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1

Introduction: Romani Politics in Neoliberal Europe

Nando Sigona and Nidhi Trehan

> Liberalism was never a doctrine of the Left; it was always the quintessential centrist doctrine. Its advocates were sure of their moderation, their wisdom, and their humanity. They arrayed themselves simultaneously against an archaic past of unjustified privilege (which they considered to be represented by conservative ideology) and a reckless levelling that took no account of either virtue or merit (which they considered to be represented by socialist/radical ideology). Liberals have always sought to define the rest of the political scene as made up of two extremes between which they fall.
>
> (Wallerstein 1995: 1–2)

> What was needed instead [...] was public action to provide decent housing and jobs, a clamp down on exploitation of migrant workers and support [for] economic development in Europe's neighbours. That opportunity has now been lost, as Italy is gripped by an ominous and retrograde spasm.
>
> (Milne, *The Guardian*, 10 July 2008 [comment on rising anti-Romani violence in Italy])

Europe in the last two decades has experienced unprecedented economic, political and social transformations – the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states, the neoliberal restructuring of post-WWII welfare systems in Western (as well as Eastern) states, the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the enlargement of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the European

Union to include former socialist countries, and a growing economic crisis – all these pivotal events define this period.

The new geopolitical order has brought with it an affirmation and consolidation of neoliberal policies and polities throughout Europe (most markedly within many EU Member States), and the redefinition of the political and ideological boundaries of Europe (cf. Gowan 1995). Two visible by-products of this phenomenon have been the increasing marginalization and pauperization of groups, which do not, for various reasons, 'fit' the new socio-economic regime. Amongst these are millions of Romani citizens, for whom chronic unemployment and social exclusion have become the norm. This has been coupled with the emergence and spread of extreme-right political movements with a markedly anti-immigrant and anti-Gypsy agenda.

This introduction is divided into three parts. In the first part, we discuss two key issues: a) the impact of neoliberal policies on the socio-economic situation of Romani communities in Europe, and in particular, in former socialist countries; and b) the rise and spread of violent forms of anti-Gypsyism in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union (and its satellite states) and the crisis of European socialism. We subsequently explore the relationship between these two phenomena. In the second part, we outline the institutional responses to these phenomena, their motivations and rationale (in particular, the fear of westward migration of Roma) and the emergence, salience and limitations of minority and human rights frameworks. In the final section of this introductory chapter, we look at the spaces of political participation for Romani communities and the issue of leadership in the context of the critique of the neoliberal racialization of political spaces occurring in Europe.

Neoliberalism, poverty and anti-Gypsyism

The profound shifts in economic policy towards neoliberal market principles in the 1990s in the former socialist countries of Europe (in some cases, a 'shock therapy') resulted in catastrophic unemployment for many Roma. Although some scholars have discussed the adverse implications of 'liberal democratic transitions' in former socialist states for Roma in particular (Bárány 2001; Pogány 2004; Kovats 1998; Guy 2001; Bancroft 2005; Klimová-Alexander 2005), few have analysed the impacts of neoliberal ideologies which have

dominated Europe since the 1980s (cf. Templer 2006). Only recently have Western NGOs and European governments begun to discuss the scale of the challenges posed by the past two decades of neglect and poor policy interventions vis-à-vis Roma in Europe (Ringold et al. 2003; Cahn 2002; Kósáné Kovács 2009; Cretu 2009; Járóka 2009). It appears as if the European policy-making elite in post-socialist Europe was concentrated in one corner of the room focusing on an American-led 'democratization' and a civil and political rights enhancement agenda (via legislative and 'rule-of-law' reforms), while the social and economic (material) conditions of Romani communities went neglected in the opposite corner for many years.

The belated recognition of Europe's Roma as the 'biggest losers' of the transition from communism to neoliberal capitalism has been part of the mainstream political discourse only since 2003, when two key figures of the global neoliberal economy – the former president of the World Bank James Wolfensohn, and George Soros,[1] a billionaire philanthropist who played a crucial role in the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the 'Americanization' of Eastern Europe – declared:

> Roma have been among the biggest losers in the transition from communism since 1989. They were often the first to lose their jobs in the early 1990's, and they have been persistently blocked from re-entering the labor force due to their often inadequate skills and pervasive discrimination. (Wolfensohn and Soros 2003: 1)

However, this label of 'losers of the transition' does not in itself suggest possible ways forward, nor does it embody the actual crisis that Romani communities across Central and Eastern Europe have been mired in since their experience of relative upward mobility (in terms of labour market access, education, housing and, in some aspects, even political participation) of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s came to an abrupt halt, resulting in increasing impoverishment and growing marginalization.

The promise of prosperity and wealth brought by Western capitalism never reached a large majority of the Romani population of Central and Eastern Europe who had, long before the current economic crisis, at the height of 'neoliberal' wealth creation in Europe during the 1990s, begun to experience *declining* household incomes. These were the results of large-scale factory closures and the shift from a command economy to laissez-faire capitalism which effectively

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squeezed out Roma from the labour market *en masse* (cf. Guy 2001; Barány 2001; Kovats 1998). For example, the employment statistics for Roma in Hungary (considered to be one of the most advanced socialist states practicing a 'mixed economy') speak for themselves: in 1985, the employment rate for Romani men was almost on par with that of the general male population, hovering around 85%; today in 2009, an estimated 70% (or more) of Hungarian Romani men are unemployed. Add to this the incidence of chronic poverty and malnutrition amongst European citizens of Romani origin across the EU, and the figures are sobering: for two recent Member States – Bulgaria and Romania – the figures for poverty rates of Romani citizens in 1997 were 84.3% and 78.8% respectively. Further, absolute deprivation can be seen in the rates of child under-nourishment of countries in the region:[2] Bulgaria is the most extreme example, where, across its society, over 50% of children are 'constantly starving', in Romania this figure is over 40%, in Hungary, just under 10%, followed by Czech Republic at 7% and Slovakia at 3% (Ringold et al. 2003; UNDP 2002). That is why it is not a coincidence that Romani communities comprise a 'Third World' in Europe today and that a majority of Roma living in Central Eastern Europe believe their living conditions were better in the past (in Romania and Slovakia a striking 80% of respondents for example, cf. UNDP 2002).

In parallel to structurally induced marginalization resulting from rapid economic transformations along neoliberal lines, the transition to the 'free market' in former socialist countries also occurred in the context of a major reconfiguration of the political map of Europe. The transition forced former nomenclatures and emerging political *élites* to engage in a battle for the definition of a new 'social contract' between the democratic state and its citizens, producing new narratives of belonging and redefining the boundaries of the 'nation' – in Brubaker's words 'reframing nationalism' (1996). This process was mirrored by similar processes evolving within Western European democracies that, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, had lost their 'nemesis'. The loss of the ideological, political and institutional backing of the USSR triggered a radical reshaping of progressive political and social forces in Western Europe and the disappearance or significant downsizing of Western Communist parties.

The massive reorganization of political spaces along national lines therefore defines the context of the (re)emergence of various

nationalist movements (Barány 2001; Cordell and Wolff 2004; Muller 2008), and the appearance or singling out of new public enemies (or the rediscovery of old ones, cf. Sigona 2003, 2009). Creating the 'enemy' is a crucial factor in the making of a feeling of shared belonging, and national identity is many times defined in its relation to the Other (Bauman 1992). What we have witnessed since the early 1990s in the post-socialist region is not a novel phenomenon, as the following statement by Lord Acton confirms. Writing in 1862 at a time when the European political landscape was dominated by empires, he noted:

> By making the state and the nation commensurate with each other in theory, [nationalism] reduces practically to a subject condition all other nationalities that may be within the boundary [...] According, therefore, to the degree of humanity and civilization in that dominant body which claims all the rights of the community, the inferior races are exterminated, or reduced to servitude, or outlawed, or put in a condition of dependence. (cited in Muller 2008)

With respect to Romani citizens, it is crucial to understand how the concept of 'Socialist citizen' or 'comrade' underwent a swift transformation at this juncture, and was subsumed by a relatively reductionist concept of 'nation' (the majority ethnic group in power), and thus Roma began to be viewed as no longer part of the broader citizenry (now increasingly equated with the majority 'nation') within former Socialist countries (cf. Guy 2001; Trehan 2009). In Western Europe, due to their perceived 'alienness' and 'Otherness' (cf. Heuss 2000; Lee 2005), Roma were never fully part of the body politic in the first place, indeed, there had never been a conscious attempt in post-WWII Western Europe to engineer this. Attempts, therefore, at integrating Roma within the Socialist bloc countries were rendered stillborn by the early 1990s, after nearly 40 years of upward mobility of many formerly disenfranchised Roma (many of whom had become 'proletarians') came to a standstill.[3] Commenting on the 'bitter experiences' of Roma during the transition, Will Guy wrote:

> The initial promise of democratic freedoms and the satisfaction at the long-awaited recognition of their ethnic identity soon turned sour. Instead, they were left exposed – to the ruthless logic of a

> fledgling market economy in which they were made redundant, to the moral vacuum of a legal interregnum in which they were left defenceless against an upsurge of murderous racism and to democratically-elected governments which were uninterested in a constituency without electoral power. (2001: xv)

Today, in 2009, it is clear that these phenomena are becoming amplified, and moreover, are no longer the preserve of former socialist countries, but are being witnessed in Western Europe as well. Long-standing unresolved tensions and the current climate of economic recession appear to be generating a resurgence of violence (for example, in Hungary, Italy, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Russia). And the re-emergence of anti-Romani racism, hate speech and violence is not a *niche* phenomena limited to a few extreme right groups and parties. Quite the opposite, it is part of a broader political process of ideological readjustment after the collapse of socialist regimes that involves the majority of citizens within European societies. The results of two polls by Eurobarometer (2007, 2008) confirm this point: 24% of EU citizens would not like to have Roma as neighbours (amongst them, fully 47% of Czech and Italian citizens).[4] Some suggest these latest results underestimate the actual level of rejection and hostility towards Roma.[5] According to Michael Guet, a senior civil servant at the Council of Europe who specializes on Romani issues:

> While the social and political debate on all forms of anti-Semitism and xenophobia relies on a variety of instruments, beginning with education up to advocacy with political and social representatives as well as legal restrictions, anti-Gypsyism remains almost a normal thing to which no attention needs to be drawn. (2008: 5)

This lack of interest in the forms of persecution and discrimination against Roma is also illustrated in the paucity of historiography on the persecution of Roma and Sinti (including the Holocaust), suggesting a deep and pervasive denial within European societies (cf. Bernadac 1996; Hancock 1987; Heuss 2000). Moreover, as Nicolae (2008: 1) emphasizes, '[D]espite the fact that anti-Gypsyism fits academic descriptions of racism [...] analyses of racism have by and large ignored or simply paid cursory attention to the plight of the Roma.' Nonetheless, a wave of scholarship is emerging which builds upon

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earlier works by Romani and non-Romani scholars in this arena, attempting to offer a more nuanced analysis of both state practices vis-à-vis Roma, and the response of, and impact on the Romani communities themselves (cf. Kapralski 1997; Oprea 2004; van Baar 2008; Trehan and Kóczé 2009; Sigona 2003, 2005, 2009).

Increasing anti-Romani racism and socio-economic segregation of Romani communities are two separate, though connected phenomena that adversely impact on the life chances of millions of Roma throughout Europe. Neither is contemporary racism the sole cause of Romani socio-economic segregation, which has deep historical, structural and policy roots; nor is poverty *per se* a reason for the resurgence of violent racism against Roma, though it does render Romani communities and individuals ever more vulnerable to scapegoating. Racism is one of the main obstacles Roma encounter in gaining access to the job market; and poverty can also become a trigger for anti-Romani racism if Roma are perceived as squandering limited welfare resources.

Both phenomena are crucial push factors behind Romani migration in contemporary Europe. We will come back to migration later; for the moment suffice to say that the attempts to control and deter this mainly westward migration by western European Member States has had a significant impact not only on the public opinion in the respective states fostering a 'tidal wave' syndrome, but affected also indigenous Romani populations who had to cope with growing anti-Romani hostility.

How policy makers, human rights entrepreneurs and Romani activists and politicians frame the nature of the relationship between poverty and racism has important consequences for the policies and programmes developed to address the 'Roma issue'.

Responses to the status quo and the emergence of EU discourse on Roma

In the 1990s, as a response to the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of millions of Roma and to growing anti-Gypsy violence, human rights and minority rights discourses and regimes emerged, consolidating alongside an embryonic Romani political movement (Guy 2001; Kovats 2003; Pogány 2004; Trehan 2001, 2009; Vermeersch 2001, 2005, 2006). In line with the practices of primarily

American human rights INGOs (International Non-Governmental Organizations) and foundations which played a major role in this process, these rights discourses tended to emphasize the primacy of civil and political rights, at the expense of economic and social rights (which only emerged after 2000 vis-à-vis Roma). The imprint of neoliberalism on the generation of human rights discourses and discursive practices surrounding the rights agenda remains particularly strong in Eastern Europe (cf. Trehan in this volume) and has gained more ground in the West following the enlargement of the EU. These discourses were mostly a by-product of the 'rule of law', 'democratization' and human rights priorities championed by American and Euro-Atlantic liberal and neoliberal political elites (Ali 2007; Bourdieu 1998; Guilhot 2005; Harvey 2005).

Unsurprisingly, the neoliberal gaze on Roma privileges spaces and forms of political mobilization which are ultimately 'safe' because they do not pose a threat to the assumptions on which the neoliberal order rests, and hence do not confront nor address the structural causes of the socio-economic marginality that affects the vast majority of Romani communities. Mainstream human and minority rights discourses operate within the neoliberal order providing an 'acceptable', although inadequate, we argue, framework for understanding and addressing Romani marginalization and anti-Gypsyism (cf. Balibar and Wallerstein 1991).

From an institutional point of view, the EU's direct involvement with European Roma dates back to the early 1990s and was at first mediated via the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Council of Europe (CoE). The preoccupation with the westward mobility of Roma was at this point the main, if not only, concern of Western countries who initially responded to this perceived 'threat' by adopting mainly repressive and deterrence measures (i.e. bilateral agreements for fast track repatriation; lists of 'safe countries'; corrosion of the right of asylum; introduction of severe visa restrictions and enhanced police border cooperation) (Matras 2000; Sobotka 2003). Gradually, we witnessed a shift in policy towards a 'mixed approach' that tried to anchor Romani people to their countries of origin (and citizenship) by improving their living conditions there.

An important step in this direction was the decision taken at the Copenhagen EU Council summit in 1993 to include the protection

of minorities among the criteria accession states had to fulfil in order to join the EU. However, minority protection was initially a matter of concern exclusively for CEE (Central and Eastern Europe) countries, as Western EU Member States did not want to be held accountable for the condition of their indigenous Romani communities (Sasse 2006; Tesser 2003; Guglielmo and Waters 2005). Safeguarding the separation between the condition of Western Romani communities and Eastern ones was essential for preserving the legitimacy of the EU's discourse on minority protection. This is also recorded in the shift of the EU discourse on Roma as discussed in Simhandl's chapter in this collection.

Crucially, the EU enlargement process, along with the concomitant increase in Romani migration resulting from precarious circumstances in home countries, is transforming the demography of Romani populations in Western states (cf. Cahn and Guild 2008).[6] This demographic shift has also forced a change of approach within EU Member States and institutions, triggering a chain of reactions which this volume attempts to capture in the making. According to one Socialist MEP (Member of European Parliament) from Romania, Gabriella Cretu (2009):

> A European solution to the problems the Roma people are currently dealing with needs to observe several essential principles. Roma are citizens like any of us, although many of the Roma people are currently found in a more vulnerable position, due to discrimination and poverty.

It is the arrival of Romani migrants in Western Europe – initially as asylum seekers escaping the wars which partitioned Yugoslavia and the threat of violent persecution resulting from resurgent nationalism in other post-socialist states; later, primarily as economic migrants following the lifting of the visa regimes on EU accession countries, and eventually as full EU citizens – that calls into question the separation between the Eastern and Western halves of Europe (cf. Balibar 2004). It also reveals the fiction of a Romani population intrinsically *alien* to the EU, despite the fact that many countries have long established and numerically significant indigenous Romani communities. Importantly, the enlargement has also made the mobility of Romani EU citizens an 'internal affair' (Gugliemo and Waters 2005).

This, of course, does not mean that Romani migration westwards is no longer perceived as a 'problem' by European policy-makers, but migration occurs now within an entirely different legal framework. Respectively, the chapters on Spain (Laparra and Macías, chapter 11) and Italy (Sigona, chapter 13) offer insights into the encounter between indigenous Gitanos and Romanian Roma migrants, and the process of the denial of Italian Romani and Sinti political subjectivities through their conflation with foreign Roma.

These demographic and policy changes have produced a domino effect: producing a shift in the public perception of the 'Gypsy issue', hence placing the issue back on the political agenda (for example, Michael Howard's 2005 electoral campaign in Britain, see also Richardson and Ryder, chapter 12). This in turn has driven the development of new representative bodies and organizations both at the national (for example, the *Federazione Rom e Sinti Insieme* in Italy) and international levels, pushing existing Romani organizations to open up to newcomers and raise important questions on the making of a common European Romani identity and its limits.

More recently, we witnessed another important change. The episodes of violence and racism which emerged in Italy during November 2007 played a crucial role in pushing the EU to acknowledge that the 'Roma issue' is relevant to the whole EU and not only to new Member States (cf. Guy, chapter 2, and Mohácsi, chapter 6).

Ethnopolitics and socio-economic segregation: challenges to Romani politics

> There is no question that the Roma of the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first are in the most uncertain period of their European history. In which direction their newly born ethnonationalism will evolve, which paths the elites will choose to guide their people into the next century, and what strategies they will employ to reach their political goals – all of these are still open questions.
>
> (Mirga and Gheorghe 1997)

Twelve years after Mirga and Gheorghe's seminal paper on 'The Roma in the Twenty-First Century', the contentious issues of direction,

leadership and goals continue to remain 'open questions'' in the Romani movement (cf. Acton 1974; Kawczynski 1997; Vermeersch 2001). Nonetheless, this statement also reflects a relatively unproblematic perspective on the relationship between Romani communities and the Romani political elite, thereby reproducing the 'classic' hierarchical model of elite/mass relations based on nineteenth century nationalist frameworks and nation-building discourses in Europe. Indeed, despite the fact that the roots of post-socialist nationalism clearly emanate from the nineteenth century European nationalist tradition (a tradition that the socialist regimes disavowed and attempted to suppress), after 1989, 'new' political elites in post-socialist Europe (including some Romani political elites) drew heavily upon the very same legacy to shape and frame new nationalist projects. The exclusion of Roma and other minorities is partly the result of this process.

However, unlike the ethnonationalisms exhibited by nation-states with modern armies and extensive bureaucratic infrastructures, the case of Romani ethnonationalism is more of *a reaction to* the broader resurgent ethnonationalist (post-socialist) power struggles of Europe (in some cases, a strategic response by communities under siege, even though it may bear little fruit). Romani ethnonationalism therefore must be differentiated from those of actually existing nation-states (cf. Trehan, chapter 3, for an analysis on the potential role of organic intellectuals in the development of alternative policy priorities in Romani communities).

The enlargement of the EU to include Central and Eastern European states is the defining event of this period and has profoundly affected the trajectory of Romani politics. As Kovats (2003) exhorts, 'neither Roma politics itself, nor the Roma issue in general, should be considered in isolation from the wider political environment in Europe'. Furthermore, he identifies two essential characteristics of this political environment in particular: growing inequality and societal fragmentation along ethnic lines. The use of ethnic identity as a signifier in political struggle is therefore instrumental in key ways to the utilization of existing political and institutional opportunity structures (Koopmans and Statham 2000; McGarry 2008).

As some of the contributions in this volume demonstrate, the political environments, both at the EU and the national levels in which select Romani representatives operate, are not only defined by

policies driven by neoliberalism, but are also immersed in broader neoliberal discourses and institutional frameworks which mark the spaces and possibilities of political mobilization by defining both 'the problem' and its solution. Moreover, as analysed in detail in Trehan's chapter, INGOs have played a decisive role in setting the agenda for the Romani movement.[7] To what extent this has been done in collaboration with Romani communities and in response to their actual needs, or by indoctrinating a young Romani leadership sympathetic to the priority of donors, is open to discussion (see the interview with Mustafa and Salijevic, chapter 10). Certainly Dušan Ristic, a Serbian Romani artist and activist invited by the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) to contribute to a round-table discussion on 'The Romani movement: what shape, what direction?', sees 'the Romani movement' as something of a misnomer:

> On a larger level, the Romani movement does not exist. [...] To be honest, in reality, to me it looks more as if non-Romani people are presently making the Romani movement, with the participation of some Roma. (ERRC 2001)

Nonetheless, the dominant discourse is beginning to be contested and, as the chapters by Nirenberg, Kóczé and Rostas illustrate, there is space for resistance and contestation by Romani intellectuals and interlocutors. Moreover, through direct street action against neoliberal cuts to the welfare state (as in the case of Slovakia), and through state policies and institutional practices (as in Spain, where socio-economic indicators suggest that the overall material condition of Spanish Gitanos has improved in past decades), the diversity of political engagement vis-à-vis Roma is demonstrated.

In this collection, contributors provide several original and multidisciplinary perspectives on how European enlargement has affected the direction of Romani politics and the challenges which lie ahead, some of which are particular to the history of political mobilization of Roma in Eastern and Western Europe (for example, on the concept of 'democratic deficit', see Acton and Klimová 2001), whilst others are inherent to ethnopolitical mobilization itself.

Romani politics is a product of its times and it is an expression of the multiplicity of interests and political orientations which exist amongst the Romani communities of Europe. Some of these voices

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are included in this collection. Such a variety of interests and agendas often clash with the process of 'Europeanization of the Roma issue' as well as the pressure from international Romani leadership and non-Romani advocates to generate one Romani voice at the European level (see Nirenberg, chapter 5).

In 2001, Dimitrina Petrova, founder and former executive director of the ERRC, confidently proclaimed, 'it would seem that the human rights agenda is a unifying factor in a movement otherwise fragmented and conflictual' (Petrova in ERRC 2001). Today, after 20 years of failed promises of progress and wealth for all, it would seem that this consensus around the human rights and minority rights agenda is being called into question. Dissonant voices can be heard nowadays not only at the fringes of the neoliberal power structure, but also at its very core. MEP Livia Járóka, a Romani Hungarian politician for the centre-right party FIDESZ (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége/Magyar Polgári Szövetség), has made it clear in recent public statements that there is a need to move beyond the anti-discrimination paradigm which has failed to provide answers to the socio-economic marginalization of a large section of the European Romani population. She argues:

> The Roma in Europe are at a similar level as people of sub-Saharan Africa. But in this they don't differ from other underprivileged social groups. Therefore, I do not want a special Commissioner for Roma affairs in Brussels. This is a cross-cutting issue, which should be located with the commissioners who are concerned about health, education, working conditions and social welfare issues. [...] Instead of wasting its time on mini projects for small charities, the state should itself become more involved. [...] Why can't the state operate factories in regions with high unemployment? (Járóka 2009)

Summary of the book

The book is divided into two main parts, and is a collection of contributions from a variety of disciplinary fields bringing together Romani and non-Romani scholars, activists and politicians alike. Part One – The Romani Political Space in Europe – explores the making of the 'Romani issue' at the European level, tracing the key trajectories of Romani political development from the 1970s to the

contemporary scene. Part Two – Domestic Perspectives – examines the national and local levels of political engagement. As a whole, the book places emphasis on the multiple dimensions and levels within the sphere of Romani politics (EU, state, regional, local and self-organization).

Taking as a starting point the fact that two decades after the collapse of Communist rule, and a full decade after the intensification of EU assistance to prepare former Socialist countries for EU membership, the situation of Europe's largest ethnic minority remains desperate, *Will Guy* reflects on EU initiatives for Romani communities as overseen by the Commission, and identifies limitations which prompt questions about how to continue.

Nidhi Trehan explores the position of the Romani subaltern within post-socialist European civil society, examining the confluence of neoliberalism and the 'NGO-ization' of the Romani movement. She explores the impact of these phenomena on broader questions of autonomy within the movement and the struggle for social justice, suggesting that the emergence of organic intellectuals working to strengthen community-level activity is one way forward.

Katrin Simhandl analyses the discourse on 'Gypsies', 'Travellers' and 'Roma' within the sphere of the institutions of the EU since the 1970s. She argues that the conceptualization of 'Gypsies'/'Roma' as an essentialist category forms the overall basis of the discourse. Building upon the most general, essentialist foundation of the EU discursive framework, she identifies three phases of the discourse, each guided by different interpretative patterns.

But how have Roma themselves mobilized in such a context? In his chapter, *Jud Nirenberg* investigates how the history of Romani political culture shapes the largest umbrella groups in Romani civil society today and their interaction with European policy-makers. In an interview with Nidhi Trehan, *Viktória Mohácsi*, Romani Hungarian MEP, reflects on her experiences working in the Hungarian NGO sector, as well as being a government minister responsible for the integration of Romani children in the school system. She then draws connections between these experiences and her work within the European Parliament and the battle for a comprehensive EU Roma strategy.

In the last chapter of Part One, *Angéla Kóczé* analyses various manifestations of 'Romani women's issues' in European public discourse, in particular the issue of forced sterilization which has

primarily affected Romani women. She reflects on how such egregious practices by the State indirectly support the construction of a pan-European Romani political identity, wherein Romani leaders (mostly men) portray Romani women as the symbolic repository of collective identity. She also interrogates the intervention of Western liberal feminist discourse on those issues identified as 'Romani women's issues', in particular, early marriage.

In Part Two, *Iulius Rostas* explores the ways in which Roma participate in public life in Romania, providing an assessment of the degree of institutionalization of Romani organizations, the way they operate and the causes of the weak mobilization of the Roma.

Martin Marušak and *Leo Singer* focus on the remarkable events of the winter of 2003/2004 in Slovakia when a wave of social unrest and organized street protests circulated in the Romani communities as a direct reaction to the cuts in social benefits provision by the then prevailingly neoliberal government.

Avdula (Dai) Mustafa and *Gazmen Salijevic*, Romani activists in Kosovo, discuss with Nando Sigona the reasons for the failure of so many EU- and internationally-financed projects and initiatives to improve the socio-economic conditions of Roma, Askhali and Egyptians in post-war Kosovo. The chapter also provides some critical insights on the impact of the international community on local political dynamics and inter-ethnic relations, and on the relationship between Kosovo's Romani diaspora and those who remained or were returned to Kosovo.

Miguel Laparra and *Almudena Macías* describe the situation of the Spanish Gypsy community (*Gitanos*) and reveal how it has experienced growing integration since the 1950s, with improvements in education, housing and employment. They also investigate the recent arrival of Romani people from Eastern Europe to Spain, examining the relationship between indigenous *Gitanos* and foreign Romani migrants, thereby problematizing the idea of a common, shared Romani identity.

Jo Richardson and *Andrew Ryder* explore the effectiveness of new accommodation policies for Gypsies and Travellers in England that were introduced from 1997 onwards by the New Labour government, in an attempt to increase social inclusion for these minority groups.

Finally, *Nando Sigona* discusses experiences, possibilities and obstacles to the political participation of Roma and Sinti in Italy at the local level. He investigates the role of the 'Gypsy issue' in the political

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manifestos and electoral campaigns of the main political parties and coalitions, the media coverage of Roma and Sinti issues during the electoral campaign for local elections, and Romani and Sinti views on and experiences of political participation within local politics.

Notes

1. For a critical assessment of the role of George Soros and his interpretations of Karl Popper's concept of 'Open Society', see Clark (2003).
2. These are general country-wide statistics and not specific to Romani communities.
3. Indeed, large numbers of Roma who previously practised traditional occupations were integrated into the Socialist labour markets across the region (cf. Guy 2001; Stewart 1997).
4. It is noteworthy that even in countries without sizeable Romani communities (i.e. Denmark and Malta) we encounter similar results to countries with far larger populations. The notion of the 'mythical Gypsy' continues to be anchored in the collective European imagination and is perpetuated in literature, academic works and perhaps most critically, the media, serving as a receptacle of all things negative: child kidnapping, thievery, criminality, etc. to which the majority society then counterpoints with itself (cf. Trehan and Kóczé 2009).
5. The result of a poll carried out in 2007 in Italy seems to confirm this. According to the Institute for the Study of the Public Opinion (ISPO 2008), the large majority of Italians (72%) have a negative image of Roma, with 47% viewing Roma and Sinti as thieves, delinquents and criminals and 35% associating them with marginalization, degradation, poverty and homelessness (ISPO 2008; Arrigoni and Vitale 2008). See also Dral (2006) on the end of 'our Roma' sympathies by the majority in Slovakia. This is crucial as it is important to understand that across Eastern Europe, many Romani communities were sheltered by the local power structures (mayors, etc.) in defiance of fascist regimes during the Second World War. The broader point is that Roma have been seen as 'contributors' to European societies in the past (cf. Csalog 1994).
6. In Italy, for example, the arrival of Romani war refugees and economic migrants from the successor republics of former Yugoslavia and, more recently, from Romania has changed the balance between Italian Roma and Sinti and foreign Roma (Sigona 2009).
7. It is not a coincidence that Mirga and Gheorghe's paper was funded and nurtured by the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER), a US-based NGO whose board of directors include several former US ambassadors. According to its website, one of PER's key aims is 'to identify and to prepare a modern Romani elite to be an independent force in the interethnic dialogue about the Romani communities of Central and Southeastern Europe' (www.per-usa.org).

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