

CHALLENGING BORDERS AND CONSTRUCTING BOUNDARIES: AN ANALYSIS OF ROMA POLITICAL PROCESSES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to show the process by which Roma elite members actually construct political and cultural boundaries and at the same time propose a deterritorialised version of a Nation across state borders. As a result, the nation-building project and the process of ethnicisation promoted by Roma activists and members of the elite can be understood as a process of challenging borders and setting up boundaries. On the one hand, state borders may represent the barrier to surmount in order to accomplish an alliance based on a supposed ethnic category. On the other hand, the analysis of Roma identity and political strategies reveals the different forms of boundaries that may exist and how they may in fact be created and manipulated.

KEY WORDS: Roma communities, nationalism, ethnogenesis, identity strategies.

ANOTACIJA

Straipsnyje siekiama atskleisti socialinius procesus, kuriuose romų elito atstovai siekia nustatyti savo bendruomenės politinio ir kultūrinio gyvenimo ypatybes. Kartu jie kuria tautos gyvensenos modelį nepibrėžtose teritorijose, nepaisant valstybių sienų. Šiuos tautos etninio konsolidavimo procesus galima vertinti ir kaip romų bendruomenės aktyvistų bei lyderių siekius panaikinti sienas ar kitas kliūtis, trukdančias žmonių bendravimui, ir kaip bandymus nustatyti kitokias, savitas šio proceso ribas. Viena vertus, valstybių sienos gali sudaryti objektyvias kliūtis, kurias reikia įveikti siekiant suvienyti žmones, atstovaujančius vienai ir tai pačiai etninei kategorijai. Kita vertus, romų tapatumo ir jų politinės strategijos tyrimai liudija skirtingas minėtų ribų formacijas bei realias jų atsiradimo bei kitimo tendencijas.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: romų bendruomenės, nacionalizmas, etnogenezė, tapatumo strategijos.

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“We, the Roma Nation” is the title of the declaration of a Roma Nation presented by the International Romani Union in 2001. How is it that at the start of the 21st century a geographically dispersed group, neither culturally nor linguistically homogeneous, not socially cohesive, marginal nor marginalised for centuries issues this proclamation?¹ Why now, when some scholars predict the decline of nation-states and national belonging, and why not at the time of national ‘awakening’ in the 19th century? Which is the process that led to this assertion? No political process has a clear-cut answer, and neither does this one.

The ideas presented here are the result of a research² done in different Central and South East European countries on Roma identity strategies. Between 2002 and 2008 local researchers in Bulgaria,

¹ It should be noted, however, that some authors mention that the idea about a Gypsy state occurred for the first time already in the 1920’s (See: Marushiakova & Popov 2005, Hancock 2002). The idea of a Gypsy state, linked to the search of a territory to establish it, contrasts with that of a Roma Nation, in which the ambition of a territorial state has disappeared.

² This qualitative research was organised by the Institute of Social Anthropology at the University of Fribourg, in Switzerland and Ethnobarometer, which is a network of independent social scientists working on inter-ethnic relations and migration in Europe, based in Italy (www.ethnobarometer.org).

Macedonia, Romania and Republic of Moldova carried out several interviews with Roma people. The information gathered through these interviews was then compared with more macro-level political processes. The research was specially focused on identity strategies of Roma people. We have taken into account that Roma is not a homogeneous category, thus interviews were made with the average Roma as well as with Roma belonging to the political, intellectual or economic elite.

From the outside, Roma are generally regarded as a single group. However, we realised that Roma usually stress differences among themselves, even between Roma and Gypsy, and express their loyalty to a particular group. Consequently, there is not a single Roma group, but several Roma and Roma-related groups³. From this empirical reality, we considered interesting to observe the ways in which some organisations and identity managers construct a sense of groupness and belonging. This group distinction is made possible through the establishment of boundaries. The purpose of this article is to show the process by which Roma elite members actually construct political and cultural boundaries and at the same time propose a deterritorialised version of a Nation across state borders.

Roma and Roma-related groups are interesting communities to analyse borders and boundaries. On the one hand, the presence of borders may be of great symbolic significance or, on the other hand, the symbolism may lie in the fading of borders. In the case of Roma communities, state borders may represent the barrier to surmount in order to accomplish an alliance based on a supposed ethnic category. The analysis of Roma identity and political strategies reveals the different forms of boundaries that may exist and how they may in fact be created and manipulated.

Roma geographical distribution

Let's begin by considering Roma geographical borders. Since they do not have a state, they neither have a geographical border of their own. Roma communities are scattered all over Central, South and Eastern Europe in particular, but, due to migration and increased mobility, there are also many in North and South America, Turkey, Israel, and North Africa. So there is a manifest geographical dispersion of Roma communities. These include several groups living between the borders, and across the borders.

We should add, however, that this international dispersion contrasts with the spatial segregation in the towns and cities where they live. In most countries, for instance in Romania or Bulgaria, Roma live in the outskirts of the cities, in special and defined neighbourhoods, or even in a specific road. Thus, there are borders for Roma in towns, not real ones but nonetheless effective, which delimit their space of living. The physical isolation of Roma communities in each country they live in is clearly evident. This is the result of a process coming from both members of the majority that want "the undesirable Gypsies far away" and some Roma who prefer isolation. The data from the interviews in Bulgaria reveals that the Roma living in the Roma neighbourhoods prefer their own micro-environment, where everybody knows each other. Furthermore, the research data suggests that the majority of Roma have always preferred the life among their own group, which is socially and culturally more acceptable than the one outside⁴. Consequently, Roma communities are scattered across national borders and segregated inside national borders, even cities or communities' borders.

³ I call Roma-related to those groups that were labelled Gypsies, but do not recognise themselves under a general category Roma.

⁴ See: KOSTOVA, Dobrinka. The Perceptions and Self-perceptions of Roma in Bulgaria. Individual and Community Crisis. *Roma's Identities in Southeast Europe: Bulgaria*. Ethnobarometer. Working Paper No. 8, 2003, p. 39–42 (www.ethnobarometer.org).

The international distribution is one of the various elements indicating that Roma is not a unified, homogeneous community. The differences between the groups are based not only on nationality, language, religion, or way of living, but also on their level of education and wealth. Actually, there is no social, economic, or cultural cohesion between the Roma living in different countries. Moreover, this geographical dispersion, shaped by different migration waves, is correlated with the presence of groups externally identified as “Gypsies” but who do not consider themselves Roma. These Roma-related groups involve, among others, the Jevgjit in Albania, the Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo and Macedonia, the Travelers in Britain and Ireland, the Beash in Hungary, and the Sinti in Germany and Switzerland. In addition, “leaving aside the non-Romani Gypsies, the Roma themselves do not (yet) make up a homogeneous ethnic group. Rather, the Roma today are a continuum of more or less related subgroups with complex, flexible, and multilevel identities”⁵.

However, some Roma leaders are striving to establish a coherent Roma identity among the different sub-groups and meta-groups, which present significant cultural, religious, linguistic, and geographical internal diversity. And, needless to say, which also have different interests. The diverse national contexts absolutely imply different interests in specific policies.

The search for establishing new identity boundaries

Despite the groups’ heterogeneity, there are some Roma elite members, activists and politically-engaged who seek to unify all Roma communities in one specific ethnic community, across geographical borders and social boundaries. It is important to distinguish between *communities*, plural, relating to populations or local groups, and *a community*, singular, taken as a conceptual model, even an ideal type. This idea of a single community, unified and homogeneous, is what Roma elite members are aiming at. The developing sense of community (singular form) for all Roma groups is promoted by a group of intellectuals rather than by a mass ideology or social movement. It does not work its way up from the bottom to the top; it is proposed by identity managers, political entrepreneurs, or even strangers to the groups – that is, from top to bottom. It has even been argued that the ‘Roma identity’ is mainly an issue for the Roma elite and for the non-Roma working for Roma rights.

This process to promote a unified image and a single pan-Roma identity, which strives to overcome the internal differences in language, culture, religion, and locality, is what may be called a process of ethnicisation or ethnogenesis⁶. By this process, identity managers are searching to promote an imagined community by making some diacritics salient and symbolic, that is, by an active construction of a boundary. Even if there has always been a boundary separating Roma from non-Roma, the managers of the ethnogenesis process are trying to nurture a common cultural content that will establish a clear boundary around a differentiated ethnic group.

On the one hand, this ethnogenesis process appears as a romantic goal tinted with the ambition of preserving the Roma’s distance from the rest of society. On the other hand, there is clearly a practical goal of possibly obtaining benefits from this categorisation. Defining a group identity in order to be called a transnational or ethnic minority would allow demanding special policies and

⁵ PETROVA, Dimitrina. The Roma: Between a Myth and the Future. *Social Research*. Vol. 70, No 1, 2003, p. 114.

⁶ See: GIORDANO, Christian & BOSCOBOINIK, Andrea. Introduction. *Roma’s Identities in Southeast Europe: Bulgaria*. Ethnobarometer. Working Paper No. 8, 2003, p. 14–29. (www.ethnobarometer.org); BOSCOBOINIK, Andrea. Becoming Rom: Ethnic Development among Roma Communities in Bulgaria and Macedonia. *Ethnic Identity. Problems and Prospects for the Twenty-First Century. Fourth Edition*. Ed. by Lola Romanucci-Ross, George de Vos and Takeyuki Tsuda. Lanham, New York, Toronto, Oxford: Altamira Press, 2006, p. 295–310.

would legitimise political claims. It is not at all new, nor limited to Roma, that organised ethnic groups can fight for their own equal rights and better policies. In the case of Roma, the shared interests focus on human rights, including the fight against discrimination, on socioeconomic development and on political representation.

André Liebich distinguishes two narratives of Roma ethnogenesis: the first one is based on ethnic or racial criteria, around what might be called the romance of exoticism, and the second one is functional or social, linked to the pathos of deprivation⁷. The ethnic narrative is linked to the ethnic basis that could be applied in the nation-building project, while the social narrative presents the thesis that Roma are characterised primarily by a way of life that has led them to marginalisation and poverty. Both narratives can help legitimise Roma claims, but usually the first ethnic narrative is drawn on to establish the political claims.

From an essentialist point of view, the most used sociocultural diacritics in defining an ethnic group are physical appearance, ethnonym, language, history, religion and nationality. In the Roma ethnogenesis process, the most significant ones are a common history and a common language. Indeed, the creation of a Roma history that could explain a common origin is crucial in order to legitimise the claims of a united ethnic group. Moreover, if a history is going to be written, better if the past reflects a glorious origin. Scholars and activists began revising Roma history and new interpretations were proposed. The idea of a warrior-caste origin was then presented, which was considered more heroic and nobler than a caste of commercial nomads or low service castes⁸. The historical discourse is viewed as an instrument to change the image of the Roma and their status in present-day society. The warrior-origin theory offers a proud ancestry and presents an historical narrative of Roma who once held prestigious and honourable social positions before being victimised and turned reluctantly into what they are now⁹. Consequently, Roma leaders and scholars are creating an origin history that could be quite fictional, yet functional. However, there are other Gypsies / Roma who perceive themselves as part of a specific nation, and who, in their historical search, always try to demonstrate that Roma are a very ancient local population, often stressing their participation in the consolidation of the state in which they live¹⁰.

Besides being a system of communication, language is a strong symbolical marker that distinguishes who belongs to a group and who is outside. As such, it establishes group boundaries that probably explain the persistent tendency to link language and ethnicity. In the absence of geographical borders, language takes on great importance as an element of one's own identity and as a factor that will be recognised by others. Not only language, but also the nuances in the way it is used, establishes boundaries between the speakers. Inside Roma communities, language acts as a marker indicating what the speakers have in common and highlighting what differentiates them.

Language, from an anthropological point of view, has been traditionally considered a central feature of ethnic identity. In order to consolidate a homogenised ethnic group, one needs a homo-

⁷ LIEBICH, André. Roma Nation? Competing Narratives of Nationhood. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2007, p. 539–554.

⁸ See for instance: HANCOCK, Ian. *We are the Romani People*. University of Hertfordshire Press, 2002.

⁹ MATRAS, Yaron. The Role of Language in Mystifying and Demystifying Gypsy Identity. *The Role of the Romanies. Images and Counter-Images of 'Gypsies' / Romanies in European Cultures*. Ed. by Nicholas Saul and Susan Tebbutt. Liverpool University Press, 2004, p. 68–74.

¹⁰ See: MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena & POPOV, Vesselin. The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies. *Nationalism across the Globe: An Overview of the Nationalism of Stateendowed and Stateless nations*. Ed. by Burszta, W., Kamusella, T., Wojciechowski, S. Poznan: School of Humanities and Journalism, 2005, p. 433–455 (<http://212.72.210.78/sr-www/files/Virtual%20library/Nation.pdf>).

genised language. A common language is then regarded as a key issue in defending and supporting the ethnic group's unity and cohesion.

As Romani is not a unified language and has different dialectal forms, language standardisation is regarded as a priority by many organisations that officially represent the Roma. Consequently, efforts are made to establish a common, modern form of Romani. Moreover, spoken language is being systematised in a written form. The goal is a language that would be recognised in educational systems and that teaching could be in a Romani standardised language, including teachers and texts books¹¹. This could seem a paradox if we consider that the different dialects had always been well-guarded secret languages. Traditionally, one of the functions of language for Roma was to demarcate them from a foreign environment by making themselves unintelligible to outsiders. As Ian Hancock points out, for a long time it was believed that no one except Roma could speak it. This is no longer the case, and there are summer schools now that offer Romani courses to anybody who is interested¹². This is linked to the aspiration that a standardised version of Romani could become a recognised language as any other national language.

This endeavour to establish ethnic boundaries through a common origin and a common language is linked to a project of constructing a new nation but with old-time ideas, or better yet, with old-time theories of nationalism. An ideological construct conventionally dating back to Johann Gottfried Herder and 18th century German Romanticism, establishes the equation of language and nation. Thus, historically, any claims to nationhood have been highly dependent on a common language. Those ideas are revisited and put to use nowadays by Roma elite members.

Becoming a Nation

In the 19th century, ideas of national identity shaped the political consciousness of many people in Europe, and particularly in Eastern Europe. As Istvan Pogany evokes, when most people began to identify themselves, first and foremost, as Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Romanians or Hungarians, clamouring for recognition of their national rights, whether in education, religious observance or political representation, Roma instead remained outside these aspirations, and stayed behind the main currents of political, social and economic development¹³.

Pogany mentions several explanations for this lack of a Roma national consciousness in a period of mounting nationalist fervour. One is the low level of literacy of Roma population that limited their knowledge of ideas from the exterior world. The segregation, in which they traditionally lived, as a result of both isolation from the exterior as well as an inner belief of being different also contributed to their lack of interest in the political paths of the "Others" (i.e. non-Roma). The identity boundaries that distinguished Roma from non-Roma were strong enough to keep Roma from pursuing the same ambitions of the non-Roma.

Most important, however, was the absence of leaders and of Roma elite to guide the process, and of course the lack of a national territory that they could claim as their own. Moreover, the various communities identified as Gypsies or Roma by the outside have never viewed themselves as belonging collectively to a single cultural, national group. Even today they do not consider themselves a unified group. For some Roma, moreover, beliefs are articulated within national mytholo-

¹¹ LIÉGEOIS, Jean-Pierre. *Roma in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2007, p. 48.

¹² HANCOCK, Ian. (...) 2002, p. 139.

¹³ POGANY, Istvan. Accommodating an Emergent National Identity: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*. Vol. 6, 1999, p. 153.

gies in which Roma appear as partners in the national projects of the countries where they live¹⁴. Even if some authors mention some precedent seeds, the idea of becoming a nation emerged in the middle of 20th century with the development of Roma elite in Europe¹⁵. It is worth adding that the idea of a Roma nation is mostly mobilised in Europe, rather than in other parts of the world where Roma also live but where Roma elite is less developed. Moreover, a Roma nation is most relevant in Europe, given the idea of representation in European institutions.

In defining a Nation, we can draw on two closely related aspects of the national imagination¹⁶. The first one refers to the modern symbols of nationhood, such as a flag, a national anthem, and a national holiday: Roma have a flag, an anthem (*Djelem, Djelem*) and a national holiday (April 8th). The flag, the anthem and the national holiday were chosen during the First International Roma meeting, which was held in London on April 8-12, 1971. It became the First World Roma Congress and it decided to form a new international Gypsy organisation. Later on, at the Second Congress in 1978 in Geneva, this organisation took the name Romani Union. It is known today as the International Romani Union, and its President, Emil Scuka, has presented the Declaration of a Roma Nation in 2001, mentioned in the opening paragraph. The IRU is the most active in this process of nation-building, and it seems that it wants to strengthen the Roma identity by introducing national symbols, historically constructed metaphors and emblems, known, used and recognised by other cultures to symbolise the claim of shared heritage.

The second aspect relates to the modern instruments of nationhood, such as a government, an army, and a territory. However, Roma leaders are not interested in these instruments, which could be considered more relevant to a State than to a Nation. They do not have the ambition of becoming a State, but a Nation, a unique nation in a world of nations. They are searching for their place in the new modern society without being tied to a specific and already existing nation. As stated in the Declaration of a Roma Nation, from January 1, 2001 “We ask for being recognized as a Nation, for the sake of Roma and of non-Roma individuals, who share the need to deal with the nowadays new challenges”¹⁷. Roma leaders aspire to a nation that is entitled to its expression like other nations around the world. As a result, they could align their political claims and try to make appeals to the international community. The idea of a Roma nation implies that Roma would be represented in international bodies, such as the European Parliament and the United Nations, with the same status of governments.

Establishing ethnic boundaries to be recognised as a nation implies a twofold instrumental use of boundaries and borders, which presents some dangers: they could be used for recognition and integration or for isolation and stigmatisation.

To Roma elite leaders the *Nation*, as a social formation, seems a viable solution to fight against the stigmatisation and marginalisation of their people on the one hand and, on the other, a way to handle the social and cultural problems they face¹⁸. As Pogany points out, recognition of the Roma as a Nation and as a national, transnational or ethnic minority could present some advantages. “The

¹⁴ See: MARUSHIAKOVA, E. & POPOV, V. (...) 2005.

¹⁵ Concerning the development of the Roma elite in Romania, see: NECULAU, Adrian; CURELARU, Mihai; ZAHARIA Daniela & TARNOVSCHI, Daniela. Elites rom dans les anciens pays communistes. Le cas de la Roumanie. *Transitions. Nouvelles identités rom en Europe centrale & orientale*. Ed. by Andrea Boscoboinik & François Ruegg. Vol. XLVIII, No. 2, 2009, p. 71–91.

¹⁶ See : BILLIG, Michael. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage, 1995.

¹⁷ SCUKA, Emil. *We, the Roma Nation*. 2001 (www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/60/132.html).

¹⁸ FOSZTÓ, László. Diaspora and Nationalism: an Anthropological Approach to the International Romani Movement. *Regio*, 2003, p. 102.

international community is familiar with these categories and Europe, in particular, has evolved an elaborate structure of inter-locking norms and institutions to articulate and safeguard the rights of such minorities. National, or minority, status thus affords the Roma a range of substantive rights as well as sources of institutional support¹⁹. Thus, for Pogany, in political and legal terms the notion of a Roma nation is a valuable tool for securing enhanced recognition of, and provision for, Europe's Roma peoples.

However, for majority nationalists, instituting a Roma nation is considered a way to free their own nation from the burden of Roma. As a consequence of the nationalist claims, Roma are establishing boundaries where before there were none. Roma nationalism legitimates the segregation and sustains racist positions that have always deemed the Gypsies as alien to and incompatible with majority society²⁰.

Thus, the consequence of Roma nationalism is that people are further divided by ethnic boundaries, rather than united by their common interests. Promoting boundaries based on essential differences between Roma and non-Roma increases traditional prejudices and stereotypes. It maintains the isolation of Roma people and supports the ideology of segregation.

Summing up, influential members of the Roma political and cultural elite work on the construction of homogeneity out of the realities of heterogeneity that characterise Roma and Roma-related communities. They aim at the emergence of a Roma ethnic nation born of an *ethnogenesis process*, more or less driven from above. Ethnicity, in this case, is a means, not an end. One of the possible models is based on a transnational and non-territorialised vision of the Roma ethnic identity. They do not show the aspiration to possess a territory of their own. In a world where state borders are becoming obsolete, this deterritorialised vision of the nation is perfectly in line with the nature of post-modernity. Therefore, the present ethnogenesis process would involve the emergence of a Roma ethnic nation transcending the narrow national States' borders and would be established as a *stateless political community*²¹.

Elite boundaries vs. ethnic boundaries

While members from the elite attempt to develop a shared ethnic consciousness among Roma beyond national borders new rifts emerge. The development of the Roma elite increasingly deepens the gap between educated and engaged Roma on the one hand and the poor, average Roma on the other. The Roma leaders have been much criticised by the non-elite Roma and are sometimes characterised by ethno-careerism, following their own interests. In order to succeed, leaders should enhance their credibility and give proof that they speak in the name of all Roma.

The development of intellectual, economic and political elite actually establishes a clear demarcation between elite and non-elite Roma. Thus, instead of consolidating a boundary between Roma and non-Roma, we are witnessing the emergence of a boundary between the educated, wealthy Roma and the vast majority of poor Roma, more interested in day-to-day survival than in identity politics. Moreover, as mentioned before, not all those that outsiders call Gypsies recognise them-

¹⁹ POGANY, I. (...) 1999, p. 157.

²⁰ See : KOVATS, Martin. The Politics of Roma Identity: Between Nationalism and Destitution. 2003 (www.opendemocracy.net/people-migrationeurope/article_1399.jsp).

²¹ See: BOSCOBINIK, Andrea & GIORDANO, Christian. Roles, Statuses, Positions. Social categories and Multiple Identities of Roma in Romania. *Roma's Identities in Southeast Europe: Romania*. Ethnobarometer. Working Paper No. 12, 2008, p. 7–23 (www.ethnobarometer.org).

selves as Roma, and the gap between elite members from the different Roma and Roma-related groups who present diverse interests is becoming wider.

In our interviews, the distinction between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ showed that Them are not only the Gadje (the non-Roma) but quite often the ‘other Roma’ (or the ‘other Gypsies’), particularly the stereotyped image of the thief, swindler, liar and idler. The distinction between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ is far from being made only between Roma and non-Roma. Our interviews show that many distinctions are defined for instance between ‘Roma’ and ‘Gypsies’ (the term “Roma” is not very popular among Gypsies, but it is mainly used by Roma leaders and intellectuals), and ‘They’ covers a large amount of ‘Others’, especially those ‘Other Roma’ or ‘Other Gypsy’. This is a way to distance themselves from stereotypes that present a world in black and white. As stereotypes emerge when the behaviour of isolated persons become metonymic for the behaviour of many, Roma individuals seek to distinguish themselves individually from those ‘other Roma or Gypsy’ that give the entire Roma community a bad name. Consequently, while Roma leaders search the unity of Roma, by creating the boundary of an “Us Roma” in opposition to a “They Gadje”, many average Gypsies establish new demarcations, both between other Roma as between non-Roma.

Even Roma activists have stereotypes concerning traditional Gypsies. In the interviews, we noticed that at times ‘Us’ stood for Roma and ‘Them’ for Gypsy or vice versa. Therefore, the boundary may finally distinguish “Us Roma” from “They Gypsies” or the other way round. Finally, it could be said that Roma represent the political replacement for the generic Gypsy identity. Indigent and uneducated Gypsies usually reserve the term Roma, which has a strong political connotation, for the educated ones. They do not feel identified under the name Roma, but Gypsy or their clan’s name. Some of them truly mistrust the name Roma and criticise Roma political leaders for being corrupt and taking advantage of projects aimed at the improvement of Gypsies’ situation.

Some interviews with wealthy and educated Roma show that, though they are engaged activists for the Roma unity, when they speak of the indigent ones they use Gypsy, even in a pejorative and despising way. Of course, such statements are strongly dependent on the personality of those who express them and any generalisations could be risky.

Clearly however, there is a boundary between Roma and Gypsy that follows a social-class cleavage. As Abner Cohen has pointed out many years ago, it is theoretically possible that “the poor from one ethnic group will cooperate with the poor from another ethnic group against the wealthy from both ethnic groups, who will, on their part, also cooperate in the course of the struggle to maintain their privileges”²².

Conclusion

The process of ethnicisation can be understood as a process of challenging borders and setting up boundaries. First, the setting of an identity boundary, as the goal of this process is to establish a clear demarcation of the group and to develop a shared ethnic consciousness across national borders. The role of individuals is called into question especially in terms of their loyalties and identities. Secondly, instead of establishing a geographical border for a territorial nation, the Roma elite aims at the creation of a nation without territory, thus without geographical borders, but with ethnic boundaries.

²² COHEN, Abner. Introduction: The Lesson of Ethnicity. *Urban Ethnicity*. Ed. by Abner Cohen. London: Tavistock Publications, 1974, p. xxi.

Usually, those analysing human situations observed that a group sharing some characteristics such as language, a common past and a common territory often formed an ethnic group. In the Roma case, we witness that in order to consolidate an ethnic group as a basis for claiming the status of a nation, elite members seek to establish those characteristics. This clearly corresponds to a primordialist view of ethnicity. Therefore, cultural practices are reified in the construction of a Roma cultural and political bond. As Yaron Matras puts it, Roma activists appear to want “package-Gypsies who sell better on the human rights market”²³.

Despite the ambition of Roma national activists of creating a clear ethnic boundary, the Roma communities’ reality still represents a challenge to definitions and boundaries. Roma communities comprise different groups living historically across the borders and having very little in common. Thus, the ethnicisation project has not been very successful among ordinary Roma people, who ignore or reject imposed boundaries. An abstraction such as a Roma nation has little meaning for the great mass of the Roma for whom identity is still defined much more narrowly and traditionally²⁴. And, I would add, they show little interest in political strategies.

These new searched boundaries imply a separation between Roma and non-Roma society that overlooks the historical interconnection between the two. In a way, it prevents Roma citizens from living as members of their home nation and to be equal citizens of the country in which they were born. Many non-elite Roma would like to be accepted and treated as an integral part of the nation in which they live. This is particularly evident in Western European countries, where Roma or Roma-related groups (Travellers, Manouche, Sinti, Romanichal, etc.) have more or less attained their integration and claim national majority’s values. But also Roma in Central and Eastern European countries have lived and settled within the surrounding population for centuries; many consider themselves equal citizens of the respective nation-states and do not have any particular desire for national segregation. Marushiakova and Popov mention the fact that when the Fifth IRU Congress officially proposed the concept of the Roma as a “nation without a state”, the Roma from Greece reacted quite violently. In the spring of 2001, there was a special declaration signed by the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations that strictly declared that they did not wish the Roma to be treated as a “nation without a state” or a “national minority”, since they are part of the Greek nation²⁵.

We can then witness new boundaries among Roma elite members and the emergence of new cleavages separating Roma and Roma-related elite’s interests and goals. For instance, a Roma Hungarian activist, Aladár Horváth, writes that there are also Roma that “do not want anybody to impose on us a 19th century Romantic idea of creating a nation. (...). The only emancipation we want is to have the right to our versatile, communal inner self-identity and, at the same time, to have the right to live with our external identity as members of our home nation, to be equal citizens of the Republic”²⁶.

Roma communities have never been united in the past. The world of Roma has always been mobile, with meetings and separations that fashioned an adaptive and flexible identity. Thus, while Roma leaders, through the process of ethnicisation, seem to be looking for essentialisation, which implies a rigidity and fixedness of identity, Roma individual identities continue to be fluid and si-

²³ MATRAS, Y. (...) 2004, p. 73.

²⁴ POGANY, I. (...) 1999, p. 157.

²⁵ See: MARUSHIAKOVA, E. & POPOV, V. (...) 2005.

²⁶ HORVÁTH, Aladár. Gadjó Nation, Roma Nation. *Roma Rights Quarterly*. Issue 2–3, 2006, p. 55 (www.cceol.com).

tual. It would seem that Roma leaders disregard the heterogeneous and multiple identities of Roma, and that identity is always the result of negotiation and renegotiation.

Roma communities are very interesting for analysing the constitution and eradication of borders and boundaries. We could even say that they live on the edge²⁷. They are also interesting communities to analyse identity politics, because they are not seeking to establish an independent state, but have the ambition to be considered as an ethnic-nation in order to struggle against marginalisation and discrimination within nation-states. However, as Aladár Horváth²⁸ rightly suggests, the problem is that stressing the significance of Roma politics exclusively based on ethnicity, would result in the further isolation of Roma people in an ethno-political ghetto.

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²⁷ See: BARANY, Zoltan. Living on the Edge: The East European Roma in Postcommunist Politics and Societies. *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 1994, p. 321–344.

²⁸ See: HORVÁTH, A. (...) 2006, p. 53–58.

KVESTIONUOJANT SIENAS IR NUSTATANT NAUJAS RIBAS: ROMŲ POLITINIŲ PROCESŲ ANALIZĖ

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S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje siekiama atskleisti socialinius procesus, kuriuose romų elito atstovai siekia nustatyti savo bendruomenės politinio ir kultūrinio gyvenimo gaires. Kartu jie kuria tautos gyvenimo modelį neapibrėžtose teritorijose, kur nepaisoma valstybių sienų. Šiuos tautos etninio konsolidavimo procesus galima vertinti ir kaip romų bendruomenės aktyvistų bei lyderių siekius panaikinti sienas ar kitas kliūtis, trukdančias žmonių bendravimui, ir kaip bandymus nustatyti kitokias, savitas šio proceso ribas.

Visų pirma turime pripažinti, kad nustatydami identiteto ribas privalome šio proceso pabaigoje aiškiai matyti viziją, kur etninės ar socialinės grupės būtų aiškiai atskirtos. Etninės savimonės išlaikymo poreikis čia turi išlikti visose šių atskirčių pusėse. Antra, turime sutikti, kad vietoje geografinių ribų nustatymo, būdingo teritoriniu aspektu susiformavusioms tautoms, romų lyderiai turi teisę konsoliduoti savo tautą ne geografiniu (teritoriniu), o etniniu principu.

Vis dėlto romų bendruomenių realijos neleidžia lengvai suformuoti tokių atskirčių. Jų gyvenimo būdas visada buvo ir dabar yra mobilus, lankstus ir lengvai prisitaikantis prie besikeičiančių išgyvenimo aplinkybių. Taigi tuo metu, kai romų elito atstovai savo tautos etnizacijos procese ieško pastovių ir vienareikšmiškų jos esmės nusistatymo kriterijų, paprasti romų žmonės savo identiteto problemas palieka savieigai. Priklausomai nuo situacijos, jų saviidentiteto nusistatymas gali radikaliai keistis ir yra iš esmės nepastovus.

Taigi nepaisant romų tautinių aktyvistų pastangų nustatyti aiškias savo tautos etninio identiteto ribas, pačių romų bendruomenės tokių pastangų nevertina ir toliau šias aspiracijas ignoruoja. Atskiros romų bendruomenės yra susiformavusios skirtingais istoriniais laikotarpiais, skirtingame jokių valstybių sienų nepripažįstančiame socialiniame kontekste. Tarpusavyje jos yra mažai susijusios. Tai lemia tokio etnizacijos projekto neperspektyvumą ir jo nepopuliarumą paprastų romų gyvenime, kurio esmė – bet kokių ribų ir sienų ignoravimas.

Dar daugiau – intelektualinio, ekonominio ir politinio romų elito formavimasis pats savaime brėžia sau esmines atskirties ribas nuo paprastų romų bendruomenių. Taip vietoje tautą konsoliduojančių jungčių, nubrėžiančių aiškias atskirtis tarp romų ir neromų bendruomenių, atsiranda praraja tarp išsilavinusių, pasiturinčių romų asmenybių ir didžiosios vargingai, inertiškai tebegyvenančios romų bendruomenių dalies, kur identiteto politikos dalykus nustelbia elementarios kasdienio išgyvenimo problemos. O ir pats romų elitas yra nevienalytis – jų gretose vis dažniau naujai įsižiebia esminiai pavienių asmenybių interesų konfliktai.

Tokios situacijos rezultatas – pavieniai romų individai ir toliau lieka atsiskyrę patys sau, nesusieti bendrų interesų. Be to, esminių atskirčių tarp romų ir neromų atstovų paieškos ir jų akcentavimas skatina tradicinių išankstinių nusistatymų ir stereotipų plitimą. Taip yra skatinamas ir toleruojamas izoliavimosi nuo romų bendruomenių procesas ir palaikoma segregacinės ideologijos politika.

Viena vertus, valstybių sienos gali sudaryti objektyvias kliūtis, kurias reikia įveikti siekiant suvienyti žmones, atstovaujančius vienai ir tai pačiai etninei kategorijai. Kita vertus, romų tapatumo ir jų politinės strategijos tyrimai liudija skirtingas minėtų ribų formacijas bei realias jų atsiradimo ir kitimo tendencijas.