



ROMANIA'S PERENNIAL 'OUTSIDERS'. FROM A FOREIGN NON-EUROPEAN MINORITY TO INTRA-EU DISPLACEMENTS. AN EXPLORATION OF ROMA'S PERPETUAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND SYMBOLIC EXCLUSION

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Abstract: *After the fall of the socialist regimes from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), various national and European programs were enabled in order to improve the socio-economic well-being of European Roma, but these policies are often anchored in an a present-centered and ahistorical framework, without taking into account the dynamic processes of stigmatization and marginalization that have plagued the Roma minority (Powell and Lever, 2015). The present paper seeks to contribute to the (historical) reconstruction of these processes of stigmatization and marginalization of Roma in different social-political periods (with an emphasis on the last and a half century). Using secondary data (censuses) and historical sources, I describe the state policies and state-led modernization programs that were aimed at improving Roma's socio-economic well-being and their ambiguous effects. I conclude that in order to achieve social inclusion of poor Romanian Roma, more efforts have to be made to tackle the stereotypical 'Gypsy image' that has guided most social inclusion/integration programs since the formation of the Romanian nation-state*

Keywords: *Romanian Roma; social history; outsiders; stigmatization; state-led programs.*

Introduction

The Roma are a particular minority in Europe/Romania and although their presence in CEE is dated back to fourteenth century when they arrived from the Byzantium

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empire, their history is marked by perpetual exclusion, socio-economic marginalization and segregation that continued (in various forms) until present day. Having no written language (until recently) and showing little interest to scholars and writers until the mid-nineteenth century, the Roma were considered to be a 'people without history' (Trumpener, 1992). Often stereotyped in the academic and literary works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Trumpener (1992) shows how these cultural narratives prevented the consolidation of a place in western historiographies (and perhaps even in CEE Europe).

In a recent paper discussing the marginal position of Roma in Europe, Powell and Lever identify some pitfalls in understanding the complex mechanisms of socio-economic and political exclusion and marginalization that have historically plagued Roma communities. In their opinion, many policy oriented researches are often anchored in a present-centered and ahistorical framework, without taking into consideration that *'their often marginal position cannot be explained without taking the historical repressive policies into account which heavily contributed to a construction of an ethnically defined minority'* (2015, p. 3). This concern regarding the lack of appropriate theoretical and conceptual tools in Romani studies to explain the dynamic processes of Roma's stigmatization and marginalization was also reiterated by Sam Beck in an article published in the late 1980s: *'The origins of such marginalization, power relations in particular, historical processes in general, active resistance, or even active participating in the forces that dominate them have not been part of the scholarly discourse concerning Gypsies'* (1989, p. 54).

Since Beck's article has a number of contributions, which have critically interrogate the dynamic processes of marginalization and stigmatization of Roma in different historical periods and the consequence of these processes on the current policies of the nation-states, have been published (e.g. Mayall, 2004, van Baar, 2011a, Willems, 1997). This paper is complementary to such contributions in discussing the socio-economic (and symbolic) exclusion and marginalization of Romanian Roma during Romania's last one and a half century. In each of the following sections I will discuss the socio-economic plight of the Roma in the historical periods discussed, state policies that were aimed to improve their well-being and their ambiguous effects.

Romanian Roma in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth century

Roma's presence in Romania was first registered in 1385 when among the donations of the Wallachian Prince, Dan I, to Tismana monastery, there were also 40 Roma families (Achim, 2004a, p. 13). In the two Principalities, Wallachia and Moldavia, the Roma held the status of slaves (*robi*) until the middle of the nineteenth century (1855 in Moldavia and 1856 in Wallachia) when the governing bodies of the two principalities decided to emancipate the Roma and abolish the slavery institution (Achim, 2004b)¹. Because of

¹ In fact, the (juridical) emancipation of Roma took place in several stages, through laws passed by the two Principalities during 1831-1856. Initially, the Roma who belonged to the prince (the State) and the monasteries were freed and then due to the laws from 1855/1856 the last Roma slaves which belonged to the boyars were also freed.

their skills as craftsmen and /or blacksmiths, they were used by the boyars or monasteries¹, but they also worked extensively in agriculture (especially Roma held by the monasteries). Roma detained by monasteries or boyars were exempt from tax duties, while state slaves were required to pay annual fees to the Prince, taxes regulated by the Organic Regulations issued by the two Principalities in 1831.

At the outset of the Europeanizing reforms in the two principalities, the Roma also came under close scrutiny of the Romanian authorities. According to Viorel Achim (2004b, p. 110), the forced settlement of Roma accelerated in the 1830s, when the boyars used Roma as labor force for large landed estates during the capitalization of agriculture after the Adrianople Treaty from 1829, which marked the beginning of a capitalist-like economy in Romania. In the same article, Achim contradicts itself and links the forced settlement of Roma to a `natural` process carried out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, commenting for example, on a census carried out in Wallachia in 1839 which showed that most of the Roma were already settled in rural areas, living in houses and being assimilated from this point of view among peasants (2004b, p. 112).

In any case, Achim continues, the final goal for the abolition of slavery was not the economic and social well-being of the Roma, but rather their forced settlement and forced integration in agricultural production. The abolition of slavery has turned Roma into dependent peasants, forced to pay important taxes to the state, albeit agricultural activity was not attractive to many of the Roma which preferred craftsmanship. On the other hand, the Roma emancipation laws did not stipulate for the boyars or monasteries to give them parcels of land or tools to cultivate them, and consequently not many Roma benefited from the 1864 agrarian reform (2004b, pp. 112-120). In the absence of genuine socio-economic emancipation policies and with the abolition of slavery, some authors suggest the hypothesis of a massive migration of the Vlach/Vlax (Căldărari, Lovari) Roma to Western Europe at the end of the nineteenth century (Matras, 2000).

Instead, the Roma from Transylvania and Banat (which were part of the Habsburg, later Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918) have become the target of assimilation policies since the second half of the eighteenth century. The purpose of these measures was to turn a foreign, uncivilized and unlawful population into, obedient, productive and good Christians. A series of decrees emitted by Empress Maria Theresa aimed at the forced settlement, assimilation and modernization of Roma. The Roma were to pay taxes to the state and meet their obligations to the boyars. They were forbidden to use horses and wagons and leave the village without permission. A decree from 1767 abolished the jurisdiction of the voivodeships on the Roma and placed them under the jurisdiction of local authorities. Roma were forbidden to use Romani language, specific clothing and occupational practices, and their children were taken to be raised by non-Roma families. In the end, they would have the status of `new Hungarians` or `new peasants` (Barany, 1998, Fraser, 2010, Barany, 2001). Joseph II, Maria Theresa's son

¹ A third category was that of slaves to the royal courts, but with greater freedom of movement on the territory of the two Principalities as long as they paid their taxes to the royal court see Achim, V. (2004a) *The Roma in Romanian History*, Budapest, Central European University Press.

and successor to the throne continued with the assimilation (authoritarian) policies by giving an order in 1782 through which Roma children had to attend a form of schooling, participate at public meetings, and follow the habits of the area. Boyars were obliged to provide land for Roma to work on. The Roma were not allowed to own horses, nomadism was forbidden, just like the use of Romani language (Achim, 2004a).

The assimilation policies of the Habsburg Empire did not bring the expected outcomes because of their short implementation period, the resistance of the boyars and peasants to integrate the Roma and the latter's opposition to the loss of their identity. Although the decrees were monitored by the royal courts, the governing councils chose not to rigorously implement these policies at the local levels (Trehan and Kóczé, 2009). Even if they failed to implement visible socio-economic reforms to enhance their living standard, the above mentioned policies have succeeded in sedentarizing them. According to the Hungarian census in Transylvania carried out in 1893, the Roma numbered just over 150,000 and most of them were already sedentary or semi-sedentary and only a small part still practiced nomadism (Achim, 2004a, p. 135).

Thus, before 1918, the Roma from the Old Kingdom but also from Transylvania, Bukovina or Bessarabia were confined to the lowest position in the social structure. Although there were different groups having different linguistic and sociocultural characteristics, what united the Roma was their *'marginal social status and secondly, their isolation as Gypsies by the population among whom they lived'* (Achim, 2004a, p. 148).

During this time span the first scholarly interests in Roma populations manifested and some anthropological and linguistic works were published in Western as well in Eastern Europe. The interest in studying non-European populations (e.g. Roma) increased precisely because they had a lifestyle incompatible with the enlightened way of life imagined by the Enlightenment (represented by the West). For example, Huub van Baar (2010, p. 154) argues that during Enlightenment and nation-state formations, the Roma were represented in literary, artistic, and scholarly chronicles as *'a group of wandering clans who were at odds with [...] the paradigms of modernity more general. They were often seen as a people who stood outside modern life and the formations of nation-states in particular and who were consequently relegated to the domain of pre-modern, traditional, natural and <history-less> societies'*. This image of *'the Otherness'* has been constantly reiterated, as the lifestyle of the Roma contradicted that of the sedentary European societies: they did not have a common language, a common territory, or a common religion¹.

¹ Undoubtedly, the different socio-occupational structure of Roma has contributed to this *'Otherness'*. András Bíró has emphasized two distinctive factors that differentiated the Roma from the majority populations in Europe. First of all, their relationship to territoriality. The Hungarian activist remarks that *'with few exceptions [...] nowhere have significant numbers of Roma turned into peasants or farmers, so that their roots and livelihood have become based on the land. A corollary of the first characteristic, the Roma preferred to earn their livelihood in the service activities and commercial sector – animal trading, petty trade, iron and weapon making, brick production and working in wood – to the detriment of agriculture see Bíró, A. (2013) The price of Roma integration. IN Guy, W. (Ed.) From Victimhood to Citizenship. The Path of Roma Integration. Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó.*

In the late eighteenth century, several German authors teaching in universities considered the flagship of the German Enlightenment (Jena, Halle, or Gottingen) published studies using scientific methods to study the non-European (Indian) origin of Roma. Due to space constraints, I will discuss only what is considered to be the most authoritative text, Heinrich Grellmann's ([1783] 1803) dissertation on the Gypsies, considered to be responsible for providing the impetus of the 'Gypsy image'. Grellmann's dissertation is the first 'academic work' that actually links Romani and Hindustan language. Although he wanted to make an ethnographic contribution to Roma studies, he used as research documents, travel notes and articles from chronicles without conducting field research (Willems, 1997). This early 'academic' Gypsy study was marked by the conviction of Roma's 'oriental' ancestry and foreignness. Grellmann's study (and others published in that period) attributed some unchangeable characteristics to Roma – ethnic inferiority, antisocial/criminal behavior, laziness.

Thus, his study remained a landmark text about the 'Roma culture' for almost two centuries, being translated into several languages in this period. The influence of these representations, delineated during Enlightenment by these 'progressive' scholars, on the policies of different political regimes (Nazism, Communism or the Habsburg Empire) has been marked by numerous authors (Bancroft, 2005, Barany, 2002, Crowe, 1995, Fraser, 2010, Taylor, 2014, Willems, 1997).

With his Dissertation on the history, morals and language of the Gypsies ([1837] (1900)), Mihail Kogălniceanu is considered to have inaugurated the Romanian research tradition on Roma. Drawing from various historical works and his interactions with Roma from Moldavia, Kogălniceanu describes various customs of Roma groups and their language. Being written for a Western public¹ (published in Berlin), his dissertation is embellished with many exoticizing descriptions of Roma behavior, which reiterated their foreignness. Nevertheless, his essay is a plea for the abolition of slavery² and in the end, he contributed to the legislative reforms that ended Roma slavery in Romania.

While Kogălniceanu's arguments for the abolition of slavery envisaged the human rights of Roma, he fails to discuss the role the Romanian Roma played in the processes of nation-state formation and national identity. According to Sam Beck, the 'ethnic' character of slavery in Romania paralleled the conceptions of 'natural' inferiority of certain races that dominated capitalist Western Europe. This allowed the Romanians to imagine themselves as more civilized and '*in contradistinction to their [Roma] low class status, a process that helped shape the Romanian national state and Romanian ethnic identity*' (1989, p. 57, p. 61).

¹ Original title of the essay is 'Esquisse sur l'histoire, les mœurs et la langue des cigains, connus en France sous le nom de Bohémiens, suivie d'un recueil de sept cents mots cigains', Berlin: Librairie de B. Behr

² In his speech held at the Romanian Academy in 1891, Kogălniceanu recalls that 'even in my hometown in Iași [capital of Moldavia], in my youths, I say human beings wearing chains around their hands and legs and even some iron horns on their forehead and tied around the throat and neck' see Kogălniceanu, M. (1891) *Dezrobirea țiganilor, ștergerea privilegiilor boeresci, emanciparea țăranilor*. Discursu rostitu în Academia Română. București, Lito Tipografia.

Roma in Greater Romania: their continuous struggle for emancipation

Interwar policies towards the Roma were ambivalent. On the one hand, the Roma have continued to be part of the poorest strata of the new nation, without any specific ethnic policy to improve their socio-economic well-being. On the other hand, the founding of Greater Romania was a turning point *vis-à-vis* the political recognition of Roma. The 1930 census recorded for the first time in the history of Romania the Roma as an ethnic minority (previously registered as a social and fiscal category) (Surdu and Kovats, 2015) and a civic and political movement of Roma activists, united under the umbrella of the General Union of Roma in Romania, emerged to improve the living conditions of Roma (Achim, 2010). In the above mentioned census, 262,501 people identified themselves as Roma, the equivalent of 1.5% of the total population of Romania, most of them (221,726 or 84.5%) living in rural areas (Achim, 2004a, p. 145). Less than half of the Roma (101,015) declared Romani as their mother tongue (Manuilă, 1940, p. 55). Most Roma were to be found in the new region of Transylvania (75,342), followed by Muntenia (71,784) and at a relatively large distance, Moldavia with 32,194. The smallest number of Roma was in another region annexed in 1918, Bukovina, where the census recorded only 2,164 Roma (Manuilă, 1940, p. 35). The territorial distribution of Roma was different in the provinces of Greater Romania. If in Transylvania the Roma were to be found in smaller shares but spread throughout the province, in the Old Kingdom, they were to be found in fewer localities, but in much larger compact groups (Achim, 2004a, p. 145).

The number of Roma registered at the 1930 census was disputed by researchers from social sciences and humanities interested in the 'Roma question'. For example, Ion Chelcea (1944, p. 84) provides a twofold figure compared to that from the census, about 525,000 Roma, which he divides into three categories: a) those who still retain their traditional behavior, and have an ethnic consciousness of the group, b) those who are on the point of being assimilated but still oscillated about their ethnicity, and c) Roma who consider themselves assimilated but can still be recognized as Roma. In his book, Chelcea advances a more specific classification of the Roma in three categories: a) the sedentarised Roma, who are in the process of assimilation, are wearing the peasant's clothes, renounced to their Romani language and are characterized by laziness, lack of character and an apparently evolved psychological type, b) Rudarii - their main occupation is the processing of wood, they dress in the peasant's clothes among whom they live, they know only the Romanian language and are characterized by gentleness, honesty, diligence, and having a natural psychological type, and c) nomadic Roma - are closest to the 'authentic Gypsies', preserving their physical and moral appearances, living in tents, preserving their language, and are inclined to theft, dishonest business, and having a speculative psychological type (1944 p. 45). This latter category became the target of repressive policies in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Iordache Făcăoaru (1938, p. 282), one of the exponents of the bio-political current in Romania, estimated the figure of the Roma from the interwar period to at least 400,000, while the official figure provided by the Central Institute of Statistics was estimating only the nomadic Roma.

With the modernization of the economy, the Roma have begun to lose their monopoly on the craft products they produce, and thus had to proletarianize. For Achim, those who abandoned traditional crafts did not become industrial workers but were engaged in marginal economic activities (2004a, p. 149). For the Romanian historian, the agrarian reform in the early 1920s also meant improving the living standard for a large share of the Roma population who received small plots of land, comparing it to the situation of the Romanian peasants (2004a, p. 149). However, the structural position of Roma in the agricultural production was marginal. The ethnographic research carried out by Ion Chelcea in the 1930s in the Olt Valley (South of Romania) showed that 57% of the Roma who had received land in Sercaia had already sold it and in Ucea de Jos, the share amounted to 73.3% (1944, p. 133).

Sociological research carried out by the Romanian Social Institute in the 1930s has showed that most of the Roma communities are in a process of linguistic and cultural assimilation. Under the pressure of an economy in full transformation and the disappearance of traditional crafts, it was assumed that the Roma had left their traditional lifestyle (Achim, 2004a, p. 151). However, such an assessment is difficult to be made.

Although most of the Roma on the territory of Greater Romania were already sedentarised due to the enslavement policy in the Old Kingdom, they were regarded with suspicious eyes by the state/local authorities because of their foreign, non-European nomadic way of life, which was simply incompatible with the Romanian nation (Solonari, 2015, Turda, 2007, Turda, 2014). Researchers from social and medical sciences, who also held positions in the state apparatus or research institutes, and were also sympathetic with the European eugenic movement, identified the Roma (especially the nomadic and semi nomadic ones) as a danger to the regeneration and homogenization of the Romanian national state. In this respect, the Roma became a `dysgenic` danger to the Romanian population that could not be / should not be avoided. Sabin Manuilă, head of the Central Institute of Statistics, remarked in the early 1940s that if the *`Jewish problem is the most important social problem, and the most serious political and economic problem of Romania [...], the Gypsy problem is the most serious and important racial problem of Romania`*, proposing even their sterilization to avoid racial interference (Turda, 2014, p. 126)¹.

In the end, the Roma who gained the public attention of the authorities were the (semi)nomadic Roma, for reasons of public health and security. Starting with 1934, nomadic Roma were forbidden to carry out their trade activities through the country without a prior authorization from the Inspectorate of Gendarmerie. This latter category, as well as those who had a criminal record or did not live from `honest work`, became the target of deportations from 1942 by the pro-Nazi right-wing government. According to some estimates, 25,000 Roma were deported to Transnistria during Ion

¹ Sabin Manuilă was not the only researcher to propose extreme measures targeting the Roma. Traian Herseni or Gheorghe Făcăoaru, brother of Iordache Făcăoaru, directly linked the national regeneration to the introduction of bio political measures - sterilization, segregation, deportation see Turda, M. (2014) *Eugenism și Modernitate. Națiune, Rasă și Biopolitică în Europa (1870-1950)*, Iași, Polirom.

Antonescu's government, of which only half are estimated to have returned to Romania (Achim, 2004a, p. 169, Wiesel, 2004, p. 227-241).

The ambivalent policies of the Romanian socialist state towards Roma

In three of the four censuses (1948, 1956, 1966) organized during socialism, the Romanian authorities did not record nationality but mother tongue. Thus, in the 1948 census there were 53,425 Romani speakers (0.3% of the population of Romania), a little over half of those who declared themselves as such in 1930 (Golopenția and Georgescu, 1948, p. 22). About 86% of Roma lived in rural areas. Although they have been a constant presence on the Romanian territories for six centuries, the Roma did not fulfill the Marxist-Leninist definition of a national minority and thus were considered a socio-economic category rather than an ethnic group. The conditions for fulfilling the status of a national minority were those of language, territory, common history and a uniform culture, conditions that the Roma did not meet.

We can distinguish two processes that affected the Roma during socialism: forced settlement and proletarianization. These policies were meant to 'turn this poor and marginalized minority into good socialist citizens' (Stewart, 1997, p. 6). Romania was one of the first states in the socialist bloc that had implemented a policy of forced settlement of nomadic and semi-nomadic Roma groups since the late 1940s. Despite the fact that these categories represented only 1/3 of the total Roma population (Marushiakova and Popov, 2008, p. 3), their mobility was a constant concern for Romania's administrative authorities¹ because of security and public order threats (Achim, 2010). Also, from a Marxist point of view, nomadism was associated with marginality and poverty. The industrial revolution had turned Roma artisans, basket makers, metallurgists into beggars forced to steal or to take advantage of others by developing commercial or trading skills, deemed as immoral by the socialist authorities. Not being integrated into the formal economy, Roma were perceived by the socialist authorities as part of the lumpenproletariat (Lucassen, 1998, Stewart, 1997). This forced settlement policy, although not fully enforced at the local level, has dispersed traditional communities at the margins of localities (urban or rural).

On the other hand, the second main objective for the authorities was that of proletarianizing their labor. Their 'commercial' activities were signs of independence from the socialist production system. By confiscating their trade and livelihood means, be it gold, horses or other means of production and engaging them into the socialist production system, they were proletarianized. Strict labor discipline, organization and

¹ Viorel Achim's article illustrates how the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party considered the semi-nomadic and nomadic Roma 'problem' as the most stringent, which is why the General Inspectorate of Gendarmerie strictly regulated the regime of the nomadic Roma and forbade them to beg, practice fortune telling or trade see Achim, V. (2010) Încercarea romilor din România de a obține statutul de naționalitate conlocuitoare (1948-1949). *Revista istorică*, XXI, 5-6, 449-465.

collective work was needed to combat 'social parasitism' and to change their lifestyle (Barany, 2002, Stewart, 1997).

During socialism, more regulations were initiated in attempt to fully integrate the Roma. Decree No. 153 from 1970 condemned 'social parasitism' and deviance from the socialist lifestyle with imprisonment and forced labor, but even so, the policy has not been rigorously implemented by local authorities (Barany, 2000).

There is no academic research to assess the socio-economic conditions of Roma during socialism. The only official policy document directly targeting the Roma population was a report commissioned by the Central Committee's (CC) Propaganda Department of the Romanian Communist Party in 1983 which was an assessment of the programs to integrate the Roma population implemented by the CC (Fosztó and Anăstăsoaie, 2001). The Roma regain the attention of the socialist authorities after the 1977 census (which registered nationality) when 227,398 persons self-identified as Roma (1,05% of the total population), although 11 years earlier, at the 1966 census (which registered the mother tongue) only 64,197 persons self-identified as Roma (thus a 354% increase) (Crowe, 1995). Two years before the 1977 census, the Ministry of Interior had conducted its own census and indicated a total of 541,000 Roma, of which 66,000 were considered semi nomads and 470 nomads (Stoenescu, 2015, p. 428). Despite the assimilation programs initiated in the 1970s, the conclusions of the report commissioned by the Central Committee blamed the Roma for maintaining non-socialist attitudes, such as social parasitism, nomadic lifestyle and non-registration with local institutions (Fosztó and Anăstăsoaie, 2001, p. 356). The report reveals the socialist approach towards Roma in terms of a deviant socio-economic category rather than in ethnic terms.

The problematization of the 'Roma question' in social rather than in ethnic or cultural terms allowed the state authorities to legitimize their intervention in the daily life of the Roma, depoliticizing the discriminatory practices associated with these interventions. As Liégeois and Gheorghe (1995, p. 12-13) rightly remarked '*Roma/Gypsies are thought to have no linguistic, cultural or ethnic roots. They are instead a <social problem> requiring <rehabilitation> and <reintegration>, who can – and must – be brought back into the fold of <society> [...] This is how cultural questions are reclassified as <social problems> and thus the right – of active intervention, [which] gives rise to measures of <assistance> opening up the way for full-scale drives aimed at <reintegration> and <rehabilitation>. These flawed analyses encourage a focus on the consequences of a given situation (such as health problems, poverty, illiteracy, etc., rather than on their root causes (rejection, inappropriate provision, etc.)*'.

Although the socialist policies enabled to improve the socio-economic well-being of Roma have helped to increase the living standard among many Roma, offering them access to stable employment, access to housing¹ and education for their children, they have also had some ambivalent results. According to a research conducted by the Research Institute for the Quality of Life (RIQL) in the early 1990s, nearly 80% of the

¹ Some scholars estimate that during socialism, 40.000 Roma families had received state-owned houses, with very low rents, due to migration of some ethnic minorities, mainly Germans and Jews see Crețan, R. & Turnock, D. (2008) Romania's Roma Population: From Marginality to Social Integration. *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 124, 4, 274-299.

working Roma performed unskilled jobs and only 4% of Roma were still carrying traditional crafts (Zamfir and Zamfir, 1993, p. 98). Simultaneously, the educational policy targeted at the Roma was a ‘silent disaster’¹. About 95% of Roma had not graduated high school (Zamfir and Zamfir, 1993, p. 88) which inevitably led them towards embracing jobs requiring low, or no skills, which were the first to be restructured after 1989. By encouraging Roma to take low or unskilled jobs in the labor intensive industry or state farms, providing them substandard housing on the outskirts of villages or towns, coupled with a weak control by the central authorities on the local ones regarding Roma integration, shows the status of second-class citizens that the Roma experienced during socialism.

Neoliberal transition and its effect on the socio-economic exclusion of Roma

The last census in Romania (2011) registered 621,573 (3.1%) of Romanian citizens belonging to the Roma minority, an increase of nearly 100,000 compared to the 2002 census and by over 200,000 compared to the 1992 census. Academic and policy research indicated a larger number. RIQL’s research carried out in 1998 on the socio-economic deprivation of Roma used a methodology based on both self-identification and hetero-identification and estimated their number at 1.5 million, of which 35% were hetero-identified (Zamfir and Preda, 2002, p. 13-14). In the following years, based on a community census, Dumitru Sandu estimates the number of Roma somewhere between 730,174 to 968,275 who are likely to self-identify themselves as Roma (World Bank, 2005). The rising interest in the number of Roma is relevant in the context of allocating sufficient public resources to improve their living conditions. Most of the Roma population face a situation of at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The risk of poverty rate is nearly three times higher (84%) for the Roma than among their non-Roma neighbors, and almost four times higher than the poverty risk rate calculated at national level (22%). The share of Roma households who experience severe material deprivation is 90%, nearly three times higher than the national percentage (World Bank, 2014, p. 4).

Using a different methodology to measure the poverty threshold (below \$ 4.30 / day in PPP), the latest UNDP / European Commission / World Bank regional comparative survey showed that the poverty rate among the Roma population is 54%, four times higher than that of the majority population (FRA and UNDP, 2012). However, this share was decreasing compared to 2000 when, according to the same methodology, the data showed a poverty rate of 69%, more than double the poverty rate for the majority population (Ringold et al., 2005, p. 29). As can be seen, although the share of Roma in poverty has decreased, the gap between them and the majority population has increased. This is also due to the fact that the efficiency of the social protection

¹ Although statistics regarding school participation of Roma during socialism are scarce, the research conducted by the Research Institute for Quality of Life in 1998 showed that the highest level of education was attained by the generation enrolled during 1960-1980 see ICCV (2002) Indicatori privind comunitățile de romi din România. București, Expert.

programs are rather poor. The World Bank's Report on Roma Inclusion in Romania reveals that social protection programs reduce by 9% the share of Roma households in the lower quintile (from 82 to 73%) (2014, p. 135), reiterating Cristina Raț's remarks that 'state transfers in Romania [...] did not change the relative income position of economically deprived Roma households in comparison with other segments of the population' (Raț, 2005, p. 96). This conclusion was enforced by a panel survey that was conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which showed that social benefits reduced absolute poverty in Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary but did not reduce relative poverty and inequalities (Emigh et al., 2017). It is not surprising that some scholars suggested that the new neoliberal policies and welfare reforms have transformed the poorest of the Roma into an underclass, trapped into a sort of 'culture of poverty', in which poverty is reproduced alongside an ethicized culture (Emigh and Szelenyi, 2001, Ladanyi and Szelenyi, 2006).

On the other hand, after 1989 we are witnessing a political recognition of Roma's plight and, implicitly, a lax governance network of government, intergovernmental and civil society organizations with the goal of improving the current situation of Roma. In parallel, a civil and political movement of Roma and pro-Roma organizations has developed since 1989 with the aim of influencing public policies regarding the Roma and combating discrimination and anti-gypsyism.

The first coherent policy to address the Roma was developed in 2001 for a period of 10 years (revised in 2006) and aimed to reduce the gaps between Roma and non-Roma in four areas: education, health, housing and employment. The most important public policies have been developed in the fields of education (subsidized places in high schools and universities, establishment of the position of school mediator), health (setting up the position of health mediator) and employment (employment caravans, job fairs for Roma). However, the lack of budgetary resources and of concrete positive results has led to the description of these policies and programs as most often inconsistent, unsustainable, piecemeal and especially unintegrated. The new inclusion strategy for Romanian citizens belonging to the Roma minority for the period 2012-2020 proposes clearer targets and more precise budget allocations, but is more oriented towards accessing European funds and leaves the task of attracting funds to local authorities and NGOs whose capacity to attract funds varies.

Thus, it is not surprising that after 15 years of public policy for the Roma minority, the gaps in the main areas continue. The average number of years of education for young Roma aged 16-24 is almost two times lower compared to the same age segment for the non-Roma (6.3 vs. 11.2) (World Bank, 2014). The employment rate for Roma is 35.5%, 30 percentage points lower than the general employment rate in Romania (Tarnovschi et al., 2012, p. 25). In the health sector, 45.7% of Roma children did not benefit from the mandatory vaccines included in the National Immunization Program and over 50% did not receive any vaccine (European Commission, 2014, p. 7).

Finally, Roma migration to Western Europe has raised the attention of both Western governments and intergovernmental organizations. The mobility of Roma from the former socialist countries has been permanently labeled as 'irregular' by Western political actors. The problematization of Roma migration in terms of 'profiteers' who

do not want to work and who prefer to live on illegal activities, nomads unable to integrate into European societies have prompted some Western governments to declare their migration a problem of 'national security' (van Baar, 2011b). Since 2007, cases of expulsions (called 'voluntary repatriation') of Bulgarian and Romanian Roma have been observed in numerous countries such as Italy, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Northern Ireland. Nomadization (or the permanent labeling of Roma mobility as nomads, reiterating a stereotype of permanent mobility, contrary to the norms of European populations) and the criminalization of Roma mobility from Central and Eastern Europe, have legitimated some measures of dismantling of Roma camps (many of them having a long period of existence) and the expulsion of Roma (EU citizens) from the territories of the national states. Recent studies on the migration of Romanian and Bulgarian Roma to Western Europe show that their socio-economic plight in the countries of destination is far from improving, much of this blame being borne by local authorities who refuse to facilitate access to basic public services (Cherkezova and Tomova, 2013).

The current situation in Romania does not seem to be more optimistic. Although there is no particular attention from the media or political parties that could incite extremist movements or anti-gypsyism, this does not mean that hostile policies against the Roma in the last 25 years have not taken shape. The relocation of various Roma groups from the city center to peripheral neighborhoods, landfills, or substandard dwellings, abandoned or belonging to old industrial sites, subsequently transformed into social housing without access to adequate public services, is an example in this respect (Mionel, 2013, Vincze and Hossu, 2014, Vincze and Raț, 2013).

Conclusions

Although after 1989 various national and European programs were enabled in order to improve the socio-economic well-being of European Roma, I have shown in this paper that this attempts are not new. They have been part of the recurrent public policy responses of European states since the eighteenth century. The assimilation programs implemented by the Habsburg Empire and Socialist states targeting the Roma had as a starting point the paradigm of modernization, i.e. integration into economic, institutional, value systems and social relations, originating in Europe since the seventeenth century. Modernization, from the perspective of Roma assimilation, meant their transformation from a pagan, uncivilized, non-European population into obedient, productive and good Christians. The problematization of Roma in social terms, as a deviant, anti-social, uncivilized and especially non-European population, legitimized the policies of forced assimilation of authoritarian regimes. I have shown that the representations of a 'Gypsy image' crystallized during Enlightenment (anti-social behavior, lack of integration into the European lifestyle, persistent nomadism) perpetuated during state-formations, Nazism/Fascist regimes and in the last years during the 'irregular' migration of Eastern European Roma towards Western Europe.

In Romania, Roma were enslaved since their arrival until the mid-nineteenth century, when their plight is starting to be addressed by the newly formed modern nation-state. The abolition of Roma slavery did not bring significant improvements in their socio-

economic well-being, since nor were the boyars or the monasteries obliged to give them land to work on. Thus, the Roma would sell their labor or migrate towards West. With the formation of Greater Romania (1918), Roma from Bessarabia, Transylvania and Bukovina became Romanian citizens, and although having different occupational structures and sociocultural characteristics, their communality was that they occupied the lowest position in the socio-economic structure. But there were still no ethnic policies to tackle their plight. With the modernization of the economy, many traditional craft skills became redundant and thus, put more pressure on Roma to assimilate. During socialism, the living standard of many Roma improved, due to the systems' overall political objectives of full employment, reducing socio-economic disparities, inequality and social homogenization. The Roma were for the first time wage earners, access to school increased for their children, and Roma intellectuals were included in official state structures to help the implementation of assimilation policies. On the other hand, by encouraging Roma to take low or unskilled jobs in the labor intensive industry or state farms, providing them substandard housing on the outskirts of villages or towns, coupled with a weak control by the central authorities on the local ones regarding Roma integration shows the status of second-class citizens that the Roma experienced during socialism. The only policy-related document to assess the Roma's socio-economic conditions was published by the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party at the end of the 1970s, showing the poor integration of Roma into the socialist structures, which was instead strongly dependent on the will of local authorities. The lack of political control towards Roma's socio-economic integration at the local level has ultimately led to different levels of integration, visible especially after 1989 when some researches revealed the socio-economic heterogeneity of Roma communities (e.g. Vincze, 2014).

The fall of socialism and the realigning of CEE states to Western (European) capitalism have had significant consequences for the Roma population in the region. Deindustrialization, the dismantling of collective and state farms has led to increased unemployment among Roma, being among the first to be laid off. Without a stable source of income and with the raising of (informal) costs for basic public services – such as education and health services –, their living standard declined, and some socio-economic indicators receded throughout the transition. Also, the state, through its public institutions, is not the sole responsible for Roma inclusion. The Roma became the target of the European Union's (EU) social inclusion programs, of the Decade Action Plans - an initiative of the World Bank and Open Society Foundation, of the National Inclusion Strategies implemented by the CEE governments, of United Nations' Human Development Initiatives and of national and European NGO's empowerment initiatives. By dispersing responsibilities to this multi-level 'web of governance' (Clarke, 2012), questions of democratic accountability and lack of political control for the social inclusion policies implemented can be raised (since neither NGOs nor the European Commission can be held accountable for their lack of efficiency) (see Anghel, 2015). More recently, EU's social inclusion programs or the new approach promoted by intergovernmental institutions, the World Bank / EU / UNDP's community-led local development (CLLD), does not contest the larger processes of unequal redistribution of resources and minority representation, limiting the debate only to its social inclusion agenda. The Roma are still represented as a 'problem'

minority, which needs special attention and must be mobilized through `integrated` projects to increase their welfare at local level. By imagining Roma as passive subjects of their welfare and not as active citizens, the risk of reiterating the `Gypsy image` stereotypes of `work-shy`, unchangeable `Roma culture`, `backward` way of living and `social-problem group` will persist and so will Roma's status of perennial `outsiders`.

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