Remarks on the Romani movement and inclusion policies

Dieter W. Halwachs (University of Graz)

2013


http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/virtuallibrary

The project RomIdent is financially supported by the HERA Joint Research Programme (www.heranet.info) which is co-funded by AHRC, AKA, DASTI, ETF, FNR, FWF, HAZU, IRCHSS, MHEST, NWO, RANNIS, RCN, VR and The European Community FP7 2007-2013, under the Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities programme.
Remarks on the Romani Movement and Inclusion Policies

Roma have been part of the European population and culture for centuries and contribute to the collective plurality of Europe as do the Basques, Greeks, Catalans, Celts, Magyars, Slavs, Turks and all other ethnocultural groups. Roma are, of course, also always part of the community of the respective region in which they are established—and most of them have been for centuries. Due to their distribution across Europe and beyond, they are as a whole perhaps the European population group with the highest degree of internal ethnocultural plurality, which results primarily from the different regional and national influences. This diversity is expressed in the different ethnocultural identity of each individual Romani community and every individual, which constitutes the typical European and the typical cultural human in general. The ethnic component, which is largely, although not solely, based on stereotypes, characterises the attitude of the dominant population groups toward Roma and thus stigmatises them collectively and individually. The background of this issue is primarily based on the history of discrimination, which extends all the way to genocide.

Despite centuries of sociocultural stigmatisation and socioeconomic marginalisation, reaching its negative peak in the genocide by the Nazi regime of terror, the situation of Roma has for centuries barely been noticed in the public–political sphere, let alone been present at the centre of a wider critical and empathic discourse. Such approaches go back to the eighteenth century but generally remain unnoticed. Published in 1782, Rüdiger's *Von der Sprache und Herkunft der Zigeuner aus Indien* broached the subject of prejudices against Roma and described their living conditions as "a political inconsistency which our enlightened century should be ashamed to continue to tolerate". Such opinions are subsequently found repeatedly in the bourgeois academic discourse, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, yet they were mostly only peripherally perceived, as were scientific papers on language and culture. The precarious situation of the Roma was eventually perceived by a wider public only in connection with serious emancipatory activities on the part of the Roma themselves.

Initial emancipation efforts at a regional and national level, *inter alia* in Poland and Romania, were made at the end of the nineteenth century and gained further importance in the 1920s, including the establishment of the All-Russian Gypsy Union in the Soviet Union in 1925. Yet, due to historical events, these efforts subsequently lost their relevance. It was only after the Second World War that organised efforts at emancipation...
were also made in Western Europe.\(^2\) The denial of fundamental rights for Roma, first and foremost not being accounted for within the so-called "reparation" for injustice suffered during the Nazi regime, and continuing discrimination led to the establishment of various organisations in the Federal Republic of Germany. The majority of these organisations finally merged into the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma in 1982.\(^3\) Roma in France, Great Britain, Sweden and other western European countries organised themselves similarly to those in Germany. Although Roma from eastern Europe, primarily from the former Yugoslavia, contributed substantially to the parallel onset of internationalisation in the process of self-organisation, it was dominated by western European associations. This was primarily due to the strict control and monitoring of any sociopolitical commitments in the socialist dictatorships of east and southern Europe which affected not so much the organisation in national associations, but restricted leadership participation at an international level in the West and usually reduced it to individual contributions.

Nevertheless, several organisations from the then Eastern European countries were represented among the 23 international organisations from 21 countries which participated in the First Romani World Congress in 1971. Apart from a flag and anthem symbolising the status of the Roma as a nation, there was an agreement during the meetings of this first world congress on the self-appellation *Roma*. Commissions were appointed who focused on the crimes committed against the Roma during the Second World War, the social situation and the educational situation, as well as language and culture. The official birth of the international Romani movement led to the creation of an umbrella organisation, the International Romani Union in 1977, under whose auspices further world congresses were organised. However, the contribution of internationalisation in the recognition of Roma as a national minority in various European states was far more important. Roma were thereby perceived as citizens by at least a fraction of the dominant population and had for the first time gained, even if limited, public political importance.

The process of social renewal initiated by the political changes in Eastern Europe from the end of the 1980s onward meant the Roma found themselves in even greater socio-economic distress due to their marginalisation.\(^4\) Yet, conversely, they were given the opportunity to actively participate in the process of change. Due to the low level of organisation within the Romani population in the individual countries and the possibilities for many Roma being reduced to a mere struggle for survival, this design perspective was very limited and associated with massive problems. This situation was only partly alleviated by supranational organisations such as the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe who had taken on a supportive role in solving the problems of the Roma at an early stage already.

\(^2\) An overview of the emancipation movement is available online at factsheets on Roma / history / 6.2 institutionalisation and emancipation at <http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/>.


The involvement of organisations such as the European Roma Rights Centre and the Open Society Institute was particularly important in this context. The activities of the Open Society Institute, *inter alia* in cooperation with the World Bank, were instrumental in the founding of the Roma Education Fund and the activities within the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-15.

Roma are thus now an integral part of the European political discourse, which, however, neither improves the socioeconomic situation of large parts of Europe's Romani population, nor significantly reduces the stigmatisation and discrimination in everyday life. The only striking difference as compared with the time prior to the public political recognition is the fact that a growing proportion within European society not only regards the Roma as a problem—as has been the case almost exclusively for centuries—but also recognises that Roma themselves have immense problems. The relevance of this dual problematisation has increased in the European political discourse with the eastern and south-eastern expansion of the European Union. The negative aspect—Roma as a problem—is used in a populist manipulative manner to fuel fears, primarily by formulating the assumption that Roma from the so-called new EU countries in eastern and south-eastern Europe could flood the wealthier, so-called old EU countries, thereby posing a security threat, as an assertion. Conversely, the precarious situation regarding access to education, housing, livelihoods or human rights as such—problems of the Roma—are a focus at the political level in the candidate countries. As a result, there are many calls for measures to improve the situation in the potential candidate countries. Whether these claims actually contribute to improving the situation of the Roma or whether they are in fact rather counterproductive remains to be seen, yet each specific one must be critically challenged.

Roma as Europe's numerically largest minority are, as was mentioned, clearly a topic in the current public political discourse. Depending on the respective media presence, their problems are repeatedly at the focus of public interest. They are, regarding this aspect, certainly emancipated. However, the actual emancipation objectives of being accepted as equivalent and equal before the law by a vast majority of Europeans are still distant for Roma.

The present thematic focus and the focus of this volume lies primarily in the context outlined above. It brings together both established and young scientists from different disciplines. The latter corresponds fully with the fundamentally interdisciplinary orientation of the by now established research field of Romani studies. All the authors have in common that as dedicated scientists and researchers they make an active contribution to the efforts of emancipation of the Roma through their activities and that they in part also actively take part in the relevant public discourse. Thematically, the contributions are divided into three areas:

- (Self)definition of the Roma / Defining Roma;
- The "Roma Issues" in Jurisprudence;
- Political Frameworks, Institutions and Participation.

The introductory area, (Self)definition of the Roma / Defining Roma, includes two contributions whose authors embody the composition of the entire group of authors from both established and young scientists who actively contribute to the efforts of emancipation. The contribution by Yaron Matras, one of the most distinguished scholars
in Romani Studies, which he has sustainably shaped and in whose establishment he has played a leading role, examines "how conceptions of Roma/Gypsy identity are entangled in the European political discourse today". His critical essay focuses on issues of identity and identification of Roma as well as the Romani movement and their political representation. Identity and identification are also a central topic in the work of Barbara Tiefenbacher, one of the young scientists whose profound research goes hand-in-hand with a high commitment for the concerns of the Roma. Her contribution takes the situation in Slovakia as a starting point to discuss the concept and the definitions and attributions of Romipen, 'Romani identity', with the suggested connection with post-colonial studies as an interesting aspect to highlight.

The second subject area, The "Roma Issues" in Jurisprudence, also includes two articles. Kristin Henrard discusses the approach of various institutions and departments of the Council of Europe to the complex issue of integration of Roma against the background of the human rights agenda, that is, the core business of the Council of Europe. She answers the implicit question posed in the subtitle "Abstract Principles versus Protection in Concreto" by providing a sound analysis leading to the clearly traceably conclusion that "the Council of Europe still has quite a long way to go regarding the effective protection in concreto of Roma, which counters their failed integration". Roberta Medda-Windischer's contribution is dedicated to the contrast in the definition of Roma as a socially disadvantaged group compared with the definition of them as national minorities in the supranational European context. This dichotomy was also one of the central questions of self-definition of the Romani movement of the 1970s and 1980s and was a particular focus during the world congresses organised by the International Romani Union. The submitted article is devoted to this subject on the basis of the findings and opinions of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe and connects the dichotomy of a national minority and a socially disadvantaged group with the closely related, always intense and controversial, issues of cultural diversity and social inclusion.

The third thematic area of focus, Political Frameworks, Institutions and Participation, is the most comprehensive. Five contributions reflect the intensity of the current ongoing discussion and deal with sociopolitical issues within the discipline of Romani studies. The first article by Peter Vermeersch, likely the leading political scientist within the field of Romani studies, discusses recent developments within the European Union that are relevant to the Roma. The contribution addresses both developments within the EU with regard to Roma, as well as reactions by the EU to general political developments concerning Roma and the associated interdependencies of both aspects. EU policies to integrate Roma are challenged, concluding inter alia that the EU's financial and symbolic support for Roma inclusion policies can only be successful by incorporation and the active participation of the respective majority population. The subsequent article by Yana Kavrakova also deals critically with integration issues on the basis of the developments in the states of south-eastern Europe, primarily Bulgaria. Whether or not these "good intentions" will develop into "concrete actions" is called into question in the summary of this article. Márton Rövid, who, like Yana Kavrakova, was at the PhD phase when writing his contribution, puts the triad "Solidarity, Citizenship, Democracy" in relation to "Romani Activism" and discusses integration and inclusion from a rather theoretical modelling perspective. Stephan Müller's article is, like the previous contributions to the
subject area, set in the interdisciplinary context of the political sciences. Starting from the EU’s European Framework for National Roma Integration Policies, which came into force in 2011, the author critically challenges their impact on the situation of the Roma in the western Balkans. The article’s central topics are also integration and inclusion. The Framework for National Roma Integration Policies is regarded as a step in the right direction, while at the same time, pointing out that more, and above all more realistic, measures are necessary for a distinctive sustainable change in the current situation of the Roma in these countries. As the title of Rumyan Russinov’s article "Segregation and the Roma" illustrates, the author discusses the downside of integration and inclusion, namely segregation, in concrete terms on the basis of a case study from Bulgaria. Among other issues, the analysis shows that Roma can only become an integral part of the respective society without preconditions of sociocultural assimilation if the necessary framework conditions are created by policies and if the majority population is positively disposed toward the integration of Roma. However, this situation and conditions do not currently exist in most countries with a relatively large proportion of Roma in the total population.

The underlying topic of all the contributions in this section is the subject of integration, the continuing segregation of Roma and the largely unsuccessful integration measures. The key observation in this context is the obvious and, to any rationally thinking individual, plausible fact that the integration of the Roma as equivalent citizens of a European national state who are equal before the law and who are simultaneously European citizens is only possible with the involvement and active participation of the dominant population groups. These are still trapped in a stereotyped image, reducing Roma to stereotypes as such nomadism, music, poverty, unemployment and illiteracy. This reduction to stereotypes to this day results in sociocultural stigmatisation and socioeconomic marginalisation, and causes inter alia the dual perception of the Roma as a problem with problems or rather challenges as outlined above. Persistent stigmatisation and marginalisation have led to a disproportionately high percentage of socially disadvantaged people with Romani roots, or rather a Romani background. Yet, explaining this fact by blaming ethnicity or labelling those who declare themselves as Roma or are allocated to them as socially marginalised and problematic is a convenient simplification of social complexity, a common ingredient of political populism in times of increasing erosion of solidarity in profit-maximising societies. Symptoms of this short-sighted ethnicisation of social problems range from the equation of Roma with problems with beggars in many, especially western European, cities, to the so-called Roma strategy of the European Union. In both cases, social problems and their effects are ethnically occupied, simplified and thus stereotyped, which in turn promotes discrimination and racism. Instead of countering the socioeconomic marginalisation of people within the framework of an overall social strategy from local to supra-national level, the social malaise is misleadingly suggestive of a simple and thus politically populist functional explanatory model through simple ethnic labelling, which obstructs and even prevents sensible problem-solving approaches. Although it is necessary to address the ethnic discrimination of Roma as a cause for the disproportionately high percentage of the socially disadvantaged within this population, it is however counterproductive to put this fact at centre stage when the overcoming of the resultant social problems are to be dealt with. Against this background, any ethnicising of social problems is to be vehemently rejected and to be called racist.