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**ROMA IDENTITY**

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**Prague**

**2010**

# **ROMA IDENTITY**

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**Supported by:**

**International Visegrad Fund and the USA Embassy to the Czech Republic**

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**Published by: NGO Slovo 21, Francouzská 2, 120 00 Prague 2, Czech  
Republic**

**ISBN: 978-80-904327-1-0**

## *Acknowledgments*

*The papers in this volume are presented and discussed at two days Seminar organized during the Roma World Festival Khamoro, May 28-29, 2010 in Prague, Czech Republic. Our thanks go to all participants and discussants!*

## **PREFACE**

It is a tradition that the World Roma Festival Khamoro together with organizing concerts, exhibitions and other events, each year has seminars on Roma history and culture. Usually, the organizers of the Festival invite also some of the leading Roma experts to discuss some of the issues and problems of Roma.

The XII World Roma Festival Khamoro 2010 brought together Roma experts from all over the world to discuss issues of Roma identity from different perspectives. For two days the linguists, ethnologists, sociologists, musicologist, historians, educators were discussing the problems of Roma culture and identity. The hot discussions during the seminar brought new knowledge to the science.

The present volume contains the papers of participants in the Seminar of the Khamoro Festival. We believe that the different views of the experts on the issues of identity will be interesting to all readers but particularly to educators, social workers and students in the field of Romology.

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**FACES OF KHAMORO 2010**

**THE EDITORS**

## INTRODUCTION

**Hristo Kyuchukov**

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The issue of Roma identity is not a new one in the field of Romani studies. Several previous publications were dedicated to this problem bringing different light to it (T. Acton, 1997; T. Acton and G. Mundy, 1997; A. Marsh and E. Strand, 2006). Throughout the centuries the Roma succeeded to build and preserve their identity, after they had left the Indian territory. And nowadays different groups of Roma (no matter what the outside world calls them) from the USA to Russia, from Turkey to Argentina believe and respect the *Romanipen*.

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The Roma groups differ by dialects/languages, religion, traditions, but there are always many characteristics which make them Roma. The symbols used and ritual conducted for celebration of child birth, marriage or funeral could be different, depending on the religion but always there are similar beliefs and rules which are followed and which make the people Roma.

One of the strongest characteristics of the Roma identity is the language. Nowadays there are groups which lost the language or even never knew any variety of Romani but still they identify themselves as Roma. Romani is preserved in the songs, fairytales, poems of Roma, it is taught at schools in many countries as a mother tongue and it is used as a tool of communication from generation to generation.

The religion is another characteristic of the Roma identities. The Roma could be Christians or Muslims but there are certain Roma rules which are preserved and passed from generation to generation which are typical Romani and do not belong to Christianity or to Muslim religion.

The traditions of Roma are also different. Very often Roma are the ones who preserve the traditions of majorities, traditions which are lost or forgotten. The Roma adopt them as their own, however, at the same time there are so many traditions which are similar in different parts of the world among different groups, for example the understanding of “clean” and “polluted”, what is allowed to be done in the presence of adults and what is not allowed, the children from very early age are taught what is part of Romani culture what is *Gadžikano*.

9 The collection of the papers in the present volume can be grouped around the following topics: *language identity, ethnic identity, historical identity, social identity, educational identity*...Perhaps there are many more identities which we do not cover...but we strongly believe that this small collection of papers brings new information to the issue of Roma identity.

The keynote papers written by Ian Hancock and Hristo Kyuchukov present the problems of Roma identity and issue of language identity among different Romani groups in Europe.

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, Eva Davidova, Adrian Marsh discusses the ethnic identity issues in Central and Eastern Europe, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, in Turkey. Jana Horvathova presents the issue of ethnic identity from the point of view of an insider. The papers are extremely interesting, highly scientific and written in a highly readable manner.

The paper by Sarah Carmone presents in an interesting way a historical view of the ethnic identity of Roma, using a retrospective methodology.

The problems of Roma identity and the education of Roma children in the Greece is covered by William New. Jaroslav Balvin presents the role of great Roma personalities in the process of preserving the Roma identity.

Milan Samko's paper discusses the language attitudes of Roma towards Romani and Slovak language in Slovakia. The paper deals with the issues of language identity among the Slovak Roma.

The last paper by Lenka Haburajová-Ilavská and Jana Gabrielová discusses recommendations and policy papers of different European institutions towards building and developing of the Roma social, cultural, and educational identities.

The problems of the identities of Roma will be discussed in the future as well. However, at the end of the first decade of the new century it is extremely important to document the new trends concerning this problem in the field of linguistics, history, ethnology, sociology and education.

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## **KEYNOTE PAPERS**

## **ROMA TODAY: ISSUES AND IDENTITY**

**Ian Hancock**

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The past two decades have seen enormous changes confronting both the Romani people, and those who study us and work with us. For so many Romanies, these changes have meant adapting once again to new and typically hostile surroundings, seeking security in employment, education, housing and in health and legal care. For the non-Romani world it has meant making room for newcomers who arrive with a complex baggage of stereotypes and a legacy of persecution.

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Since the collapse of communism twenty years ago hundreds of thousands of Roma from Eastern Europe have left to come West in search of a better life. For westerners, a colourful and largely inoffensive population that was very much restricted in the public mind to storybooks and film suddenly became a real, and evidently menacing, presence. This has not just affected Western Europe; in countries overseas too this has been the case; we need only to look at the hostile reception of Roma from the Czech Republic and from Hungary in Canada as an example.

There were some 180,000 Romanies in Italy four years ago, but today there is less than a quarter of that number. Amongst them, those from Romania are fewer than 6,000, 4,500 of whom are incarcerated, mainly for begging, theft, resisting arrest and for trespassing. These are, incidentally, exactly the same crimes as those listed in Dillmann's 1905 *Zigeunerbuch* which paved the way for the Nazi

genocide. There are no reliable figures for how many Roma are now stateless throughout Europe, although estimates place the numbers at 10,000 in Bosnia, 1,500 in Montenegro, 17,000 in Serbia, and 4,090 in Slovenia.

Reports issued by the EU's Agency for Fundamental Rights make it crystal clear: racism against Roma is everywhere on the increase throughout Europe. Today, the Roma are just as poor and marginalized, as unemployed, and as badly housed as they ever were. They are just as far from living the normal lives of citizens in their own countries as they were before the EU's expansion, and comparisons have been made with the atmosphere in Germany during the 1930s. During the past two years, at least ten Roma have been murdered—and those are only the reported cases. An estimated 80% of incidents of anti-Gypsyism go unreported. Evicted families left stranded in the road after their settlements have been demolished are especially vulnerable to acts of violence from hostile gangs. Beatings and rapes are commonplace.

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In September 2001 a BBC news release stated that the Council of Europe “issued a blistering condemnation of Europe’s treatment of the Roma Gypsy community, saying they are subject to racism, discrimination and violence . . . the United Nations says they pose Europe’s most serious human rights problem.” An editorial in *The Economist* in 2005 described Romanies in Europe as being “at the bottom of every socio-economic indicator: the poorest, the most unemployed, the least educated, the shortest-lived, the most welfare dependent, the most imprisoned and the most segregated.” An EU report called it “one of the most important political, social and humanitarian questions in today’s Europe”. We are half way through the Decade of Roma Inclusion, but clearly the results of efforts to bring change have still to be judged, and we’re not doing too well so far.

Those who went before us were equally unsuccessful; I was reading a report recently published forty years ago in the journal *Soviet Studies* that described the

situation of Roma in one particular eastern bloc country. It claimed that while the socialist system had created all of the prerequisites necessary to deal with the “Gypsy problem,” those “prerequisites” were not working. That “Gypsy problem” was described as the Roma’s “lack of responsiveness to Marxist deterministic formulae,” blamed upon their having inherited pre-communist notions of capitalism, and with one or two exceptions, Gypsies were still “beggars, thieves, violent and a scourge in the countryside,” to quote from one government report. We were to blame because we were deliberately being antisocial by clinging to our distinctive identity, since as a people, they said, we came from the same racial stock as the non-Romani population. This contradicts, incidentally, a Romanian foreign minister, who stated publicly not very long ago that criminality was a racial characteristic that set us apart from the rest of the population. We did not satisfy Stalin’s definition of nationhood, those reports maintained, because we “neither possessed common territory nor maintained a common culture and economic way of life.” Marxist ideology gave Roma a social identity, not an ethnic one.

Four decades of communism were not able to solve their “Gypsy problem,” and the two decades that have passed since then have not accomplished a great deal either. We have seen a number of positive changes it is true, for example the Czech government recently banned the Workers’ Party in that country as xenophobic and a threat to democracy, mentioning specifically its attacks on Roma. But for each move forward, there are others that operate against us. The French government has just come under fire for failing to provide adequate accommodation and voting rights for Travellers; Switzerland’s most recent report to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities said that it was not considering ratifying the International Labour Organization’s Convention 169 because it was concerned that the treaty might apply to Roma; Canada is planning to draft a new immigration law that will give the Minister of Immigration

the power to declare which country is safe in Europe, and then rule that because of the new category refugees cannot come to Canada from that country. We can predict that they will put all of the EU countries on this list, which means that Roma will not be able to go to Canada as refugees under the new law.

It is almost predictable that any formal report on Roma will use the word problem; a quick Internet search for the words “Gypsy problem” that I made when I was writing this presentation last month brought over twenty-two thousand returns. Let me repeat that: an Internet search for the words “Gypsy problem” brought over twenty-two thousand returns.

It should perhaps be more openly acknowledged that we also have a gadjo problem; after all, those 22,000 references on the Internet did not originate with us. But the reality is that we Romanies and you gadjé have a whole lot of problems with each other. And if they are to be dealt with successfully, just as in a successful marriage the key words are communication and compromise.

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I live, like an increasing number of Romani people, with a foot in two worlds, and I can identify a number of these issues from both perspectives. The non-Romani world sees us as the eternal outsiders, not wanting to fit in yet wanting what it has, living by deception and theft, taking everything while contributing nothing except perhaps entertainment—loud, dirty and leaving a mess behind besides. These are some of the “Gypsy problems” the gadjé have with us.

From our position, our overwhelming problem with gadjé is racism. This directly underlies and supports the problems that it holds up—those of poverty, those in employment, schooling, health care and housing, and in human and civil rights. Poverty amongst some Romani populations is absolutely overwhelming. In 2006 a World Bank report said “Roma are the most prominent poverty risk group in many of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. They are poorer than other groups, more likely to fall into poverty, and more likely to remain poor. In some

cases poverty rates for Roma are more than ten times that of non-Roma. A recent survey found that nearly 80 per cent of Roma in Romania and Bulgaria were living on less than \$4.30 per day . . . even in Hungary, one of the most prosperous accession countries, 40 per cent of Roma live below the poverty line.” George Orwell wrote that “the first effect of poverty is that it kills thought.” Seeing ourselves as victims, though, is a loser’s game; we must use our own skills to change our situation, and if we don’t have those skills then we must get them. Ultimately we must rely on ourselves. The outside world is not going to solve our problems for us and if we expect it to do so, it will be a very long wait.

So what to do?

A large sign in Romani on my office wall reads Education is the Passport to Freedom. I firmly believe this, and I urge that we make education our highest priority in the discussions that follow here in Brussels. I will not elaborate upon the weightier issues that stem from racism, their solution will follow in due course once proper educational programmes have been designed and implemented. Just as issues of employment and housing exist because of racism, their solution will come about because of education. And I am not speaking simply of education for Romani people, but also for the non-Romani populations.

I made the point in a recently published essay that it is the vagueness regarding Romani identity that has allowed it to be so casually manipulated by outsiders, and this brings me to the main thrust of my talk this morning. If we knew who we were, and had more status allowing us to be heard, we would have a say in how we are portrayed. If a journalist wants to say we originated in Egypt, as one recently did, who are we to say she was wrong, and what would we say to correct her, and where would that protest even be heard or acknowledged? Because our history was lost to us many years ago and we thus cannot provide it, the non-Romani world has not shirked in creating various identities for us. I don’t

believe that we can make history unless we know our history; Alain Besançon has said that “a man without memory is of absolute plasticity. He is recreated at all moments. He cannot look behind himself, nor can he feel continuity with himself, nor can he preserve his own identity.” As long as the storybook Gypsy influences the journalist’s and the novelist’s portrayal of us, as long as the instant experts in the media feel confident that what they write will go unchallenged, as long as their imagination has free rein, we will continue to be “recreated at all moments,” as Besançon says, never in control of our own identity.

Without education we cannot be articulate; we lack a loud enough voice. We complain, but are not heard. Five members of the Roma Civic Alliance attending a conference on Roma in Bucharest recently were made to leave when they criticized the government’s inaction. Their voice was stifled. Without education we cannot tell people who we are, and where we come from, and how we have had the strength and determination to survive centuries of persecution, slavery and genocide and still be here. When we have our own educators, lawyers and doctors, we will no longer need to rely on the outside world, and go to the gadje with our hands out. As long as we continue to do that, we will never be respected. We don’t want the non-Romani world to love us, particularly, but we do want its respect.

Educational curricula for Roma must be carefully planned. Will they promote integration or assimilation? The older generations must be comfortable in the knowledge that it is not turning their children into gadje, which is a great fear among American Romanies. In turn, education about the Romani people for state schools must present our history and culture in a uniform way.

I have already mentioned the media. While they could be a powerful ally, they are overwhelmingly just the opposite. A quarter century ago Kenedi Janós wrote “the mass media, in a veiled, and often less-veiled form, goad opinion in an

anti-Gypsy direction.” Newspapers disseminate opinion on a regular basis as well as news. Newspapers make people’s minds up for them. Newspapers create attitudes. When the biggest daily paper in Romania, *Evenimentul Zilei* wrote that “Gypsies are believed to be genetically inclined to become criminals” it was repeating Hitler’s rationale for the extermination of Romanies in the Third Reich. When another Romanian daily, the *Cronica Romana*, advised customers not to do business with any salesman because “the colour of his skin” is an indication of his being “untrustworthy,” the message is clear. And this is not an attitude restricted only to central and Eastern Europe. From England headlines such as “Gypsies! You Can’t Come In!” in the *Sunday Express* or the *Sun*’s “How long before we kick the whole lot out?,” for example, fueled public hostility, and a marked jump in anti-Gypsy public opinion. I was stunned to learn that the Foreign Press Association has just presented the BBC production *Gypsy Child Thieves* with its Media Award for the best Television Story of the Year. The irresponsible move on the part of the BBC aside, in showing this for the second time despite outrage from Romani organizations following its first broadcast six months ago, the Foreign Press Association’s claim that its purpose is to “continually strive to enhance communication and understanding between the rich diversity of cultures of this world and the global community” is a travesty. No understanding of the situation of those children came from the documentary, and in no way did it present our “rich culture.” Instead it helped hammer down even more firmly the growing Romaphobia in Britain, the country where I was born, ensuring further hateful newspaper headlines. The documentary has just been shown in Italy and this country too, and complaints have been filed with the Belgian Centre for Equality and with the Media Supervisory Authority for Audiovisual Media in Belgium.

Fictional print media can also perpetuate stereotypes, though usually those of romance, magic, and mystery. Two recently published titles are Sasha White’s

*Gypsy Heart*; the book's cover reads "Can a man bent on settling down convince a free-spirited woman . . . to risk her Gypsy Heart? Warning: this book contains explicit sex explained in graphic detail with contemporary language," and Isabella Jordan's *Gypsies, Tramps and Heat: An Anthology of Erotic Romance*, tells the reader "Lose yourself in the dark eyes and crystal ball of a gypsy lover!"

Film also presents Romanies in a negative way specifically for entertainment. Now showing is the movie *Werewolf*; a year ago we were watching *Drag Me to Hell*, and before that *Thinner*. My students' first exposure to Gypsies was through the Disney version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. There is an Internet link specifically for "Gypsy curse movies," and typing that in on Google brings up 64,000 hits.

While there was a cursory reference in the BBC documentary to the shameful conditions experienced by Roma in today's Europe, no attempt at analysis was made to explain why such a situation has come to exist, no explanation of the profound psychological legacy Romanian Roma have inherited from 550 years of slavery, indeed no mention of that slavery at all, when it was the former slave-owners who received compensation from the government for their loss, while no programmers were created to help integrate the uneducated and penniless Romani ex-slaves into free society. There was no reference in that documentary either to the fact that after the Holocaust the Romani survivors of that genocide were turned away from the camps with no help, no war crimes reparations, to rebuild their shattered lives in a hostile world where laws against them were still in effect.

The Chinese say that the beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right name. If we treat "Gypsies" as one people, one "community," we are simplifying a complex situation and ignoring the great differences that distinguish the different Romani populations. In July, 2007, *Newsweek International* ran a story entitled

“All over the world, people are embracing the culture of the Roma people,” but of course we have no single culture, and the cultures we do have are certainly not embraced by peoples all over the world. But it makes good copy. Finnish Kaale and Spanish Calé have more differences than similarities; Romanichals differ very considerably from the Kalderasha, and so on. Those differences have been used to deny Romani populations any shared ethnic identity, and instead to use social and behavioral criteria to define us. The quote from *Soviet Studies* I read earlier is an example of that kind of thinking, and I’ve repeated the words of the Czech sociologist, Jaroslav Sus, several times before, who claimed that it was an “utterly mistaken opinion that Gypsies form a nationality or a nation, that they have their own national culture, their own national language.”

Instead of thinking negatively in terms of identity, about the things that make one group different from another, we must think instead of what all of us share, in terms of language, culture and ancestry. After all, those are things we came with into Europe. The characteristics that divide us now have all been acquired from the non-Romani world.

Let me then turn to what I think are the main issues that bear examination.

Firstly, do we proceed regarding Roma through-out Europe as ethnically-defined populations or as socially-defined populations? Clearly the latter has been the case so far, since both Romanies and non-Romanies have usually been grouped together, for example in the various Roma and Gypsy Traveller organizations and festivals. Certainly common cause is every reason for different groups to work together, and that should continue to be the case. But I maintain that not enough acknowledgment is made of the cultural distinctiveness of Romani peoples, distinctions that must be taken into account for example in the areas of teaching, or housing. The fact is that different Romani subgroups are not anxious to work with

each other, given a choice, let alone with non-Romani groups who, from the Romani point of view, are gadjé after all.

If Roma are to be regarded ethnically, then a number of questions immediately arise. Can we in fact speak about one Romani people? Well, the answer is both yes and no. Let me elaborate on that.

A military origin for Romanies is not a new idea; over the past one and a quarter centuries researchers, including de Goeje, Clarke, Leland, Burton, Kochanowski, Bhalla, Courthiade, Mróz, Haliti, Lee and Knudsen have all argued for this—the consensus being that it was the Ghaznavid invasions during the first quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century that led to the move out of India. The work of Soulis, Fraser, Marush-iakova & Popov and more recently Marsh has further-more demonstrated that it was also the spread of Islam that was the principal factor in the migration of our ancestors into Europe from Asia during the medieval period. I won't go into the historical and linguistic details here, they are presented in a book of my essays edited by Dileep Karanth and shortly to be published by the University of Hertfordshire Press. What is significant about this is that we now understand that our ancestors were never one people speaking one language when they left India, but included many ethnolinguistic components.

I have argued elsewhere that like our language, our identity as Roma came into being during the sedentary Anatolian period, the professional status of the Indians and the contact variety of their language crystallizing into the Romani language and people, particularly under the influence of Byzantine Greek. There were no “Roma” before Anatolia.

I should like to advance here a different perspective which, I believe, provides an alternative way of understanding the question of identity, and why the question of identity confuses journalists and sociologists, and why it causes us ourselves so much of a problem.

In light of the particular details of our origins and of our shared and unshared social history since then, certain conclusions must be drawn: First that the population has been a composite one from its very beginning, and at that time was occupationally rather than ethnically-defined; Second that while the earliest components—linguistic, cultural and genetic—are traceable to India, we essentially constitute a population that acquired our identity and language in the West (accepting the Christian, Greek-speaking Byzantine Empire as being linguistically and culturally ‘western’), and Third that the entry into Europe from what is today Turkey was not as a single people, but as a number of smaller migrations over perhaps as much as a two-century span of time. These factors have combined to create a situation that is in some sense unique, that is to say we are a population of Asian origin that has spent essentially the entire period of our existence in the West. We are the proverbial square peg trying to fit into a round hole.

Because the population was fragmenting and moving into Europe during the very period that an ethnic identity was emerging, there is no sense of our ever having been a single, unified people in one place at one time. We can speak of a “core of direct retention” consisting of genetic, linguistic and cultural factors traceable to Asia and evident to a greater or lesser extent in all populations identifying as Romani, but we must also acknowledge that all of these areas have been augmented too through contact with European peoples and cultures, and it is the latter accretions that account for the sometimes extreme differences from group to group.

For some, “core” Romani culture has been diluted practically out of existence, sometimes by deliberate government policy as in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Hungary or Spain, yet such populations are nevertheless regarded as “Gypsies” by the larger society on the basis of appearance, dress, name, occupation and neighbourhood

and are treated accordingly, but have no traditional ethnic community into which to find refuge. At the other extreme are Romani populations in substantial numbers, such as the Vlax or Sinti, who vigorously maintain the language and the culture and who are restrained from functioning in the European mainstream because of them. Because of this, no single educational package will do for every group. We will need group-specific—within the larger framework of country-specific—programmes.

While these will provide knowledge of a common origin and early history, and explain our differences, they are not likely to serve to coalesce all groups into one. What relationship they will ultimately recognise remains to be seen, but ideally some sort of commonalty should be achieved—there is strength in numbers.

My second point that I'd like to have discussed addresses the psychological damage that persecution has brought with it—not just the fear Roma live with daily in too many places, fear that affects both mental and physical health, but the deeper psychological damage that history has wrought. I don't believe that any attention has been paid to this at all. In 1988 in Austria, on the anniversary of the *Anschlöss*, Romani survivors told a *London Times* reporter that they were still haunted by fears of recurrent Nazi persecutions. Apocryphally, there are stories of isolated Romani families in far eastern Europe who believe that the Nazis are still in power.

Some Romanies bear another, heavier legacy—a perspective on life inherited from the hundreds of years of slavery. For more than five centuries, Vlax Roma had no decision-making powers. This has created a worldview which sees the situation of Roma as having been created by non-Roma who, having caused the problems arising from it, must therefore be responsible for solving those problems. Having no internal autonomy or problem-solving power, the slaves had to go to the

gadje for intervention, or else get by on their wits. If, for centuries, a people have lived in a society where every single thing, including food, clothing and even one's spouse was provided from outside, i.e. at the discretion of one's owner, and if getting anything extra, including favours, depended upon one's influence with that owner, then it must instill an assumption that this is how one survives in the world. And while slavery has been abolished now for a century and a half, remnants of this way of thinking are still in evidence. Not only are assistance and material things sought from outside rather than from within the community, but cultivating useful and influential contacts outside of the non-Romani world is also a priority, and becomes a mark of prestige within it. A man can become the leader of his community on that basis alone. This kind of thinking does not encourage self-determination or personal initiative; but before it can be addressed and changed, it has to be understood.

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25 I want to say something last of all about those who are sometimes called *pasaxèrja* in American Vlax. It is a word that means “passengers,” and refers not to those who genuinely want to work with us and help bring about change—such people are very welcome—but instead to those who have hitched a ride on the Gypsy Industry bandwagon, those who get a grant, write one or two things about us while it's a hot topic, and then disappear. These are too often people who don't know any Roma socially, and who have no understanding of Romani mentality or culture. The author of one of the most oft-quoted work on the ethnopolitics of eastern European Roma actually says in the introduction to his book “I don't like Gypsies very much;” a similarly highly profiled book on the treatment of Roma in the Holocaust includes the words that we are, “with exceptions, a lazy, lying, thieving and extraordinarily filthy people . . . exceedingly disagreeable people to be around.” Such people are self-serving, taking but giving nothing. Let's talk about what to do about that too.

# **PROJECTION HYPOTHESES IN LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY AMONG MUSLIM ROMA**

**Hristo Kyuchukov**

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## **Theoretical backgrounds of group identity**

The issue of language and identity among different ethnic groups is well investigated, but still there are many questions, which did not get their answers. There are cases where different ethnic groups speaking the same language identify themselves as one group, and at the same time there are cases when two groups, which speak the same language identify as different groups. This is why Donald Horowitz (1975:113) says that “group boundaries are often fluid. Most research on ethnic relations has tended to take the groups as it finds them, as if they all existed in their present form since time out of mind”

As Horowitz (1975) says most groups change their boundaries slowly and imperceptibly, but some changes quickly, deliberately and noticeably. Ascription is of course the key characteristic that distinguishes ethnicity from voluntary affiliation. Ethnic identity is generally acquired at birth. The identity can be changed on individual or group level. Linguistic and religious conversions are also possible. A group may become more or less inscriptive in its criteria for membership, acculturated to the norms of some other group, ethnocentric and hostile to other groups. Group boundaries can become either wider or narrower.

Some group identity may be lost by *assimilation*. There are two principal varieties of assimilation. Two or more groups may unite to form a new group, larger and different from any component parts. This is referred to as *amalgamation*. Alternatively, one group may lose its identity by merging into another group, which retains its identity. This is called *incorporation*. (D. Horowitz, 1975:115).

On the other hand, there is a possibility of proliferation: a new group comes into existence without its “parent group” (or groups) losing its (or their) identity (D. Horowitz, 1975: 115).

<b>Assimilation</b>		<b>Differentiation</b>	
<b>Amalgamation</b>	<b>Incorporation</b>	<b>Division</b>	<b>Proliferation</b>
$A+B \rightarrow C$  Two or more groups unite to form a new larger groups	$A+B \rightarrow A$  One group assumes the identity of other	$A \rightarrow B+C$  One group divides into two or more component parts	$A \rightarrow A+B$  $(A+B \rightarrow A+B+C)$  One or more groups (often two) produce an additional group from within their ranks

Similar processes were studied by Elena Marushikaova and Veselin Popov on example of four Roma groups in countries of former Soviet Union and they introduced the notions of segmentation and consolidation to describe the constant ongoing processes of transformation of Roma groups. (Marushiakova & Popov 2004 : 145-191).

### **Some characteristics of Muslim Roma**

In my study I do observe the following groups of Muslim Roma:

1. Romani spoken by groups which some 80-100 years ago were Muslims, but nowadays they are Christians (Orthodox or Evangelic Christian). They speak only Romani and their language and identity are changed.
2. Roma groups speakers of both Romani and Turkish.

All the groups in the study are Muslim, however some of the groups switched to Evangelic religion. They are still speakers of Turkish and/or Romani in their everyday communication. Most of the Roma groups celebrate the Muslim as well as some of the Christian holidays – Christmas – Krečuno, St. Basil day – Bango Vasili (Roma New Year – January 13), St. George day – Gyorgyovden/Džoržovdan or Hederlezi (May 6), Easter - Patragy/Patradi/Paskelle.

The wedding celebrations are in a way very similar: the first day the celebration is in the house of the bride. Her hands and hair are painted with Hanna. The second day the celebration is in the house of boy.

The funerals are mostly done with a Muslim priest, according to the Muslim religion. The Evangelic Roma do not do the funerals any more in a Muslim tradition.

## **Publications on Romani spoken by Muslim Roma**

For last two decades or so few authors have published number of studies on Romani spoken by Muslim Roma on the Balkan Peninsula. On the Arlia dialect spoken by Muslim Roma in Macedonia has publications mainly V. Freedman. On Sepetči dialect spoken in Turkey various papers published M. Heinschink. The dialects of Muslim Roma in Greece are described in various publications I. Sechidou. And the Muslim dialects of Bulgaria are described by H. Kyuchukov.

The publications of the mentioned above authors are focused on Romani or Turkish spoken by the Roma groups. There are cases when they identify as Roma although they do not speak Romani, but only Turkish. Their Turkish, however contents Roma words as well.

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## **Names of Muslim Romani Groups**

The dialects which the Muslim Roma groups speak are divided into Vlax and non-Vlax dialects, although the boundaries some time are very difficult to be found.

In Bulgaria the dialects are called Xoraxano (non-Vlax dialect) or Laxo (Vlax dialect). The speakers of Vlax dialect with Christian religious are called Purčorja (north-east part of Bulgaria – Dobrich and Russe). Although with Ortodox Christian religion they have a lot of borrowings from Turkish, but not from Bulgarian. The speakers of Vlax dialects, with Muslim religion are called Laxo, Džambazi, Zagondžii, Kalburdžii...The names of the non-Vlax Roma groups, based on their professions are Sepetčii, Kalajdžii, and etc. In Bulgaria there are no strict boundaries between the groups regarding their religion. Muslim Roma can be speakers of Vlax and non-Vlax dialects, and it is the same – Ortodox Christian

and Evangelic Christian Roma can be speakers of Vlax and non-Vlax Romani as well.

In Greece the Vlax dialects are called Dorika, Finikas Romika, Laxo. Speakers of the Vlax Romani dialects are mainly Ortodox Christian by religion. Speakers of non-Vlax Romani are Muslim by religion.

In Macedonia the non-Vlax dialect is called Arlia and the speakers are Muslim by religion. The Speakers of Vlax dialects are Ortodox Christian and they are called Džambazi or Gurbeti .

In Turkey the dialects are called Yerlija (non-Vlax) or Laxo (Vlax) dialects and both groups are Muslim by religion.

Although it is very difficult to identify the dialects by dividing them to Vlax and non-Vlax, I will try to present them in the following Table 1

***Table 1. Dialect Groups in Balkan countries***

<b>VLAX DIALECTS</b>	<b>NON-VLAX DIALECTS</b>
<b>Laxo</b> (BG, Turkey, Greece)	<b>Sepečides</b> ( Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece)
<b>Zagondži</b> (Bulgaria)	<b>Čičekčides</b> (Turkey and Greece)
<b>Kalburdži</b> (Bulgaria)	<b>Fičiri</b> (Bulgaria and Greece)
<b>Finikas</b> (Greece)	<b>Yerlija</b> (Turkey)
<b>Džambaz</b> (Bulgaria, Macedonia)	<b>Xoraxano</b> (Bulgaria)

<b>Gurbet</b> (Macedonia)	<b>Millet</b> (Bulgaria)
<b>Čikaj</b> (Turkey)	<b>Kalajdžides</b> (Bulgaria and Turkey)
<b>Kalajdžides</b> (Bulgaria)	<b>Erlija/ Arlija</b> (Bulgaria, Macedonia)

## Case studies

### *Case study 1*

A 52 years old woman (a teacher) from Bulgaria, from a village close to the town of Pleven, identifies as a Turkish, but she does not speak any Turkish. She speaks only Bulgarian. Her grandparents came to Pleven from Macedonia at the beginning of 1900. Part of the relatives emigrated to Turkey at the beginning of the 20 c. – and they were sieve makers. The other grandfather (the father of her mother) who remained in Bulgaria was a smith. They have Muslim names but during the process of Bulgarization of the Muslims in mid 1980-s they were forced to changed their names. In everyday communication they use their Muslim names. They do speak Bulgarian only but the older generation used to speak Turkish as well. Nowadays the youngest generation is studying Romani language and Roma traditions and identifies as Roma.

### *Case study 2*

A Rom in his early 30-s from Bulgaria, from the surroundings of the town of Pleven, from the groups of smiths and horse shoes makers, speaker of Vlax dialect, call themselves *Turski cigani* (Turkish Gypsies). The grandparents had Muslim names but now the younger generation has Christian names only. They do not keep

the Muslim traditions. They are Orthodox Christians but the funerals are done with Muslim priest and with Music band.

### ***Case study 3***

Roma from the village of Rosen in Bulgaria, close to city of Burgas on the Black Sea use to have Muslim religion, but nowadays they have converted to Evangelic Christianity. They use to have Muslim names, but nowadays they are with Christian names and at the same time they use in parallel their Muslim names as well. They are speakers of non-Vlax Romani dialect which also has some features of Vlax dialects.

### ***Case study 4***

Roma from Turkey, from the town of Çatalca, not so far from Istanbul, live in two settlements: the Roma from the first settlement call themselves Kibar Çingene (Polite Roma) and they do not speak any Romani. They identify as Turks and consider themselves more prestigious as a group from the Roma from the second settlement, who speak Romani language and identify as Roma.

### ***Case study 5***

The town of Kavarna on the Black sea in Bulgaria is a town which belonged to the Romanian government till 1940. The Roma here are Muslims and most recently part of them converted to Evangelic Christianity. They are speakers of Turkish and Romani but they do not know Romanian language (even the elder generation). It is obvious that the base of the dialect is non-Vlax, but there are some Vlax words as well.

## Language problems with Muslim Roma dialects

As one can see all the described above case studies are diverse and in a way it is difficult to define the boundaries between the dialects and the group identity. The dialects spoken by Muslim Roma are a good example of the processes described by D. Horowitz (1975). In all Balkan countries there is a process of assimilation towards Turkish identity. The reasons are different: political, economical and personal. Being a Turk in some Balkan countries is more prestigious than being a Rom.

At the same time there are processes of Amalgamation and Incorporation where in one Roma dialect can be found features of other Roma dialects as well. In most of the cases in Roma settlements where usually two or three dialects live together and they are in constant contact for many years, always there are influences. These is very well explained by E. Marushiakova and V. Popov (2001) for the case of Bulgaria, and these kind of phenomenon exist also in other Balkan countries.

Usually there is a Matrix dialect and Embaded dialect, and the identification usually is based on the Matrix dialect. This is shown in the next Table 2.

*Table 2. Identification based on the spoken dialects*

MATRIX DIALECT	Vlax Romani Dialect	Non-Vlax Romani Dialect
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<b>EMBADED DIALECT</b>	<b>Non-Vlax Romani dialect</b>	<b>Vlax Romani Dialect</b>
<b>IDENTIFY AS</b>	<b>Vlax Roma</b>	<b>Non-Vlax Roma</b>

### **Discussion**

Speaking in the terminology suggested by Horowitz among the Muslim Roma groups are present the process of assimilation or incorporation into majority group (Bulgarian, Turkish, or another minority group – the Turkish minority as is the case in Bulgaria and in Thracian Greece): Incorporation  $A+B \rightarrow A$ . From other side for last 20 years a process of proliferation is observed as well: Muslim Roma becoming followers of the Evangelic Christianity and together with their religious traditions they change their language as well:  $A \rightarrow A+B$ .

### ***Bases for a new sociolinguistic hypothesis***

Roma are bilingual and there are many theories about bilingual speakers which could be used for explanation of one or another phenomenon among Roma communities. Most of the existing theories, however, do not connect the degree of spoken language with their ethnic identity. In the linguistic/sociolinguistic literature still is very little written about ethnic identity and language identity (I. Hancock, 2006; C. Fought, 2006; J. Hewitt, 1988)

So I take the example of Muslim Roma from the Balkans as a base for new hypotheses. The processes of assimilation and differentiation described by Horowitz exist among other Roma communities in different parts of Europe. There are Roma who prefer to identify as Hungarians, Romanians, or Albanians and etc.

### *Language, Identity and Projection Hypotheses*

A. Tabouret - Keller (1998:315) argues that “The language spoken by somebody and his or her identity as a speaker of this language are inseparable [...]. Language acts are acts of identity”. At the same time the speech acts are seen as acts of projection “The speaker is projecting his inner universe” (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985:181).

As a base for Projection Hypotheses I take the ideas of Tabouret-Keller (1998). The individuals or groups using language **A** or language **B** use different symbolic codes. The use of one or another language shows the ability of the individual or the group to switch from one symbolic code to another. In some cases the changes from one language/respectively identity can be done quickly within a day – the speaker is using different codes in his everyday communication. And he changes his identities. He is projecting different worlds in different situations

The switch to other codes and identity can take longer period and it depends on the motivation of the speaker. The motivation could be an outside force: the actions of Maria Teresa and new Hungarians in Austro-Hungarian Empire; the assimilated Roma have new language and new identity respectively. Or the

motivation could be the different prestige of different minority groups in a society. Identifying with another minority group or individuals with higher prestige you have new projection in the process of the speech act.

## **Conclusions**

There is still a lot of work to be done among Roma groups in order to discover their dialects, cultures and identities and how the language influences their identity. There are cases when different religious and profession groups have different identities but they have the same Romani dialect. The idea to connect the language and the identity in a new sociolinguistic hypothesis is based on the speech act itself as a process of projection of the internal world of the speaker.

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Among Roma the language has much stronger value and speakers from different professional groups and different religious, but with the same dialect have much closer relation based on their dialect because they project in the same way their inside world during the speech act.

The Muslim Roma being speakers of different dialects/languages, having different professions and even changing their religion, still in their everyday life and communication they project their Muslim identity and connect it somehow with the language they use as a symbol system of the Muslim world.

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## PAPERS

# ROMA IDENTITIES IN CENTRAL, SOUTH-EASTERN AND EASTERN EUROPE

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## **Introduction**

From the very beginning we would like to underline that in our paper we will not enter the discussion related to the notions of Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsy, Travellers and so on, into which many authors put different content. In this case we will talk only about "Roma" in the narrow sense, i.e. about the communities who live mainly in the regions of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (or rather lived only there before the migration of large parts of them in nineteenth and twentieth century towards Western Europe and New World).

## **Multidimensional identity structure of the Roma**

In order to be able to understand the complex multidimensional identity structure of the Roma, expressed on various levels and in various contexts, first we have to take into consideration the fact that the Roma are not a hermetically isolated and self-sufficient social and cultural system. Everywhere in the world Roma have always existed at least in 'two dimensions', or in two coordinate planes - both as a separate community and as a society (as its ethnically-based integral part within the respective nation-state). The distinction **community - society** among the Roma

has to be analysed in its complexity, and in particular in its entirety discussed from two different perspectives. (Marushiakova 2008: 101-120; Popov 2008: 491-503).

The Roma represent a non-homogeneous social and cultural ethnic community that is structured according to a certain hierarchy on various taxonomic levels. It is divided into separate, more or less distinctive groups, each and every one of which with its own ethno-social and ethno-cultural characteristics. Departing from the “group” as a basic unit we can discern the various hierarchical levels of existence of the Roma community with the respective forms of identity – group, subgroup divisions and meta-group units – whereas, depending on the various factors, each and every one of those levels could become a leading and determining factor in the overall structure of their multidimensional identity (Marushiakova and Popov 1997: 56-58).

The processes of formation and development of the identities of the individual Roma groups are not hermetically isolated within the community limits, but are in inseparable connection with the processes in the society in which they live. The entire mosaic of identities is conditioned by the common frames of the respective social and political formations in which the Roma live. The multiple impacts of various orders (economic, political, ideological, etc.) on the part of the macro-society, in which they live, have left their significant imprint on their overall development as community and the common structure of their identities. This community (and identities) development is irregular, multidirectional, and sometimes even controversial. A few interrelated and inter-influencing cardinal trends however can be discerned, which will be presented here briefly and without going into detail and variants.

## **Internal community development**

The Roma community, just like any other community is not a static and unchangeable formation – neither as an ethno-social structure, nor as ethno-cultural characteristics. Its internal evolution leads to ongoing considerable changes in its overall structure. Processes with different direction, velocity and frequency flow constantly among Roma groups. These processes can be reduced into two main contradictory and correlated tendencies. On the one hand, there goes a process of segmentation of the group into separate subgroup divisions formed either on a family/clan, or a territory principle; on the other, however, there goes a process of consolidation of the separate subgroup divisions into one group. In both cases, the newly formed communities gradually accept the dimensions of a new, unique Roma group. (Marushiakova and Popov 2004a: 145-191)

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Nowadays the mosaic of the various Roma communities in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe is extremely varied. (Marushiakova and Popov 2001b: 33-53; Tcherenkov and Laederich 2004, 1: 235-554) The historical development (either in one direction or another, with the dominating of either segmentation or consolidation, as well as their mutual constant intertwining) among those communities has demonstrated clearly the course of the above-mentioned processes within the Roma community on the whole. These processes have in all likelihood been characteristic of the community ever since the time of their arrival in Europe to date.

This development of the Roma community in the modern age, after the disintegration of the old Empires and the emergence of the new states in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, has become to a great extent limited within their confines, which results in the occurrence of a new

level of Roma identity (an identity as a Roma community within the borders of the respective ethno-nation).

This level of identity has turned a very sustainable one, and currently a large part of the Roma communities in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe have found themselves limited within the borders of individual states. The historical examples have demonstrated that even when in the event of a change in state borders parts of the same group happened to remain on the opposite sides, even without serious hindrance to cross-border communication among its members, a single generation is enough for the unity of the group to disappear and to form two new groups (in the respective countries). The memory of the former affinity disappears definitely after two-three generations or remains only on an abstract level, or in the sphere of folklore. Even when the memory is preserved the distinction of the two separate groups is irreversible.

### **Evolution of the community as part of the respective nation**

This is a relatively recent process related to the modern age. The first expressions of the struggle of the Roma for civil emancipation date from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. in the Balkans, within the conditions of the Ottoman Empire. (Marushiakova and Popov 2001a: 76-79) However, we can only speak about the true development of those processes in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. In the circumstances of the new ethno-national states that emerged in Southeastern Europe, the Roma wanted to integrate as fully-fledged citizens in the new social realities. This is in fact the primary strategic goal of all Roma organizations created during that period (the 1920s and 1930s) in Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania and Greece. (Marushiakova and Popov 2004b: 435-436) These social organizations have become the heralds of the

movement for civil emancipation of the Roma, paying attention at the same time to the safeguarding and development of the ethno-cultural traditions of the community (i.e. the two levels of identity, community and society, do not contradict, but on the contrary, complement and enrich one another).

The so-called “socialist era” exerted a particularly powerful impact on the processes of social integration and their imprint on the common structural identity of the Roma in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. This period comes after the end of WW II and lasts until the end of the “Cold War” and the breakdown of the so-called “socialist system” in 1989. It won’t be exaggerated to say that this period became a key factor in the development of the Roma community in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

The outcome of these processes for the Roma in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe in the envisaged period stands out clearly against the fate of their fellow brethren living in other parts of the world as regards the extent of social integration, which in this region is definitely greater (no matter what is written in the human rights reports and publication over the past 10-15 years, and unfortunately also in considerable number of academic studies, that accepted those kind of production as a serious source about the history and current situation of the Roma in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe). That is why we should not be surprised by the fact that the awareness of belonging to a respective nation-state among the Roma in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, is more pronounced (compared to the Gypsies/Roma in Western Europe or in other parts of the world) and occupies a central place in the general structure of their identity.

## **Development of the preferred ethnic identity and/or construction of a new identity**

The processes of the development of the identity in that direction are common among large segments of the Roma community in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe that possess (or at least wish to demonstrate in public) a different, “non-Gypsy” identity. These processes should not be mistaken for the above-mentioned possibility for the development of the Roma as an integral part of a given nation, although formally very often the results are rather similar (at first glance, at least).

The envisaged processes of identity development among the Roma have their old historical roots and contemporary new dimensions. If we compare the situation in the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, we shall notice that various conditions and various types of state policies (or the lack of such) towards the Roma could yield similar results. The entire societal stand, and the *de facto* absence of a specialized state policy towards the Roma within the Ottoman Empire, has created opportunities for large portions of that community to follow the path of voluntary assimilation towards the domineering Muslim/Turkish ethno-religious community, which is reflected in the changes in identity of large sections of them. (Kyuchukov 1993: 29-31; Marushiakova and Popov 2001a: 46-47; Marushiakova and Popov 2006) Contrary to that, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the state adopted a series of measures aiming at forceful social integration, which targeted also the complete annihilation of the Roma as a separate ethnic community and their irreversible assimilation by the surrounding population. The outcome of such a policy is clearly discernible nowadays in many parts of the former Empire, e.g. in Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine (the Transcarpathian region). Large portions of the Roma in these regions are with a

preferred Hungarian identity and have lost entirely or partially their ethnic culture, but, together with that considerable part of them, have failed to adapt to the new social and cultural realities.

A specific case in themselves represent the Romanian-language speaking Roma communities who name themselves *Rudari/Ludari* in Bulgaria, Romania (Wallachia) and East Serbia, *Bâeși/Beași/Bojași/Bajași* in Romania (Transylvania), Hungary, Slovakia and Croatia, *Karavlas* in Bosnia, *Banjași* in Serbia (Vojvodina), *Lingurari* in Romania (Moldova) and the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. (Chelcea 1944; Calota 1995; Marushiakova and Popov 1997; Marushiakova and Popov 2001b; Sikimić 2005). These communities resettled from the lands of present-day Romania in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. - the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., and their identities have become quite varied. Most often they define themselves as “Wallachians/Romanians”, but also as “Cigany” (in Hungary), and in recent years as “Roma” (in Croatia, in parts of Serbia), (Kovalcsik 1996; Marushiakova and Popov 2000; Marushiakova et al 2001).

Processes in search of and attempts at constructing a new, non-Gypsy identity have been observed among other Gypsy communities in the Balkans. These processes have gone farthest with the so-called “Balkan Egyptians” in Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo and Serbia, who although considered for many centuries as “Gjupti/Gjupci” in Macedonia, “Jevg” in Albania, etc., have at present not only construed their own entire and detailed national history, but have even been granted official recognition by the international forces as a separate community in Kosovo, as part of the RAE entity - *Roma, Ashkali* and *Egyptians* (Marushiakova et al 2001).

## **Development in the context of global Roma nationalism**

This is by far the latest trend that has emerged in the development of the Roma community and its identities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the First Congress in London in 1971 the foundations of the International Romani Union were laid down. From this Congress started the trend to impose the name of the largest subdivision of the Gypsy community, the name Roma, on the entire community. The principle “our state is everywhere in the world, where Roma people live” became the leading concept, i.e. the Roma were considered part of the respective nations. Together with this however the Congress adopted a banner and a hymn of the Roma, which are typical symbols of a nation. This ideological concept about the essence of the Roma community has become the leading one at the ensuing IRU Congresses in Geneva (1978) and Göttingen (1981), (Kenrick 1971: 107-108; Marushiakova and Popov 2004b: 439-440).

The Fourth IRU Congress in Warsaw laid the beginnings for a new and important stage in the development of the international Roma movement. It was characterized by the large-scale participation of representatives from Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe states, where the prevailing majority of the Roma live. During the “socialist era” those countries had formed new Roma elite, more or less distanced in many parameters (education, social status, etc.) from the Roma in Western Europe. With the coming of this new fresh force onto the scene, the international Roma movement gained rather different dimensions. The Fourth IRU Congress adopted the concept that the Roma are citizens of the countries in which they lived but had to seek nevertheless their own place in the future of united Europe. The first part of this concept was predetermined by the relatively greater share of social integration of the Roma in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, whereas the second one was a response to the emerging directives

for the future development of those states and the prospects of their integration into the new European realities.

In the search of a place for the Roma in the processes of common European integration the rather unclear concept of the Roma as a “trans-border national minority” also emerged. During this period a lot of hopes for improving the social status of the Roma and solving their numerous problems in the countries in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe that had appeared or had acutely exacerbated as a result of the hardships of the transition period, had been laid on international law and the European regulations and institutions. The deep disappointment from the lack of considerable changes as result of signing and ratifying the Framework Convention for the national minorities in the countries in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, which granted to Roma a national minority status (unlike of the status of Gypsies/Roma in most of Western European countries), resulted in the seeking of new ideas for the development of the Roma community. It is thus natural that against this backdrop the concept of the Roma as a ‘nation without a state’ emerged. (Pietrosanti 1997).

This trend became a foundation-laying one after the Fifth IRU Congress in Prague in July 2000 and became the priority of the future activities of the Union. The International Romani Union itself was declared a governing body that represented the Roma nation before the international institutions, and had all the symbols of the nation-state: a Parliament (legislative power), a Commissariat (executive power) and a Supreme Court of justice (juridical power). The new leadership of the organization set as a primary goal the officialization of the IRU stand before international institutions, i.e. to aim to obtain a fully-fledged membership status in world organizations - the UN, UNESCO, and above all in the

European institutions - the Council of Europe, European Union (Acton and Klimova 2001: 157-211).

### **The Gypsy/Roma identities in the new EU realities**

With the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a series of considerable changes became palpable that were related above all to the finalization of the processes of European integration in the majority of the countries in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. Most of them have already joined the European Union. The migration floods and the illegal (or semi-legal with a trend for definite legalization) labor mobility became something common not only for the newly acceded countries, but to a certain degree for the entire Central, Eastern and South-Eastern European region. These common processes encompass the Roma from the region, too, which leave its impact on the development of the Roma identities and grants them new, common European dimensions. Together with this on the international level, the ideas of global Roma nationalism, represented mainly by the new organization of the European Roma and Travellers Forum, returned to the concept of Roma as a transnational, European minority.

In the new European realities the development of the Roma community acquires new and wider spatial dimensions that transcend the existing state borders. Large portions of the existing Roma groups migrate in various forms from Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe to various countries in Western Europe settling permanently there (or with intent to settle). At this stage the relations (including through marriage) among the members of the groups remain lasting, but it is not difficult to forecast that the development of the processes of segmentation and consolidation of the groups will certainly acquire new dimensions that will

find their expression in group (and subgroup and meta-group) identities, i.e. eventually, after a few decades we'll have a totally different overall *tableau* of the Roma presence in united Europe.

The basic trends in the development of the Gypsy/Roma identities as outlined in this paper are constantly intersecting, overlapping and thus enriching one another. The processes of the development of the Gypsy community are influenced by a number of “external” factors related to the specific situation in the various countries in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, and the common processes of European integration and globalization. That is why at this stage it is very difficult to predict what specific dimensions the Gypsy/Roma identities will acquire in the short and in the long term and what their development will be like.

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# CONTEMPORARY CHANGES IN ROMA IDENTITY IN THE CZECH AND SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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The Roma, diverse and scattered across the European countries and almost throughout the world, is unified by the ethnicity, based on their common origin, language, culture and perception of values and ethnic identity, feeling of affiliation to Romaness, Romipen. The Roma – whether they called themselves by the ethnonyms of Roma, Sinti or a taken-over name, given to them by the other, majority population – i.e. Gypsies, Romanies or Travellers in England, Scotland and Ireland but also in America, Gitanos in Spain, Tsiganes in France, Zigeuner and Sinti in Germany and Austria, Cigáni or Cygany, Cikáni in Slovakia, partially also in Bohemia and Moravia, to a major degree in Bulgaria, Hungary and similarly also in other countries - represent within Europe a common largest ethnic minority, though varied according to the country and group. This important fact, however, is unknown to majority of the Roma and often they do not even know of institutions representing them – whether globally as is the case of the International Romani Union (IRU), officially active since April 1971, or recently within the European Union which is the case of many leading institutions. Their activities and impact on all the Roma is still problematic and the representatives of these organisations, institutions and Roma intelligentsia realise that more intensive work is required in the Roma communities in individual countries in order to support their ethnic identity.

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So far there has not been a uniform scientific or legal definition of the terms such as nation, nationality, national or ethnic minority. Nation is defined as a community of people with common origin, culture and language which usually has its own state – in case of the Roma it is the country in the territory of which they have settled and lived for a long period of time. In Europe with 8-10 million Roma scattered in multiple countries, where they constitute the largest national minority, the Roma, Sinti and Travellers (in the United Kingdom – in England, Scotland and Ireland) consider themselves to be a common transnational ethnic group, some sort of Roma European nation. This definition was also referred to by the participants in the World Romani Congress of the International Romani Union held in Prague in July 2000, attended by the Roma from almost 40 countries worldwide. In the memorandum “We, the Roma nation” they reiterated their desire for the recognition of the transnational Roma nation representatives: “We share the tradition, culture, origin, language, therefore we consider ourselves to be a nation, even though we do not strive for the creation of a Roma state. We present to the mankind a request to be represented as a nation, which we are. We seek the representation and new ways of the representation of individuals, regardless of their nationality. The current policies do not reflect the existing needs of individuals in the changing world and the needs of those who continue to starve and suffer from the violation of their fundamental human rights. For that reason we offer this particular, possible and needed solution. “

In 2002 this was articulated in a scientific manner by Rom Ian Hancock, an outstanding representative of the Roma nation, in his book called “We are the Romani People“, as well as by Thomas Acton in his book called “Romani Culture and Gypsy Identity“ (1997), and by others.

There is still lack of unity in the way the majority society calls the Roma and this unclarity relates not only to their standing, but also impacts their self-determination and feeling of belonging to the Romaness, Romipen: Are the Roma/Gypsies in each country a minority or do they constitute Romani nationality, nation or an ethnic group?

In the Czech and Slovak Republic for example all the ethnic Roma are called the members of Roma nationality, although the Roma themselves usually do not present or declare their nationality in Census. Since 1990 they have been able to declare their nationality because in both the republics (former Czechoslovakia) the Roma nationality status was adopted. Nevertheless, majority of the Roma do not declare this nationality. The majority population has so far been grappling with the definition of this population, i.e. who is and who is not the Roma, and how to encourage them to declare the Roma nationality in statistical surveys. The main reason for the reluctance of the Roma, elderly people in particular, to declare their nationality has been the negative past experience of several generations and their fear of any registration whatsoever. Some of them are convinced that any registration may be followed by persecution, as was the case during Holocaust in the World War II, when the records from the Census of Gypsy population were used pursuant to Act No 117/1927 Coll. and Government Order No 68 Coll. of 1928, based on which the Roma received the so called Gypsy identity cards that significantly restricted their fundamental human rights and freedoms. Nowadays they are also afraid of potential racially and xenophobia motivated attacks which might follow if they declare the Roma nationality and make themselves visible.

Moreover, some of the elderly Roma today do not even understand precisely the meaning of the concept of nationality, which is new and unfamiliar for them since they have always considered themselves to be primarily members of their

group or a family-based community. In reality, though, the majority of them simply do not want to be officially considered or registered as the Roma and mostly declare another nationality, usually the Czech or Slovak in the Czech Republic and Slovak or Hungarian in the Slovak Republic. Withholding one's own ethnic or national identity during the Census, whether intentionally or not, has become a common practice of the Roma population both in our country and in the former socialist countries. Yet it proves their Roma identity.

The number of the Roma, ascertained through these censuses, is therefore strongly underestimated and irrelevant – in comparison to the actual number of the ethnic Roma which is estimated at least at 220 thousand in the Czech Republic and even 360 to 500 thousand in the Slovak Republic. The Roma constitute in fact the largest minority expressed in percentage of the total population, in the Slovak Republic in particular.

Today, the majority society stresses again the social aspect, not the ethnic one, which is why many Roma families are wrongly judged and placed in socially excluded communities, covered by the term of social exclusion. Building on this approach is also the state policy of social integration, i.e. de facto a gradual adaptation of the Roma to the majority population – without any clarification of social and ethnic relationships, thorough knowledge of specific features of lifestyle of such families. The environment, in which they live, has been newly labeled as socio-culturally disadvantaged environment or disadvantaged environment. This term of socially disadvantaged environment is officially used in the framework of well meant assistance to these families in the field of education, welfare and health care (including the award of projects and grants at the level of EU) and its features are associated more with social than broader cultural or ethnic aspects. Yet ever since 1990 the use of Romani language and the presentation of the Romani culture

has been made possible and to a certain degree also encouraged. A proof thereof is the foundation and activities of the Museum of Romani Culture, publishing of books and magazines in Romani language (partially), Romani studies at several universities in the Czech and Slovak Republic and other positive phenomena – which, however, is not in contradiction with the above referred to issues.

Nonetheless, the essential thing is who the Roma believe they are and what path they want to follow – ensuing from this is their identity, whether they feel their belonging to the Roma nation or merely to their family group. Currently, there are vast differences between the individual groups and generations.

Even in these two republics they are divided into groups and family-based extensive families. Both in the Slovak and Czech Republic the most numerous groups are the Slovak Roma (servike Roma) and partly the so called Hungarian Roma (ungrike Roma) – both called Rumungre. Most of them arrived following 1945, i.e. the end of the World War II, in several migration waves in the Czech and Moravian towns, industrial as well as border areas, where they have settled and lived ever since for three of four generations, representing now almost 85 percent of all the Roma living here. Apart from these large groups, there are small numbers of Czech and Moravian Roma/Gypsies – members of families who survived the World War II Holocaust of Gypsies and Jews, and Sinti – the German Gypsies living in Bohemia and Moravia. Here too, a specific group accounting for almost 10 percent of Roma population in each of our two republics is the Vlach Gypsies (Vlachike), nomadic until February 1959, who preserve their language, internal social structure and system of values and do not mix with other Roma. That is the internal ethnic division of Roma. Vlachike Roma as well as Sinti, though, have preserved their ethnic identity to which they are strongly attached - their Vlach and

Sinti language, their system of values and traditions, including their own internal courts (kris).

The majority society in the Czech and Slovak Republic judges and distinguishes the Roma not according to their ethnic and family affiliation, but the social group to which they are ranked. This is mostly done through an external assessment of the living standard and the way of life of a family or a group, but also through the so called degree of social integration, as still perceived here by the majority society – from the Roma living a relatively good, troublefree life (including Romani intelligentsia, elite and entrepreneurs), via the middle group of the until recently employed and the so called better integrated Roma to the socially excluded groups and communities, the so called “difficult to adapt“ Roma, mostly unemployed and having ever more problems. This stratification, however, is not correct and in many Roma living in these countries it has a negative impact on the feeling of their ethnic belonging.

The feeling of one's standing and social status within the community keeps changing, also from generation to generation. Since 1990s the Roma living in Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia, especially those belonging to the Slovak and Hungarian groups, apart from sub-ethnic division have started to classify themselves also internally into the rich (*barvale*) and poor (*čore*), or the successful and unsuccessful – which is how they assess and define one another. The first group comprises the young Roma intelligentsia, growing in numbers and significance (even though it is not always rich), the Roma entrepreneurs and members of the Romani elite, whose affinity, however, is based on different values – namely the achieved social and economic standing. They often do not want to have anything in common with the latter, still prevailing groups and do not communicate with them. Even some young Roma, who have successfully attained

higher or university education, often times do not identify themselves with “the others“, mostly troubled Roma and do not feel any urge to help them solve the situation they are in, not only materially. This approach of a part of the current Romani elite is on the one hand understandable, because they do not want to give up social and economic position in the majority society which they have gained after a hard struggle. On the other hand, though, it proves the existing, ever more serious problems in the internal social stratification of Roma communities and changes in the ethnic identity.

In the Czech and Slovak Republic only recently, or since 1990, the majority society has started to officially point out that with respect to Roma in multicultural society an account has to be also taken of ethnicity, which is not the case in reality. The specificity of the Roma is, however, perceived today by the majority once again predominantly from the social point of view, not from the point of view of their ethnic specific characteristics. The environment, in which the Roma families live, is in practice described by term of “socio-culturally disadvantaging“ or “disadvantaged environment“. This new concept is used especially in connection with Roma families faced with socio-economic problems as a consequence of unemployment and living in the so called socially excluded communities, often called ghettos. It is also used in the government integration policy of Roma population, in the area of social services and system of education, where many Roma children are labeled as children from socially and culturally disadvantaged environment. The characteristic features of this so called disadvantaged environment are causally associated rather with social than broader cultural context and once again tend to have social rather than cultural or ethnic nature. Mistaking the ethnic specific characteristics for the characteristics of social strata then more

easily results in the division of Roma and the negative impact of their feeling for Romaness - Romipen.

The Romani solidarity and cooperation in larger families and groups of relatives has been substantially weakened in the Czech Republic, particularly among the members of younger generation, living in towns.

Thus, major changes between the individual generations of the prevailing majority of Roma occur with respect to their ethnic identity. These changes were brought about by the past assimilation pressures exerted by the former – communist society, namely from 1950s to late 1980s, i.e. for the period of 40 years, when the specific features of “gypsies” were fought against with the aim to “make them similar “to the others, i.e. Gazhe (Gaje) and hence the language, lifestyle and tradition of Roma people were declared to stand in the way of future of their children. These forced pressures led to serious erosion of the traditional system of values in many Roma communities and families, including a gradual loss of family authorities.

A negative implication is also the gradually decreasing knowledge and use of the Romani language by the younger middle-aged and young generation, in town environment in particular. The worst impact of this pressure exerted by the society in the past consists in the fact that many members of younger generations deem their Roma ethnicity (ethnic affiliation) to be a stigma and therefore wish to assimilate and become the Czechs, Slovaks or Hungarians and present themselves as Roma by their culture only. This gives rise to problems in the current ethnic identity of the Roma, many of whom suffer from the feelings of ambivalence, unclear stance to their own ethnicity. This fact is truly alarming.

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# **“YAŞASIN ROMANLAR!” EMERGING ROMANI ORGANISATIONS AND IDENTITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY, 2000-2010**

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The previous decade in Turkey has seen a major and exceptional change in the perceptions of identity amongst the Turkish Romani peoples. Where once the refusal to acknowledge anything other than a nationalist, ethnocentric Turkish and Muslim identity was common, now the Romani and other ‘Gypsy’ populations (*Romanlar, Domlar, Lomlar, Abdallar, Göçmenler, Gezginler, Göcebeler* and others) of Turkey have begun to assert a strong counter-narrative of *indigineity* and *exceptionalism*, positing them at the centre of Ottoman history and the foundation of the Republic. The conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and the *mubadele* (population exchanges) of the 1920’s and 1930’s are the keystones in this reconfiguration of Romani identity, with the trinity of Fatih Sultan Mehmed, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and now Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as representative of those who have given to the Romanlar and acknowledged them as an equal part of the body politic.

The current “democratic opening” (*Roman açılımı*), initiated by the AKP government in Istanbul in December 2009, has created a momentum that may well prove the most significant change in the situation of Romani people anywhere in Europe, particularly if (as widely expected) Turkey joins the “Decade for Roma Inclusion” this year. There are real risks however, of a ‘backlash’ against this recognition of a Turkish ‘ethnic’ minority in Turkey, as the traditional forces for reaction in the military and the ‘deep state’ seeks to resist the moves towards

growing democratization and shifting notions of Turkish citizenship from the narrow vision of the past to a pluralist future. There are also no guarantees that the pursuit of an Anatolian *exceptionalist* narrative will bring the Turkish Romani communities into closer relationships with Roma in the remainder of Europe, a position that the rewriting of Romani historiography and the “late origin theory” currently being discussed amongst scholars and researchers may only bolster, by placing a greater importance upon the *ethnogenesis* of the Egyptians in Byzantium in the eleventh century CE<sup>1</sup>. However, these are ‘extraordinary times’ and the Romani peoples of Turkey are living through them with hope, anticipation and not a little anxiety...

The first attempts to establish Romani social and cultural associations in the Turkish Republic were met with repression; in 1996 a small group of Romanlar in Izmir had attempted to establish an arts and theatre-based organization for young Romani people. This association was closed by the police and the leader of the organisation was prosecuted and fined for attempting to subvert the notion of an indivisible, ethnically homogeneous Republic with a form of ethnic separatism. Other attempts in 1998 and 1999 were also made with similar results and it was not until the change in legislation surrounding the registration of associations and foundations (*dernekler*) under the AKP government elected in November 2002, that this became possible. Since that time, there have been some forty new Romani, Domari and Lom associations founded (some more short lived than others). At present, there are approximately twenty-four active associations and four or five regional federations<sup>2</sup>. One of the most recent associations to open, the

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<sup>1</sup> The work of Ian Hancock, Thomas Acton, Ken Lee and Ron Lee, together with myself are at the core of this re-evaluation of Romani origins and identities.

<sup>2</sup> These are the western Turkish, or Trackyan Federation, the Aegean Federations (there are two, competing organizations), the Mediterranean Federation and the Anatolian Federation. There are few associations in the south east or north east of Turkey, so no regional organizations exist for these areas at present.

*Avrupa Yakısı Balkan Göçmenleri Roman Kültür ve Yardımlaşma Derneği* (The European Balkan Region Culture and Assistance Association for Romani Travellers<sup>3</sup>), in Istanbul's Zeytinburnu district<sup>4</sup> directly acknowledges the complex origins of Romani and other 'Gypsy'<sup>5</sup> communities in Turkey, especially with reference to the *mubadele* that followed the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). The Abdallar, Dom and Lom communities in Turkey have all opened their own associations following the work of the ERRC/hCa/EDROM project, "Promoting Roma Rights in Turkey, 2006-08"<sup>6</sup>, increased interest from European Roma NGO's<sup>7</sup> and a growing interest in the situation for Romani communities from institutions such as the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights<sup>8</sup>, the European Union and the European Commission. Scholarship, research and international organizations too have taken a far greater interest in the situation of Turkish Romani communities since 2000, than over the whole of the previous five decades<sup>9</sup>. The planned Romani Research Centre at Adnan Mederes Universitesi, in

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<sup>3</sup> 'Göçmenler' means 'migrants' or 'travellers' associated with groups, rather than an individual – 'yolcu' (traveller) – or nomad – 'göçebe' – or itinerant – 'gezgin'.

<sup>4</sup> The Association registered on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2010 and was officially opened by the Mayor of Istanbul, Mr. Kadir Topbaş on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2010. The Association is led by Mr. Muhterem Gül ('başkan') as president.

<sup>5</sup> The term 'Çingeneler' is contested and often perceived as pejorative, when used by non-Romani people but in my experience of working with and amongst Turkish Romani communities, it is the most frequent term used by themselves and some activists, such as Mr. Mustafa Aksu, wish to reclaim the term as the overall description whilst some organizations, such as Mr. Ali Mezarcioglu's 'Çingeneyiz.Org' actively promote this term as the general noun.

<sup>6</sup> European Roma Rights Centre/Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (Helsinki Yurttaşlar Derneği)/Edirne Romani Association; see the report "We are Here!": Discriminatory Exclusion and Struggle for Rights of Roma in Turkey, Istanbul/Budapest (2008); <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2975&archiv=1>.

<sup>7</sup> Such as the European Roma Information Office, whose Director Dr. Ivan Ivanov has been actively engaged with the Turkish Romani movement over the preceding three or four years.

<sup>8</sup> See REPORT by Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe following his visit to Turkey on 28 June – 3 July 2009, 1 October 2009; <https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?Index=no&command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=1520983&SecMode=1&DocId=1470368&Usage=2>.

<sup>9</sup> There have been seven major international conferences in Turkey on a variety of issues affecting Turkish Romani communities, some thirty conference presentations at events outside of Turkey, eight MA theses and five doctoral theses by Turkish students about Turkish Romani communities, a number of foreign theses either wholly or partly about Turkish Romani communities (most often focussing upon the Sulukule neighbourhood in Istanbul), numerous media reports and films and an increased participation by Turkish Romani musicians and performers in international festivals, such as Selim Sesler and Hüsnü Şenlendirici. Turkish Romani dance has become the focus of much of the

Aydın will open in autumn 2010, further raising the profile of Romani scholarship and research in Turkey and the region.

The changes are dramatic then, with perhaps an unprecedented interest in Romani and other ‘Gypsy’ groups from a wide variety of perspectives and approaches. The most startling example of these is the moves by the national government of the Republic to acknowledge the disadvantages faced by Romani communities in Turkish society, in education, housing, social services, welfare, health care provision and employment. With the *Roman açılımı* that began in Istanbul, 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009 and continued with the huge meeting (*Roman buluşması*) on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2010 in the *Abdi İpekçi Spor Salonu, Zeytinburnu* in Istanbul, the AKP government and the Prime Minister’s Office in particular seem to have taken a surprising degree of interest in the plight of Romani communities<sup>10</sup>. The government has also begun to address some of the legislation that has discriminated against Romani communities, removing derogatory references<sup>11</sup> and aspects of the law that constituted prejudicial treatment on the basis of their identity. In addition, housing has been promised for some 3,400 Romani families living in 42 areas that will cost no more than 100 lira (approximately 50 Euros) per month, to begin to address the problems faced by some 20,000 nomadic or peripatetic Romani Travellers.

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dance research – and tourism – from the USA, with performers such as ‘Reyhan’ becoming extremely popular in the past ten years.

<sup>10</sup> On the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2010, the PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan issued a general circular to all ministries (27580) asking for special care in the treatment of minorities within government institutions and to take particular care also in the implementation of reforms, regarding minorities including the Romanlar. Prior to this, the PM had issued a public apology to the Romani people of Turkey for the past treatment of them by previous regimes and had made a speech to some 16,000 Romanlar at the Abdi İpekçi Spor Salonu, Istanbul on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2010 where he again made a series of commitments to improve the social and economic circumstances of Romani citizens.

<sup>11</sup> The government amended Article 21 of the Law on the Movement and Residence of Aliens (Law No: 5683), which authorizes "the Ministry of Internal Affairs to expel stateless and non-Turkish citizen Gypsies and aliens that are not bound to the Turkish culture", thus promoting discrimination against Roma. The amendment proposal was submitted by four AK Party MPs including Ali Koyuncu, the Bursa MP in charge of the Roma gathering. This amendment was accepted just one week after the Roma gathering in Istanbul on March 14, 2010.

Despite the enthusiastic reception for ‘Tayyip Baba’ (‘father Tayyip’) at the Romani ‘gathering’ (*buluşması*) in Zeytinburnu and his apparent commitment to addressing their problems, there are many issues that remain challenging. The fundamental lack of access to education is one of the major concerns that many of the Romani associations focus upon and there is little support being given to any initiatives to encourage Romani children to attend school. Poverty is the primary reason for the problem of low attendance, together with very poor expectations from teachers and educators and bullying experienced by Romani children from their peers. Most have no schooling at all beyond the most basic of literacy skills and Romani girls are almost entirely absent from schooling. Adult literacy and numeracy levels are consequently very low and employment prospects bright, both as a result of low educational experience and prejudice regarding ‘lazy’ and ‘untrustworthy Gypsies’, on the part of employers. Health care and access to medicines are beyond the reach of most Romani families, with the costs of natal care meaning most children are born in the cramped and over-crowded homes that Romani people live in, with little or no medical intervention. All of the health related problems found across Europe in Romani communities are present in Turkey, especially amongst the mobile groups, including the very real prejudices that Romani and other Gypsy people face in accessing health services. Housing may be being built in new areas for Romani people at low cost, but the repercussions of forced eviction and demolition of long-standing Romani neighbourhoods in Mersin, Adana, Diyarbakir, Ankara and most notably, Sulukule in Istanbul<sup>12</sup>, have not been addressed, nor does the Urban Regeneration Law 5366

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<sup>12</sup> Sulukule, as the oldest Romani settlement has received a great deal of media attention and the support of many Turkish NGO’s and activists, but the wider picture in Istanbul and the remainder of the country has been neglected as a result. The complete destruction of Küçükbakkalköy in Üsküdar, Çin-çin Bağları in Ankara and Kağıthane in Istanbul in the period 2005-08 are just some of the instances of the Urban Renewal 5366 law in practice against Romani communities across Turkey.

look set to undergo any reform in the near future, with its disproportionate impact upon Romani communities.

The other implications for this shift in attitudes are closely intertwined with the darker side of Turkish politics and nationalism. The assault on the community of Selendi in Manisa province in December 2009, where 1,000 strong mob of ultra-nationalists burnt 300 Romani families out of their homes has remained uninvestigated and no individuals have been brought to charge. The provincial authorities have promised new housing but the local municipality, who it has been alleged instigated the attack in the first place have promised no such resettlement in the city, nor compensation to the Romani people who lost their homes and property. Ultra-nationalist hate speech has been steadily increasing against the Romani communities in Turkey for the past five years, but more recently this has burgeoned, particularly on the internet. The possibility of a wide-scale, ultra-nationalist led backlash against Romani people as ‘another’ minority demanding rights, through interference from Europeans who have no understanding of Turkey and want to see the Republic undermined, is very real.

The tensions then are these; an apparently increasing assertion of Romani and other identities (the *Lom*, *Dom*, *Abdallar*) through the process of establishing of associations, including women’s associations, combined with an increasing recognition at the highest government level of Romani rights and the promotion of equality through a ‘democratic initiative’, opposed by an increasingly ultra-nationalist rhetoric of exclusion and homogeneity, coupled with violence and threats to persons and communities, whilst local municipalities continue to deny Romani rights through demolition of homes, refusing access to schooling and little actual support for any of the necessary measures to achieve the kind of changes that the Prime Minister is urging. At this point, the initiative of the Prime

Minister's office remains just that; there is no lead ministry that has taken on responsibility for implementing any of the suggested reforms to improve social inclusion and the office responsible for housing developments in Turkey (TOKI) remain almost unaware of the proposal from PM Tayyip Erdoğan for identifying and allocating housing for Romani communities. It is not even clear whether these proposed measures are intended to address the mobile populations' housing needs or those that have been displaced by forced evictions, nor where such housing projects might be located. State Minister Faruk Çelik has now completed his remit to organize consultations and no further steps are planned at present, leaving the situation unclear and almost suspended without a strategy or action plan to continue. On the other hand, the PM continues to meet with local Romani leadership in visits to differing cities, as he did in Izmir recently, continuing a dialogue between his office and the Romani communities.

In wider society, the perceptions of Romani people are perhaps changing, as they become more 'positively' visible in the media. Advertising campaigns are using Romani people such as Balik Ayhan and other musicians, television drama serials feature the stories of young Romani singers 'discovered' by wealthy musical composers and their consequent relationship that defies both 'Gypsy' and non-Gypsy conventions 'to be together' and the popular musical talent shows, such as 'Roman Star' attract high ratings. Debate programmes (*Beş N, Bir K*) feature Romani topics and figures from the Romani leadership such as Erdinç Çekiç appear alongside progressive intellectuals and writers to discuss the issues. Yet the deep seated prejudices remain and little changes the attitudes in ordinary Turks that relegate 'Gypsies' to a second class status, beyond the pale of 'normal' Turkish society.

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To draw some conclusions, the changes that have taken place since 2000 are dramatic and do demonstrate an overall positive trend, but they are fragile and insecure at present and may even have effectively stalled, as European criticism from the CoE Commissioner for Human Rights and others has suggested, alongside a more positive appreciation of the recent initiative by EU politicians. Proposed policies though have little to support them and the impressive rhetoric of PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan notwithstanding (nor the reality of his personal commitment), little can change without the support of the ministries (education, social services, employment, health, housing) that deliver services to Romani communities, nor a positive engagement with the wider *tranche* of European Romani strategies and initiatives, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in particular. The civil service bureaucracy is in many ways a much more conservative bloc than the current AKP government and the question of the attitudes of other actors in Turkish politics, such as the People's Republican Party (CHP), the military and the constitutional court, adds a whole layer of complexities and contingencies to this issue. AKP will have to continue to promote the 'Romani democratic initiative' at the same time as persuading the more conservative elements and actors that this is not going to produce a divisive, 'ethnic' minority and a potentially 'separatist' situation in the Republic, something that the Romani associations categorically refute. In order to do this, AKP and the Romani associations must continue to articulate a non-diasporic, Anatolian *exceptionalist* and refashioned Romani identity that looks, not to other Roma communities and notions of Indian ethno-genesis but to Ottoman history, Islam and the early Republic for its legitimating discourse.

The key to the issue of Romani rights in Turkey remains the recognition of equality before the law and under the Constitution and the active implementation

of those rights for all citizens, as enshrined in both. This is at the heart of the Romani movement here and represents the aspirations of all the Gypsy communities who are opposed to the notion of rights as a ‘minority’ or a trans-national identity. The successful social inclusion of Romani and other Gypsy communities in Turkey is the primary goal of all activity by the associations and their collective federations. In this, the situation in Turkey provides perhaps a model for the successful pursuit of Romani rights across Europe, in contradistinction to the dubious benefits of the past twenty-five years of promoting Roma identity as a European, trans-national minority based in a narrative of ‘otherness’ and non-European origins. As equal citizens in the Turkish Republic, the *Romanlar* may be able to achieve, providing the fragile and somewhat precarious democratic initiative continues to move forward, true citizenship in a European pre-accession nation-state and demonstrate the falsity of the commitment to the Roma by the existing member states. That fact alone should encourage Roma rights activists and advocates, scholars and researchers to pay a great deal more attention to Turkish Romani communities than they currently do.

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# **THE ROLE OF HEALTHY ROMA SELF-CONFIDENCE IN THE INTEGRATION PROCESS**

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Until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century two major approaches of the majority society to the Roma prevailed, striving either for their elimination (expulsion from the country, persecution, physical liquidation), or for their assimilation. The efforts to assimilate the Roma exerted particularly since the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century constituted the more progressive solution as against the expulsion, persecution and physical liquidation which did not bring about any improvement at all. Sometimes too excessive assimilation pressures aimed at the Roma inclusion in majority society, they did not exclude them from the society, but on the contrary, wanted to include them at any cost, even by force. It was this force-based approach that proved to be ineffective since it was unnatural. This was ascertained, however, only towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the application of the new fields of science such as psychology, sociology and ethnology. The final quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its last decade in particular, brought new, more humane and respectful approaches that raised the inclusion efforts to a new level – namely the policy of integration; the inclusion of the Roma in majority population with the possibility to preserve some of their ethno-cultural specifics. Though the history witnessed several waves of assimilation in relation to the Roma, no assimilation pressure in the Bohemian countries has ever been so conceptual, consistent and persistent, and thus also “successful” as the pressure exerted by the communist regime. I believe it is important to share an example from recent history in order to illustrate the

socially devastating consequences of ignoring (disregarding) or even overt belittling of the functioning Romipen – Romany culture.

The attempts of the Czechoslovak communist regime to assimilate the Roma were launched in 1958 through the policy of state controlled assimilation. The Roma were supposed to totally disappear in the majority population. This policy within the purview of the Stalin's national policy relied on the disregard of ethno-cultural specifics. It was not desirable to remind the citizens of Gypsy origin - as they were called at that time since the term Roma was forbidden throughout the communist era – of the moments of their common identity, such as history and culture. The state support provided to Gypsies covered especially their **material needs**. The other population perceived it as unfair and advantageous for Gypsies, while in reality they did only harm to them by **depriving them of their agelong self-sufficiency**, they taught them to rely on the state. (It entailed first and foremost the improvement of housing conditions, allowances for meals for school children, etc). Contrary to the material sphere, **the spiritual culture** of the Roma suffered from ever stronger devastation and demoralization. The Romany culture was officially degraded with the aim to eliminate it: the Romany language was considered to be a mere argot of the mob and criminals. The children at schools or in the substitute institutional care were punished for using the Romany language. The whole complex of surviving Gypsy culture was presented as a manifestation of retardation dating back to the capitalist era. That is why it was necessary to cure it, or to eradicate it. **The Roma themselves started to believe these statements**, they got to understand that they should be ashamed of their past as well as their presence and for the sake of progress to overcome their Gypsiness as fast as possible and to cast it away as primitive and immature. The Roma were encouraged **not to speak the Romani language with their children** and to

generally adapt to the surrounding majority society. However, only the members of the lowest social strata of the majority population were willing to communicate with the Roma, the culture of whom the Roma started to take over. Within the implementation of assimilation policy, **the regime also hastily liquidated the traditional Romani concentrations** and resettled the Roma from isolated Romani settlements in the eastern parts of the country in the industrial areas with lower density of Roma population. Here, they were given new flats and jobs. At this very point the policy as implemented in practice turned into unmanageable spontaneous transfers of citizens, the Roma town districts and the whole housing estates (socially excluded locations) came into being, with in fact segregated Roma schools.

**The regime rashly and headlong demolished the Roma family structure** and hierarchies which have existed for centuries and constituted the backbone of their communities. The Roma started to lose faith in the cornerstones of their culture, whatever it might be, but did not receive any adequate replacement. The loss of values brought them into a vacuum, conducive to **deep demoralisation**. The Roma themselves started to believe that their culture was paltry and undeserving of attention. Moreover, the already disintegrating traditional structures failed to support them. The state paternalism, on the contrary, taught the Roma not only to rely on it, but also to take the advantage of it.

Although the assimilation policy included also the Roma **literacy programme**, the obvious social handicaps of Roma children were not addressed at schools, thus many of these children ended up in special schools – intended for the mentally retarded. Under the totalitarian regime the consequences were not that tragic since really everybody had the right to work, though the Roma were hired to do the most physically demanding unskilled jobs. The consequences of long-term

lack of success of Roma children in Czech schools were tragically manifested after the fall of the regime. The market mechanisms revealed the unpreparedness of the Roma and led to their total failure in the labour market. Soon after the Velvet Revolution the Roma were the first to lose their jobs and until now have had difficulties to find a job due to their low level of skills.

**Serious identity problems** have been faced by the Roma until now (not only in the Czech Republic, but obviously in the whole post-communist block). The deeply rooted feeling of inferiority hinders also the process of equal involvement in the majority society. Frustrated people burdened by multiple problems not addressed in the past and visibly different from the rest of the society have difficulties in communicating with their surroundings, prefer to stay in isolation, but are also de facto isolated in their socially excluded locations by local self-governments. Let us imagine this misery using the example of **language**. The parents seeking to get rid of unpopular Gypsy stigmas intentionally speak only Czech to their children, the Czech they know, i.e. with improper phrases and poor vocabulary. Such children then cannot speak the Romani language at all and they speak poor Czech, often with a funny Romani accent. Starting with the first grade they understand neither the teacher, nor the reading material, so without the help of an assistant or extra classes they are losers from the very beginning of their school attendance. Their being a failure at school constitutes for the Roma the starting point of their living the dead-end life of their parents – at the bottom of the society.

The communist regime has for sure provided the Roma with a lot of positive moments, apart from guaranteeing the right to work, civil equality and material advantages, it was also the right and duty to attend school. **The communist regime naturally made it possible to high achievers from among the Roma to attend a higher education institution**, however in exchange for the cooperation with the

regime – for assimilation, severing their ties with their own community. This way the **Roma elite alienated from their communities**, to which they could no more be of assistance. **This is one of the essential negative consequences of the assimilation policy - apart from the loss of values and self-confidence.** The assimilation leads to the loss of the elite of the given community, to general humiliation and distortion of identity, without which it is very difficult to get involved in a healthy manner in the majority society as its equal partner. Unhealthy and unnatural environment promotes unhealthy processes. In order to choose sensitive programmes of integration it is necessary, however, to have an insight in the functioning of Roma communities, their everyday life.

The socially excluded Roma locations are now full of dark-skinned people considered to be Gypsies by the rest of the society, though they in the effort to obtain a better social standing present themselves as Non-Roma. **The luxury of being self-confident of the Roma origin is in our country** (or generally in the post-totalitarian countries which experienced tough assimilation) **is the privilege of only exceptional Roma**, who managed to become well educated and get a decent position in the society. A number of Roma persons who studied under the previous regime are familiar with these feelings, when only upon attainment of higher education they were capable of assuming the burden of hated Gypsiness and to claim their origin and their never forgotten, but humble identity. **It is only with the attained education that these people regain the lost self-confidence as well as the consciousness of the value of their own Romani culture, they get the courage to publicly acknowledge their next of kin and predecessors, their fajta.** And that is very liberating. **The issues of personal identity and healthy self-confidence are interrelated.** We can have the so called assimilated gadjé who back at home within their family members will share their Roma feelings from the

Non-Roma everyday life, in which being genuine Roma they cower in order for them not to be recognised. Or we can have strong Roma with healthy self-confidence who have no problems with their identity and therefore have no need to offset their social handicaps by aggression or other socially dangerous behaviour. **To accept and put up with one's own identity is essential for a successful integration, for healthy and independent involvement in the majority society, as its equal member.**

**The identity problem of the Roma is fed and worsened by the anti-Romani aversion affecting the whole society.** It does not create suitable conditions for the integration of Roma into the hostile surrounding community. On the other hand, the stalled Roma integration, with obviously troublesome behaviour of the Roma, is the source of anti-Romani aversion. We are thus getting into a **vicious circle**, which forms the so called Roma problem. Its individual components, however, support one another and reproduce. **In other words, for the Roma to have a healthy self-confidence as citizens of equal value is one of the prerequisites for successful integration, or rather its successful completion.**

The surveys of Romipen are nowadays needed and necessary in order for us to find out what is the Roma experience, what are the concrete barriers that hamper their integration in the whole society. **Based on the experience gained in our museum I shall share one example: the deep rooted belief that the Roma are not interested in the non-Romani education in order not to get assimilated,** is at least in the prevailing majority of Czech and Slovak Roma, a myth caused by the lack of knowledge of the situation, experience and perception of the Roma. In our institution remedial classes are given to 53 Roma children – living in the adjacent socially excluded Roma location. The interest of parents in these classes is immense and we cannot satisfy the demand. The parents of these children, half

illiterate special school leavers, are not able to help their children with their studies, even though they would sometimes wish to do so. The Czech schooling places specific and challenging demands on pupils in their homework and other preparation for school, which necessitates the parents' assistance. If they are incapable of that, the socially neglected children equipped with poor language skills, when faced with the first failures, **lose their interest in school, which becomes a hostile territory**. Initially, the young Roma children have ambitious goals as to their future integration in the majority society and career. With the beginning of their school attendance and the subsequent frustration, they quickly abandon their ambitions (notoriously known is the frequent case when a dream to become a medical doctor soon turns into a dream to become a nurse, and if everything turns out well in reality the girl becomes at least an orderly, more often though only a hospital cleaning lady). And the children put up with the fact that they will live just as sad and miserable life as their parents. The adults know these ends well from their own experience, which is why they do not support these ambitions of their children, **they do not trust themselves or their children**. (Naturally, there are other reasons too, not as fundamental as the one I mentioned). This is just a small example of what I revealed during the field survey done by our Museum and what obviously exists in reality. There are many more similar examples, the society is full of similar wrong ideas about the Roma which make the communication difficult. The knowledge of the current life of the Roma and their culture is crucial in order for us not to **keep hitting our heads against the closed door during our integration endeavours, when this door can be slightly open, one can enter and start constructive communication in a peaceful atmosphere**.

Now, let me mention some sort of a topical delicate appendix to this topic. In the current – only Czech though – discourse of social anthropology oriented at the Roma, spreading and flourishing is a popular and populist statement that the **Romaness is a disadvantaging factor of** the integration process. Sometimes, it is literally said: “The Romaness as a disadvantaging factor is an element causing retardation mainly in two areas: it hampers education and through its system of family solidarity slows down the process of personal responsibility and motivation.” (I. Gabal and P. Víšek 2009: 31–32.) This statement is welcome also by officials responsible for updating the Roma integration policy, members of self-governments, and often those who simply do not know how to cope with the Roma and are tasked with finding quick solutions, while having only shallow knowledge of the current situation of the Roma.

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This fairly dangerous statement, since it is discreetly misleading, **mixes two diverse moments**. First, the Romaness is confused with the manifestation of demoralisation and perhaps also the so called “culture of poverty“ of the population in socially excluded locations. This decayed situation, from the moral and spiritual point of view (not necessarily the material point of view), quite often found in the socially excluded, is not anything that would constitute the supporting pillar of the Romani traditional culture, i.e. the manifestation of genuine Romaness. That would be a fatal confusion that could result in multiple subsequent mistakes concerning the real integration of the Roma in the society. (Jakoubek, M. and Hirt, T., 2004; Hirt, T. and Jakoubek, M., 2006)

*The second issue consists in the irrelevance of the given to statement* in the quest for the ways of Roma integration or the fight against social exclusion. If the socially excluded, i.e. also the socially needy, were the upholders of Romaness, then the statement on Romaness as the factor of retardation would be merely a

statement without any profound meaning whatsoever for future solutions. The integration endeavours focus on people at the bottom of the society who have so far been incapable of getting off the bottom and take care of themselves. It is caused by the overall situation of these people, not by their potential material poverty, which actually is the consequence of the level of their education attainment and the spiritual state. People at the bottom live their lives rather unconsciously, without any profound philosophical dimension. If in their everyday lives they practice anything that could be considered the specific characteristics of the Romani culture, it is done merely unconsciously, by force of habit, because they cannot act otherwise. These socially excluded people, the inhabitants of the most appalling communities hardly ever present themselves as the Roma. It is them who suffer from the most serious inferiority complex, though masked by aggressiveness. That is why also their consciousness of ethnic identity or their interest to acknowledge the Romaness is strongly weakened, if not totally obliterated. According to my research these “Roma people” (whether genuine or in the negligible number of cases those who only declare to be the Roma) declare their Romaness in Census to the lowest degree. On the contrary, the Romaness was declared by the Roma who have put up with their origin, by the self-sufficient Roma who are capable of taking care of themselves and their families. The Roma well aware of their worth, the Roma heading for successful integration or already integrated.

People affected by demoralisation and overall decline do not think about their identity or culture or general spiritual questions. **Even if the Romaness really was a disadvantage, it would be beyond the democratic regime to “reeducate” these people within a short span of time, to prevent them from behaving the way they are used to since no awareness campaign is sufficient to**

**meet this challenge.** We might proclaim enlightened statements: “The Roma people, when in need do not rely on your next of kin, on your family, do rely on the state and its authorities!” Or: “Focus on yourselves, do not think of your nearest and dearest, stand up against your family, against your parents, this is the only way to get off the bottom!” That would, however, be very foolish and it would consequently lead to other unthought-of negatives. Who would then take care of this old and rejected generation of parents and grandparents, would they now end up in the old folks’ home? How about the feelings of deprivation, which are mutual, present both in the parents and their revolting children? But the main thing is that the meaning of these naive statements would not be grasped by the socially needy since for them it is the deeds that count. The arguments used claim that a typical, not ethnic but social feature of the “culture of poverty”, is the focus on family solidarity, on its safety net. **Does it, however, make sense to strive for the demolition of this safety net, if there is no adequate replacement?!** Has not the family safety net always been rather a virtue of necessity? Is not this almost instinctive reliance on one’s relatives and nobody else a proof that something does not work in this country, that the society does not offer these people adequate guarantees of preventing them from a fall? Does it make any sense to campaign against the “Romaness“ – sometimes in the ethnic sense of the word – and on other occasions merely in the social sense against the “culture of poverty“ if **the state coordinated system and policy solutions of pulling these people out of the isolation are not implemented?**

The apparent contradiction in these so called expert statements is also visible in the confused switching from the statement about the disadvantaging “Romaness“ (i.e. the set of behaviour of the ethnic – the Roma) to the term of “culture of poverty” used when describing the Romani lifestyle, in which its social

character is highlighted as against the ethnic one. The culture of poverty is characterised similarly to the “disadvantaging Romaness“ by *strong ties of solidarity in a large family*“. Yes, the “culture of poverty” truly is a disadvantaging factor of integration and let us do something to eliminate it. This culture of poverty is not the cause, but the effect of the long lasting situation of the Roma. Therefore, essential is not the statement whether the alleged Romaness or culture of poverty are the disadvantaging factor, but the **proposal of solution** of how to eliminate this “makeshift“ or “ersatz“ culture of poverty. How to find its adequate replacement? Where will these people find help and support if not in the family safety net?

Our Roma people in their subjugation and humbleness are sometimes willing to listen to these theories, which, however is unthinkable for the Roma European representation or the still proud Roma groups such as Sinti, Manus or also Kalderash. This discourse would be considered unacceptable, but for them also difficult to understand. It ensues from the entirely different experience the Roma had in the free Europe as against that in the post-communist countries. The Roma, who had not been exposed to tough assimilation pressure, could remain self-confident, unbowed and their Romaness, their identity has never been disturbed by this pressure.

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**MEMORY, HISTORY AND RROMANIPEN: REFLECTION ON THE  
CONCEPT OF TRACE**

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*"We must write the history of our ancestors ourselves"*

*Ian Hancock, The Pariah Syndrome*

*"An event is not a being, but an intersection of possible routes"*

*P. VEYNE, how we write the story.*

History is a thread which connects events between them, gives them form to interpret them, and understand their transcendence. This thread is woven by the historian. A paradoxical person, half scientific, half dreamer ... women and men provided with all the complexities involving humankind, with a cultural background, social, intellectual, political, moral and spiritual ones as well. And yet, still a player of here and now, that is, of the present time.

We can understand history as the memory of people. The shaping of a memory through writing allows the historian to fight against forgetting and collective amnesia. However, the association history/memory makes more sense when referring to the writers of chronologies and to historians. When it comes to the modern historian, one must first ask the question of the objectivity of science

what is proposed by the historian as a narration. Thus, we are faced with the question of the perspective and of the ideology of the historian. Even if the historian wants to develop scientific methods, the political and ideological substrate, assumed or not, is the hurdle to overcome, both by the historian as well as by the readers. The facts themselves are merely a jumble in which the historian must put a hand in so as to achieve coherence and meaning. And it is there, behind the fabric of human logic that we can glimpse their true motivations. The issue of subjectivity and objectivity is crucial in historical writing. Obviously, the most reasonable advice is, in order to think correctly of history, should be under no circumstances to lose sight of an epistemological approach. Without which for some, collective memory could transform itself into the elaboration of a collective myth.

### **What is really a memory?**

Can it be constitutive of our identity, both personal and collective, community or national? Memory is a narrative, a narrative, a narration in which logically the facts, circumstances, episodes are articulated. However, memory is primarily a "sense of things." It is also the meaning we give to what we remember. We are all concerned by the idea, the need to "remember", we are all aware of the importance of historical memory, the "duty of memory". Without doubt, memory is fundamental and its loss is terrifying, as well as troubling. It may even lead the individual affected by this towards the total elimination of an identity, considering here identity as what remains beyond that which differs. Yet, even more tragic than forgetting, is undoubtedly the loss of our sense of what has happened. There is nothing more important and fundamental to "remember with meaning", whether in

a conscious manner, an intellectual or natural one. Ignoring the intrinsic and general meaning of what the facts teach us and form our identity represents the most terrible of losses and the greatest of pains.

### **How can we collectively remember?**

Remembering collectively is to make for ourselves something that we have not lived, as if these events and their meanings are housed within our fortified inner self in the form of memories. This is the narration of past circumstances that we feel, or that we are made to feel, as part of us, and as personal. The sociological notion of collective memory proposed by Maurice Halbwachs (1950) describes how a past can be stored in individual memory, history and society. Individual memory is defined of course from the perspective of the social dimension. "It is in the society that normally, the individual acquires his memories, and the individual remembers them, which are recognized and located by the individual concerned" (Halbwachs, 1992: 38) Memories, even personal, are evoked from the outside. Moreover, if an individual or group of person is incapable of capturing and reconstructing their memories against the group they belong or society as a whole, this phenomenon is made difficult. And this is all the more so when it is about, as is the case of our community, a people who unfortunately suffer from the syndrome of Pygmalion.

Thus, the organization of memory whether individual or collective may depend on the social experience and may rely on what Halbwachs calls "the social framework of memory", which is represented by language, space and time. These frameworks define social practices. By that, collective memory is understood and perceived in this context as a continual upgrading of knowledge, beliefs, abilities

and standards "through which a society ensures the permanence of its representations." Collective memory appears here as a social concept and political key - fundamental as it shapes the identity of a group and vice versa.

Here we must stress that without doubt one of the main vectors of this "collective think and feel" factor is language since, as Halbwachs (1952:275) emphasizes "the whole system of social convention is attached to it" and it allows us to reconstruct our past at every moment. Language is thus the space in which all humans think in common. To understand, study, and underline the richness of our language consists therefore of remembering, and of "creating a memory". The fact that the study of our history is being achieved mainly through the study of our language is another argument and illustration of this idea. It is for this reason that the organization of memory, individual or collective, depends on social experience. It has been established that linguistics is a political science. Naming things is to decide on their position within a whole, to specify their meaning. Naming something is therefore affirming the ability to act.

People without a shaped memory, inscribed in writing or in oral form are not people without history. It is not because people celebrate their past exploits that they have historical knowledge of themselves. People without memory are not people without history. Unlike individual memory, groups and societies are more prone to amnesia. They can "forget" their past if institutions do not endeavor to conserve and maintain this along with self-esteem and education. As we are a nation without territory and thus without institutional structures linked to this task, our memories have been rendered weak (and still are) under the yoke of oppression, the need for survival and the devastating Pygmalion syndrome.

Indeed, in the fifteenth century, 400 years after our departure from India, our ancestors presented themselves as coming from India. Hieronimus de Forli tells us about Rroma in Italy in 1422 and wrote « aliquit dicebant, quod erani in India » (“they say they are from India” in *Crónica di Bologna*, 1749, Citado por J.P. Clebert, Ludovico Antonio Muhatori , città di Castello 1916, tomo 18 of the Corpus chronicoum Bonenensium, Parte I, pp. 568-570.), This mention of the origins of our people is in no way unique. At least five articles between 1422 and 1630 mention the knowledge of, and the demand for recognition of, our Indian origins.

Logically, we can wonder about the process of supposed "amnesia" from which our people suffer in modern and contemporary times. It is therefore necessary to try to understand how and why this phenomenon could have happened. Firstly, it is likely, as we are reminded by Ian Hancock (2006), that when our ancestors arrived in Christian Europe, its inhabitants had difficulty differentiating the source of our individuality. As a result, our ancestors were given incorrect ethnonyms. Unfortunately, even at that time, our ancestors were well aware of their origins, after 300 years of traumatic history, punctuated by wars and constant geographic displacement, the beliefs and images that majority society could impose on our people represented undoubtedly an important factor in the deformation of our own perceptions of ourselves. It is most probably as well that what others saw in us, to some extent conditioned us. We made ourselves, the image that majority society made of us. Such are the disasters of ignorance and prejudice! This phenomenon, called the Pygmalion syndrome, is known both in practice and in theory by an experiment in social psychology highlighted by Robert Rosenthal and Leonor Jacobson (1968).

The basic assumption is as follows: the prejudices of a person on the behavior or the nature of another transfer from "prophecy to automatic realization". It suffices to convey a prejudice in order that this phenomenon is realized and conveyed at the speed of light. There is nothing magic, but rather the force of which may have expectations of the other on behaviors. This process of manipulation of identity has been able to operate in such a way on our people that the wrong image, conveyed by the prejudice, has ended up being assimilated and internalized. Without land, the direct protagonists of vicissitudes from a more than turbulent medieval history, without an institution able to preserve a true image of our people just as much in relation to the outside as to that intrinsically, we became lost in what others saw (or wanted to perceive) of us.

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Once the confusion took hold, in the context of survival, the Rromani people were not at all perceived in the same way once they entered into Christian Europe. Their survival became much more difficult. They were not a military force but rather regarded as pariahs who may be spies, the Christian chroniclers tell us most of the time with repulsion of clair voyance talents and even of artistic skills, it is clear that establishing the truth about Rromani identity was surely not their priority. In some cases, this mistaken identity was very useful to the Rromani population as a whole. In Spain, in the midst of the Reconquista, as in other European countries, they presented themselves as "Dukes of Egypt" on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, Christians fleeing Muslim invasions, which began as a very attractive card, thereby facilitating their establishment, such as in the Kingdoms of Castile, and furthermore enabling them to obtain permission for certain rights of free passage and privileges.

It is also equally important to think historically; during the Middle Ages what mattered was not where the people came from, but with whom, as well as

against whom the people fought. It therefore appears that there has been a confusion of ourselves and others on the identity of our ancestors. Yet, in light of the texts from the XV, XVI and XVII centuries respectively which refer to our conscious knowledge of being from Indian lineage, this confusion was therefore not made on our origin.

As we discussed earlier, it is from the XVI that a strong change in perception of the Rromani people, by European dominant society of that respective time, starts to occur. The increasing attempts of centralization and state control, together with the control of the states over their respective citizens and domains, the different foreign and colonial policies, all led to a shift in the perception of mainstream society on the Rromani communities spread throughout Europe. The different and strong culture of the Rromani communities, as well as their skills and even mastery of crafts and art of war (since leaving Kannauj, our history is a continual battle) were potentially considered dangerous. To force a people into submission, the more favorable attitude to adopt is no doubt the one of denying and manipulating their respective identity, history and culture. However, this "loss of memory" could not destroy these traces, these marks, these cultural traits that to this day unite all Rroma and that we know as Rromanipen.

### **Plato, Ricoeur, the traces and Rromanipen**

Everyone knows what a trace is. It is a very ordinary word and of a common usage. The simplicity of this definition leaves little room for a theoretical interpretation. However, the more the words are simple, the more the questions and issues they raise are complex. A trace can be a mark, an impression, that of an animal, a man, a vehicle but can also be seen in a figurative sense. In this case, a trace is a mark

left by an action, an event in the past. A trace can also be a miniscule amount. Finally, in geometry, a trace is a point, a place of intersection with a plane. We can relate these definitions with four other concepts: 1). A trace that would be a fingerprint, or a mental imprint (Paul Ricoeur, 2000); 2). A trace that comprises an indication, a small amount (Carlo Ginzburg, 1989); 3). The concept of trace as memory as documented, oral or experienced (P. Ricoeur, 1955; Marc Bloch, 1974), and 4). The trace as a line or writing.

The concept of trace is fundamental and if I dwell on this it is because it leads to a reflection on the concept of memory of imagination and of truth. The parable that best illustrates this transcendence is the enigma known as the Platonic metaphor of the wax block. In this dialogue between Socrates and a Sophist, Plato establishes a relationship between two problems: first, that of "eikon", the image or imagination of the presence or of the present representation of something that is absent; the other, that of "tupos", the imprint, or the trace, illustrated by the metaphor of the wax block. For Plato, the intersection of these two issues raises the question of truth and error.

Plato understood here by error, the erasure of marks or failure to adjust the image to its print. What is this metaphor of the wax block that illustrates the problem of the trace, of the "tupos" in the philosophy of Plato? This dialogue of Plato compares the soul, or the mind to a wax block, which can be very different according to the person who serves to register, to engrave feelings and thoughts (the "semeia). These feelings or thoughts, recorded by memory, constitute consciousness, and knowledge. This metaphor is very important because it lies at the intersection of a triple dialectic between memory and forgetting, between knowledge and ignorance, between truth and error. For Plato, truth or true opinion

is the result of the faithfulness of memory with traces, while that which is false or erroneous is from inadequacies to this trace.

Much later, Paul Ricoeur (2000) would develop this concept and refer to three types of traces: The first trace is the emotive one that “results from the shock of an event.” It is the psychological mark which is either directly experienced or not. The second type is the trace of memory, one that is cerebral, studied by neuroscience and serves as the connection between impressions of the outside world and the prints in the physical brain. The third type of material trace is the physical evidence, written or otherwise, on which the historian works.

All these three types of traces could constitute without doubt that which undoubtedly results in what is very difficult to understand and feel for a person not belonging to the Rromani people and to what we know as Rromanipen. A collective memory, and a collective feeling which is neither based on the academic knowledge of our history, nor on the development of core myths, nor on the cult of national heroes. This is the sense of belonging to the same people, to the same set of values and rules. It is also experimenting with a similar sensitivity and even skills, a deep appreciation of oneself even in the other, the feeling of belonging to a large sibling group, a duty of solidarity, beyond the distances and the differences that we see also in each of the groups we belong. Ultimately, Rromanipen could be defined in the same sentence as that defined universally - collective memory: this is what unites us beyond that what separates us.

On many occasions, this concept, which is ours, has been subjected to political development or to a romantic dream. As we discussed before, Rromanipen is not built on a Gadžikane fashioned memory, historical and institutionalized, but rather on the strength and power of these traces present both in the Rromani people

as in each of the individual members who constitute the community. For over 1,000 years and in every move we make on a daily basis in each Rromani household, from Istanbul to Santiago de Chile, via Bucharest, Sarajevo, Amsterdam, London, Paris and Granada, we reinterpret our history. In each of Rromani word, however used, we celebrate Rromanipen.

**If Rromanipen, this personal and profound feeling is so strong, why the need to reclaim our history?**

Considering Rromani history written by Rromani historians is to think of the idea of an entity provided with a national consciousness and history. Behind the writing of a history, it is difficult that there is no political dimension or protest. For centuries, the Rromani people have been the object of all kinds of research, scrutinized from all angles by all types of looks, from the most benevolent to the most contemptuous, which in one way or another have ended up as only playing into stereotypes and lies. The history of perceptions of majority society on our people shows that we have never been recognized for what we are. We were, and we are now, still largely a nation of model clay figures. From the romantic image of the wandering musician to the congenital antisocial image the Nazis created of us, to the mentally retarded in specialized Czech or Slovak institutions or the Gypsy woman dancer with blood of fire from the Sacromonte tableaux, we have been and we will remain, if we fail to be a player in our own culture, elaborations, creations of the gadjikane world.

Since *Aresaipe* (the Arrival of our people to Europe), our identity has been denied, which has been usurped and manipulated. Our history has been revised, more or less consciously, always prepared from a perspective and a different

sensitivity to that which experience we have within ourselves. Obviously, to study and understand the history of people to which one belongs is not a sine qua non; the quality of scientific work does not depend on the researcher's ethnic precedence but nobody can shake off cultural and emotional ties. The Rromani look and sensibility is essential for a sound study of our history.

Rromani historiography is young. It is still in a pre-adolescent phase, a key period which requires a questioning of identity and claim. Prejudice and racism are based inter alia on the handling and denial of the identity of the other. Retrieving, interpreting and promoting our history are therefore the most useful tools in overcoming the lack of self esteem and undoubtedly the most effective of weapons against stigma and xenophobia.

Moreover, a trend which is very popular in the field of anthropological, sociological and historical studies of our people consists of denying the sense of community that unites all the Rromani people in the world, thus minimizing the implications for us of Rromanipen. This tendency involves emphasizing the cultural differences of different groups that make up the Rromani people and underestimating or trivializing those aspects that unite us. The «divide et regna» (divide and rule), from the age-old principle, immortalized by Philip II of Macedonia, is a clearly effective *modus operandi*. Contrary to any healthy society, it would seem that for some, diversity is not, in the case of our people, perceived as an asset but rather as an element of division. These "Gypsyphiles" who (due to a lack of training of some and political leaning of others, imply that the Rroma are not people or an ethnic group or a community or even a culture as their references are incompatible with their classifications) are correctly branded as "negationists" by Ian Hancock in "The Pariah Syndrome" (1987) and the French history specialist Claire Auzias (2009).

The Rromani people are not outside the world. Our nation is bound to modernity and to the countries in which we live. We are citizens and can moreover affirm our rights that the countries grant us. In theory, racism is prohibited in our civilized world; there is therefore no measure that prohibits us in relation to anything on the basis of being Rromani. However, in practice, the opposite occurs. Our life is hell if we want to safeguard our cultural heritage, and our identity. And yet, this is where the real challenge and the real fight lies. Saving our heritage and identity in a world where for decades we are made to believe that the role model, one that applies - is that of the majority or dominant society. Many things will have changed when our people have regained their pride and confidence in themselves.

History is the mirror of the past but also that of the present, an instrument of knowledge or manipulation and a weapon of power, of development or of destruction. History is still to be realized.

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