self-employed activities and cover areas such as education, social protection including social security and healthcare, social advantages and access to and supply of goods and services.**

(c)

Politics of policies of social inclusion

Roma as vulnerable social group

Decade for Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015

2003, "[Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future](#)," regional conference, idea of Decade

2005, Sofia: eight participating governments signed the [Declaration of the Decade of Roma Inclusion](#) – now 12 countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Spain elaborating Decade Action Plans (reducing gaps between Roma and non-Roma; **4 domains: education, housing, employment, health; cross-cutting issues: human rights, non-discrimination, gender equality**)

International partner organizations of the Decade: the [World Bank](#), the [Open Society Foundations](#), the [United Nations Development Program](#), the [Council of Europe](#), [Council of Europe Development Bank](#), the [Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues](#) of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the [European Roma Information Office](#), the [European Roma and Traveller Forum](#), the [European Roma Rights Centre](#), [UN-HABITAT](#), [UNHCR](#) and the [United Nations Children's Fund \(UNICEF\)](#). In 2011, the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)

2005, Roma Education Fund

EU Framework Strategy

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, April 2011

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0173:FIN:EN:PDF>

The Council of the European Union conclusions, May and June 2011

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st10/st10658.en11.pdf>

National strategies, 27 member states:

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/national-strategies/index_en.htm

DG Social Affairs and Employment

- **Economic integration** of the Roma will also contribute to social cohesion and improve respect for fundamental rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, and help eliminating discrimination based on someone's race, colour, ethnic, social origin or membership of a minority.
- Since non-discrimination alone is not sufficient to combat the social exclusion of Roma, the Commission asks the EU institutions to endorse this EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. It is a means to **complement and reinforce the EU's equality legislation and policies** by addressing, at national, regional and local level, but also through dialogue with and participation of the Roma, the **specific needs of Roma regarding equal access to employment, education, housing and healthcare.**
- Integrating the Roma people will not only **bring social benefits**, but will also **economically benefit both Roma people as well as the communities they are part of.**

Conclusions

- 1) Challenges of “politics and policies for Roma”
- 2) The process of de-politicization
- 3) The need for a three-dimensional approach and re-politicization

(1)

Challenges of “politics and policies for Roma”?

- creating a subject as “people” (the “Roma”)
- creating a public of and for Roma: transforming “the people” into political subject that addresses other political actors/decision-makers with different claims in the name of Roma
- creating representative bodies (local, national, international)
- inventing a nation without (“kin”)state and without territory
- inventing a trans-national or non-territorial minority
- a process of creating a substitute for the “own state” as a set of principles and institutions, in the relation to whom Roma might claim personhood, peoplehood and citizenship (process orchestrated predominantly by different types of actors shaped by their own interests):
 - (a) Culture (cultural nationalism&internationalism, ethnic pride, declaring our “own way”) – Roma international actors (elites), non-European exoticism
 - (b) Rights (universalism, human dignity, claiming Roma rights as human rights) - civil rights organizations, global citizenship
 - (c) Inclusion (social particularism, vulnerable group) – europenization by European institutions , actors of economic development
- Challengeds towards the modern nation state and the European Union (ethnicities, citizenship regimes, mobility, belonging)
- these ‘politics and policies for Roma’ contributed to the creation of an ultimate/racialized other
- (a) and (b) are politics, while (c) is policy-oriented

(2)

**The process of de-politicization
of “politics and policies for Roma”:**

from politics of culture and rights to policies for
social inclusion

Nando Sigona and Nidhi Trehan (2009). *Romani Politics in Contemporary Europe: Poverty, Ethnic Mobilization, and the Neoliberal Order*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

How do policy makers, human rights entrepreneurs, Roma activists and politicians frame the nature of relationship between racism and poverty has important consequences for the policies and programs developed to address “the Roma issue”

The neoliberal gaze favors mobilizations that are safe because they do not threaten the bases of the neoliberal order, and do not confront the structural causes of the socio-economic marginality of Roma

Huub Van Baar (2011). *The European Roma. Minority Representation, Memory and the Limits of Transnational Governmentality*. Amsterdam: F&N Eigen Beheer.

Process of depoliticization

“Primarily political problems tend to be removed from the domain of political discourse and reformulated in the ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ language of expertise, policy-making, and science”

The potential of re-politicization: how Roma became targets of population regulation?

- the division between the ethno-cultural and the social paradigm
- depoliticization of the Roma issues (shifting from politics of culture and politics of civil rights to policies for social inclusion)
- the way of thinking about Roma as vulnerable group, Roma poverty, Roma inclusion, development, the role of NGOs versus that of the state favors the reproduction of socio-spatial marginality (it cannot define the proper measures because it fails identifying its structural causes, focusing mostly on “internal and individual characteristics”)
- the state is placing its responsibilities on the shoulders of civil society
- NGOs tend becoming service providers also because that is how they are shaped by the market of funds
- NGOs become bureaucratic and financial agencies processing EU funded projects
- socio-economic inequalities, socio-spatial marginalization cannot be solved on a project- and target-group based approach

3)

The need for a three-dimensional approach
and re-politicization

- there is need to re-politicize by focusing on the structural causes of social exclusion
- the socio-economic aspects of Roma marginalization are more and more de-politicized (transformed, at the best, into public policy issues without addressing the major systemic causes of mass impoverishment and marginalization), and it is expected that - also as a reaction to anti-Gypsy racism and failures of social inclusion policies - the Roma elites will predominantly respond to these challenges by re-enforcing the unfulfilled ethno-cultural identity politics
- solidarities and coalitions across ethnic groups focusing on shared socio-economic problems (poverty, marginalization, exclusion) and jointly assuming anti-racism
- re-framing the rights paradigm:
 - the social embeddedness of rights (transcending the legalistic understanding)
 - socio-economic rights

Nancy Fraser (1995-2007)

Using a three dimensional approach towards subordination, social justice, and social movements;

- class-based/ economic dimension /just redistribution;
- identity-based/cultural dimension/reciprocal recognition;
- participation/ representation (inclusive political body that “decides” on who counts in just redistribution and reciprocal recognition)

The responsibilities of the academic research

Statistics, ethnic profiling

Ex. World Bank, FRA, UNDP surveys – comparing Roma and non-Roma and explanations given to differences

Ex. dependency trap, development, focusing on the individual (person or household), the interpretation of the relation between cultural and social (ex. culture of poverty)

The need to conduct contextual inquiries that describe and analyze the societal context within which all this is happening, and the processes that generate such inequalities, and not on the characteristics of the excluded

Former work, EV

Roma women and reproductive policies:

(2005) Roma women's access to reproductive health at the crossroads of gender, ethnicity and class

(2009) Culture, rights and entitlements

(2013) Roma women's voices and silences on unjust power regimes

School education and educational policies:

(2011) Strategii identitare și educație școlară [Identity Strategies and School Education]

Labor and occupational policies:

(2011) Accesul femeilor și bărbaților de etnie romă la muncă decentă. Viață cotidiană, politici și programe [Roma women's and men's access to decent work. Everyday life, policies and programs]

Marginalization and housing policies:

(2012) Landfill as space of advanced marginality

(2013) Socio-spatial marginality of Roma as form of intersectional injustice