Between past and future

the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe

edited by

WILL GUY

Cover: Young Roma, East Slovakia, 1971
This image was the cover picture of Race Today, March 1972. This issue included an
article by Davidová and Guy, which quoted internal Czechoslovak government
documents admitting that restrictions on the freedom of movement of Roma were
unconstitutional and that local authorities were breaching ministry directives in refusing
to register Roma migrant workers as permanent residents. Similar local authority practice
was reported in the 1990s in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia
Photographer: Eva Davidová

Inset (upper): Hristo Kyuchukov, IRU Secretary General-elect, moderates the election
proceedings, Fifth World Romani Congress, Prague, July 2000. Security guard (left) of
Radio Free Europe, which provided the congress venue. Photographer: Will Guy.
Inset (lower): Emil Ščuka, IRU President-elect, addresses the Fifth World Romani Congress,
Prague, July 2000. Photograph: ERRC

Back cover: Will Guy at roundtable on Romani migration, Prague, November 2000. Photographer:
Dagmar Havranková, Institute of Ethnology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.

Frontispiece: Last Roma in Pejá, Kosovo.
Here Roma were driven out and their homes set on fire by former neighbours
– ethnic Albanians. Photographer: Rolf Bauerdick

Romania: representations, public policies and political projects[1]

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Two senior officers from the Republic of Moldova, guerrilla warfare specialists who formerly served in Afghanistan and Chechnya, were hired by the municipal office in Piatra Neamț, to safeguard public order in several blocks of flats in the Dărmănești neighbourhood, where Roma live. The mayor plans to rehabilitate the D2 and D3 blocks in this area and has recruited the two officers in order to evict the inhabitants, who have resisted this measure for some time.

(Curierul National, 20 October 1999)

This report was published in a newspaper with a wide circulation and although this example could be considered extreme, it is not exceptional in public discussion about Roma in Romania. Journalists interested in sensational news often focus on the 'Roma issue' but rarely with the intention of understanding the sources of tensions. On the other hand, since 1989 human rights activists and Roma and non-Roma political leaders have presented alternative views in statements about the situation of Roma in Romania. In most cases, conflicts between Roma and the majority society are headline news (as in the quotation above), but with few exceptions the means of representation and access to decision-making are entirely in the hands of the majority.

Although there has been much discussion about issues and problems relating to Roma in Romania it is no easy task to present an overall account of the topic. The complexity of the situation is partly due to historical differences between regions, language and cultural diversity among groups and more recently to different directions taken in pursuing political strategies and action. However, problems such as increasing poverty and unemployment among Roma and violent attacks by the local majority (both Romanian and Hungarian) are related to the emergence of a market economy and transformation of the political system, which are ongoing processes of the Romanian 'transition'.

Successive waves of westward migration since 1989 have made Roma from Romania the centre of attention in Western European countries too.

In the West interest has focused more on understanding the situation of Roma in Romania and has been reinforced by fears of an invasion that are regularly invoked by the press. However, little empirically-based research is available on the Roma in Romania. The fact that Romania has the largest Roma population in Europe is widely quoted, although the figures are highly contested. The last national census in January 1992 recorded 409,723 Roma. However, various researchers and activists estimate the true figure to be much larger, ranging from one million to three and a half million with the estimated proportion of Roma in the total population (22,760,449 in 1992) consequently varying from 2 to 15 per cent. Indeed, given their demographic structure, Roma in Romania may well play an important role in future social developments and political projects that will concern not only Romania but other countries as well.

This chapter does not aim to summarise previous research in order to make general statements about the Roma population in Romania. Instead, we propose to look at specific situations through which the reader can gain an insight into the processes by which images and representations are produced by and about the Roma in Romania. We argue that these representations have their roots in the social realities of the subjects who sustain and promote them. At the same time the development of public policy is dependent on the perception and identification of the nature of problems, mediated through such images and representations.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. After a short discussion of the main theoretical concepts, we briefly summarise the historical experience of Roma in Romania. Then we focus on various educational, employment and cultural policies and programmes concerning Roma which were carried out by state and non-governmental organisations after 1989. We also look at ways in which Roma have begun to enter political life in Romania.

Drawing on the insights of anthropology, we argue for a perspective that takes account of how national politics and policies are seen and experienced at local level. Using the case of the multi-ethnic Transylvanian region, we illustrate the dynamics of local, inter-group power relations within the framework of changing economic and political conditions. This approach emphasises the ability of members of local communities to use, transform and/or manipulate the categories and measures of both local and central administration. Placing local settings within the national and even international context in this way provides a far more comprehensive picture of the social location of Roma in Romania.

The second case study, an analysis of a talk-show with two Roma leaders in the autumn of 1999, concentrates on issues such as types of policies designed to address the situation of Roma, political legitimacy and (non) authentic auto-representations, as they are used in the arguments of the two leaders.

To conclude, we try to summarise the experience of the Roma in the 1990s in terms of the dynamics between politics and representations. We also try to indicate some possible lines of future evolution as regards Roma in Romania.

Representations

The study of representations has a long and distinguished tradition in the history of social science. Here we limit ourselves to a brief summary of the concepts used in this chapter. Following the distinctions made by Agnes Heller (1996) we can identify two semantic areas associated with this concept – on the one hand, representation meaning a creative process of building up the image of an object; on the other hand, in a political context, as being the representative of a larger group. These two aspects, even if separable analytically, are interdependent in social situations. The activities of categorising the social world and creating images of it are interwoven with similar problems to those arising from the political activity of speaking and acting on behalf of others.

We also distinguish between auto-representation (or self-representation) and hetero-representation (or representation by others), depending on the subject making the representation. Strictly speaking, most instances of representation are of hetero-representation, the only exceptions being self-portraits and confessions. But, in a wider sense, members of a group could be elected as representatives of that group, or could claim they were representing them, in this way constituting auto-representation by the community.

In the case of the Roma these processes could involve contests for the support of group members, raising the problem of the authenticity of auto-representation. In so far as we do not accept a primordial definition of group membership, a contest involving rival claims to authenticity can be seen as a fight for the position of being the acknowledged representative and over the political legitimacy of the representation. Therefore such auto-representation also depends on the power of would-be representatives to mobilise the group, in order to legitimate their representation.

On the other hand, hetero-representations have political implications too, for governmental and non-governmental bodies at various levels frequently develop their perceptions of Roma without reference to auto-representations. The assumptions underlying the programmes and policies promoted by these official institutions can often be found in the hetero-representations constructed by various outsiders. In this way, non-Roma politicians could appeal for and indeed count on the support of the Roma population in their campaigns. Naturally, this kind of hetero-representation fuels the criticism of many Roma, who are insiders claiming authentic auto-representation for themselves.

These considerations are also relevant in the field of political action, including scientific discourse, for the adoption of the radical position that only auto-representation is legitimate could rule out any attempt to develop an outsider's view of the social reality of Romani life. Both authors of this chapter are gadje[2] (non-Roma) and have no political ambitions in presenting this account, although they are aware that publication of their views may have unforeseen consequences.

Representing the historical experience of the Roma

The present situation of Roma in Romania is extremely varied as regards regional differences, historical experience, socio-occupational structure and cultural background making it hard, though not impossible, to sketch a historical narrative of the group from their 'arrival' to the present[3]. However, the historical account in this chapter concentrates on the period from the First World War onwards, since unification in 1918 brought Roma from the previously separate political region of Transylvania and the Romanian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia under the same rule. Slavery of Roma in the Romanian principalities and the assimilationist policy of the Habsburg Empire in Transylvania were important, formative historical experiences, relevant to the current social-political status of Roma in present-day Romania.

Viorel Achim (1998) published the most recent historical study of Roma in Romania, based on research carried out between 1993 and 1995. Achim dated the emergence of historical and ethnographical interest in Roma living in the territories of the Romanian principalities from around the 1840s onwards.[4] This interest was stimulated by the intellectual debates surrounding emancipation of the Roma from slavery. The abolitionist arguments of enlightened intellectuals proved successful and Roma were legally freed from slavery in the mid-nineteenth century. However, emphasis on this period in historical accounts of Roma remained long lasting.[5]

The period of slavery gives rise to speculation about whether the Roma became enslaved after their arrival in the area or were brought as slaves to the Romanian principalities by thirteenth century Tartar invaders. The latter theory was refuted as both historically false and racially and ethnically prejudiced by Nicolae Gheorghe (1983: 15). He argued instead that the process of enslavement should be understood as embedded in the political, social and economical processes of the feudal principalities. This argument suggested new perspectives for studying different degrees and types of enslavement.

Slavery eventually ended in both principalities after a series of abolition laws, the last of which was passed in 1855–6. These legislative measures prompted what almost amounted to an exodus. Freed groups travelled westwards to neighbouring countries, even to Western Europe, and then remained in their new surroundings for various lengths of time. This mass movement at

the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century is sometimes referred as the second migration of the Roma. Another important legal measure in the territories of the Romanian principalities was the land reform of 1864. As a result of this reform some groups of Roma settled near existing villages and towns while some Roma even established new villages of their own (Achim 1998: 103).

After the unification of 1918, Roma with their varying legal and social status from different regions were brought under the uniform jurisdiction of the modern Romanian state. In 1930, in the first census after unification, 262,501 persons declared themselves as *ţigani*, which represented around 1.5 per cent of the population. The 1920s and 30s saw the emergence of formal political activity by Roma in Romania. Organisations were created, newspapers published and this developing Roma mobilisation in Romania can be seen as an important moment in the context of the international Romani movement (Achim 1998: 132).

At the same time there was increasing interest in the history and social conditions of Roma. Gheorghe Porta's (1939) book is considered by Achim as the first reliable account of this topic. The socio-economic situation of the rural Roma population was documented in a series of studies in ethnography and rural sociology, carried out under the auspices of the Romanian Social Institute (*Institutul Social Român*) led by Dimitrie Gusti.[6] Although characteristic of the period these investigations were stimulated by interest in rural development and the integration of Roma into Romanian society and the wider economy.

In contrast to these developments, the Second World War was a tragic time for the Roma in Romania. The regime of Marshal Ion Antonescu[7] pursued anti-Gypsy policies and many Roma were deported and died in Transnistria. Although these years are very important for Romani history few studies have been carried out in Romania, although Western scholars such as Kenrick and Puxon (1995: 108–112) and more recently Kelso (1999) have researched and written on this period. Achim (1998: 133–52) included a chapter based on archival research, but nevertheless the history of these years remains largely unwritten, even though there are many documents available in the archives. As a result public discussion on the fate of the Roma under the Antonescu regime is non-existent.

There is also no adequate account of the period of Communist rule, although this can be partly blamed on the nature of Romanian state socialism. Official documents were not published and even today the archives are difficult for researchers to access (Achim 1998: 153). There are no reliable statistical data and it was nearly impossible to carry out field research during the years of Communist rule. However, an alternative source lies in personal memories and life stories which could still be explored to develop an oral history of these years. The fruitfulness of this approach is demonstrated by

Sam Beck's (1993) dialogue with Nicolae Gheorghe.

Broadly, the Communist era in Romania can be divided into two major periods. The first started with the ending of the Second World War and lasted until 1965 when Nicolae Ceauşescu came to power. During these years the Roma organisations founded before the war were dissolved, as were many other civil organisations that were regarded as incompatible with the new system. In addition, Roma were excluded from the list of 'cohabiting nationalities' and this denial of their separate ethnicity was combined with official neglect of the social problems of the Roma. Although collectivisation of agriculture in the 1950s represented an attack on economic inequality in rural areas, this left the marginality of the Roma unchanged. However, collective farms did create new job opportunities for many Roma living in the countryside, mostly in places where others were unwilling to live.

After 1965, however, it increasingly became obligatory to accept jobs offered by the state socialist economy as part of the drive to achieve the target of 'full employment' for all those of working age. Decree no. 153, issued in 1970, punished 'social parasitism', 'anarchism' and deviance from the 'socialist way of life' with jail or hard labour. Although the decree made no special mention of ethnicity it affected a large part of the Roma population who did not conform to the norms of the regime. Another decree, passed in 1966, banned abortions for women under forty-five who had not given birth to four children. This law brought about considerable demographic changes and led to increased numbers of children being abandoned by their desperate parents in orphanages and special schools (şcoală ajutătoare), including children of Roma origin (Crowe 1999: 62–3).

The only published document on official policy towards Roma was a 1983 report by the Propaganda Section of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (Human Rights Watch 1991: 108–16). This was an evaluation of a 1977 Central Committee programme to integrate the Roma population. The report's substantive findings, discernible in spite of the inevitable propaganda gloss, reflected some of the main problems among the Roma population, in particular the high rate of unemployment – especially among women at 48 per cent – and inadequate housing conditions. As well as discussing social problems the report criticised Roma for maintaining their non-socialist attitudes, such as 'social parasitism', the nomadic way of life of some and avoidance of registering with state institutions (Achim 1998: 159–60).

As for the opinion of Roma about state policies concerning them, we have the letters of Alexandru Danciu and Cosmina Cosmin that were sent to Radio Free Europe in 1982. Cosmina (probably an assumed name), a Romani woman, denounced the ignorance displayed by state policies in disregarding the discrimination against Roma in everyday situations. Developing her theme she compared the possibilities for cultural affirmation, offered by the

'cohabiting nationality' status (even if this was limited and used for propaganda purposes) to Hungarians, Germans and even smaller groups like Tartars and Armenians, with the 'pseudo-ignorance' shown towards Roma. She termed official practice 'pseudo-ignorance' because in spite of Roma being denied a separate ethnic identity, this did not prevent the police from maintaining special records and statistics for 'Gypsy criminals' (Cosmin 1983: 34).

At this time only a few public affirmations of their identity were made by Roma in Romania including a Romani Cultural Festival organised on 8 September 1984 at Bistritza cloister in Vîlcea county, the site of an annual pilgrimage. This pilgrimage had long served as a meeting point for the *Kalderash* as in 1978 when Ion Cioaba had been elected as *bulibasa* (leader) for the whole *neam* (kinship group). The 1984 festival was planned by *Kalderash* Roma from the city of Sibiu, and was organised with the assistance of local Romanian officials from Vîlcea country. Large numbers of Roma and non-Roma attended the festival where Romani folklore was presented on stage for the first time (Gheorghe 1985). The following year the central government prevented the festival being repeated (Pons 1999: 32), an act characteristic of this severely repressive regime that left little room for public affirmation of Romani culture.

From the 1970s onwards Romania slid into a deepening economic crisis but the regime seemed incapable of internal reform. For, while signs of economic and cultural change could be seen in neighbouring countries, the Ceauşescu regime adhered firmly to a nationalistic version of Stalinism.

The forced industrialisation of towns had led some Roma to take up unskilled work in factories but after 1989, such workers were the first to become unemployed, sharing the fate of farm workers – including Roma – who lost their jobs after de-collectivisation. Partly in view of these developments Achim stated in a recent article that 'it is evident to us that the present-day Roma "problem" derives from the "problem" of the 1970s and 80s. In our case the Roma "problem" is a heritage of Ceauşescu's socialism' (Achim 1999). After the fall of Communism the only sociological research carried out on a national scale was apparently based on similar presuppositions. According to the conclusions of this research, sponsored by the Institute for Life Quality Research, the problem of the Roma is not primarily an ethnic problem and therefore one of discrimination. 'The ethnic problem cannot be disregarded, but this is a secondary problem sustained mainly by social and economic problems' (Zamfir and Zamfir 1993: 156). These accounts (or representations) locate the 'Roma problem' in an economic and social context, suggesting policies to deal with hardships experienced in these areas. Without denying the importance of economic and social factors we would like to reframe the situation of Roma in Romania in more political and cultural terms.

Post-communist representations

After the fall of Communism new types of social conflict emerged both within the new democracies and between former Communist countries and Western European states. The intensification of nationalist feeling led to internal tensions and several waves of international migration in which Central and Eastern European Roma played a prominent part. Westward migration from Romania – especially of Roma – stimulated new interest in the circumstances of the Roma in Romania. We argue that this situation should be understood on at least two distinct levels: firstly, on the level of public institutions and legislation and, secondly, on the level of social life, ranging from media discourses to the politics of everyday life.

In the 1991 Romanian Constitution Roma were recognised as a national minority, a situation without precedent in Romanian political life. Now, just like Hungarians and other minorities in Romania, Roma could organise political parties on an ethnic basis and participate in politics as a formally acknowledged group for the first time. However, legal recognition alone was not able to solve many of the problems Roma communities faced in their everyday lives. Indeed, in many respects, the extent of continuity between the Communist and post-Communist periods is more significant than any changes that have occurred.

In spite of the public attention paid to them Roma were in no position to make use of the new media to promote their interests or foster better understanding between Roma and the majority community. Looking back, many non-Roma perceived the Communist period as one where Roma were given undeserved advantages, in spite of the evident drawbacks described above. In this atmosphere of mutual mistrust several violent conflicts erupted in settlements throughout the country during the first half of the 1990s.

After 1989, attacks targeting Roma frequently made the headlines in the mass media.[8] There is not space here to comment in more depth on the aggression displayed in Romanian public life immediately after 1990 but nevertheless, without diminishing their seriousness, incidents involving Roma must be seen within the broader context of other violent events. These include the *Mineriade*, when miners from the Jiu valley savagely attacked anti-Iliescu demonstrators in Bucharest, and the bloody confrontation between ethnic Romanians and Hungarians in the Transylvanian town of Tîrgu-Mureş. For Roma the worst years were 1990 and 1991 when most outbursts of violence against them took place in rural areas, often following a typical scenario.[9]

Usually the spark was an argument or fight between Roma and non-Roma, provoking a violent reaction from non-Roma. Also characteristic, at least for the earlier incidents, was the non-involvement of the police or their lack of effective response in failing to stop the violence. In some cases they stood by as Roma houses were set on fire or simply watched without

intervening while Roma were beaten by non-Roma. In fact, in one instance in Comaneşti, police officers themselves were directly involved in an attack in which two Roma were killed. In addition, subsequent administrative processes at local or national level were prolonged and generally the judicial process of investigating and prosecuting those accused of these offences was extremely slow and inefficient.[10] Such delays only strengthened the conviction among Roma that attacks against them were not treated seriously by the authorities and would not result in adequate sentences for those found guilty. Consequently Roma victims were left unsupported and the whole community became increasingly mistrustful of the capacity or resolve of the state to protect them.

However, it should be mentioned that these kinds of violent incidents have not occurred in recent years. One factor explaining this change might be the growing awareness of the non-Roma population of the possible consequences of being convicted. Organisations such as Human Rights Watch or the European Roma Rights Center have played an important part in lobbying and publicising the judicial proceedings of cases like that of Hădăreni. Another factor is the greater readiness of Roma leaders to react promptly to the occurrence of anti-Roma incidents. Moreover, the management of conflict between Roma and non-Roma seemed to become more effective in the second half of the decade.

A wide variety of organisations need to be taken into account when considering the formal structures which have created a new context for issues of concern to Roma. At national and sub-national level the state is represented by the government, ministries and regional and local administration. In addition, other types of participant appeared on the scene and have been increasingly influential during the second half of the decade. These include supra-national organisations such as the United Nations and its agencies (e.g. UNESCO, UNCHR), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe and European Union, as well as the specialised committees on migration, minorities and human rights, etc.). Other types of institutions engaged in dealing with Roma-related issues are the many and varied NGOs, amongst which the most active and significant in terms of resources are the Open Society Institute (OSI) and the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER).

It is not possible to deal with all these levels and organisations here, partly because of the complexity of the processes and partly because the outcomes are not yet evident. Nevertheless, it is possible to make at least a preliminary assessment of results. Since 1996 several governmental offices and commissions have been established in order to deal with the problems of national minorities. In 1997 the Department for the Protection of Minorities and the Office for Roma were created and a Minister for the Protection of Minorities was attached to the prime minister's office. The following year an

Inter-ministerial Commission for Minorities was set up (with the participation of seventeen ministries and departments) and within it an Inter-ministerial Commission for Roma (eight representatives). Some ministries have their own special programmes addressing Roma-related issues: the Ministry of National Education has a programme for education in Romani, the Ministry of Culture supports initiatives regarding Romani culture and even the justifiably much-criticised Ministry of the Interior is trying to change its attitude.

In the sphere of civil society the Civic Assembly of Roma Associations in Romania was convened in January 1998 and the Working Group of Romani Associations (GLAR) created, with representatives of Roma associations, in order to collaborate with governmental structures. GLAR assists in carrying out a PHARE-funded programme of the European Union, Improving the Situation of the Roma in Romania (1999–2000), which aims to plan a strategy for the protection of the Roma minority for the Romanian government. These institutional developments reflect changes in the official position and policy towards Roma in Romania. The inclusion of ordinary Roma in joint ventures promises a more sensible approach in helping Roma and better feedback of results.

Case studies

In politics, both local and national Roma political organisations make their presence felt at various levels and in different locations. The following case studies provide an insight into the complex processes at work.

Roma in local communities in Transylvania

Hungarians are the largest ethnic group in eastern Transylvania and study of group relations in local communities provides a basis for understanding the interaction between groups and competing representations. In this multiethnic region both traditional and new patterns of ethnic relations can be seen operating in competition with each other. Here, the changing economic, legal and political contexts generate instant responses to new conditions. The following interpretation of the behaviour of local Roma, based on field research and the findings of previous case studies (Fosztó 1998a, 1998b), cannot be assumed to be typical of Roma elsewhere in Romania but can be seen as variants arising from local conditions. One can learn from these but should not draw general conclusions.

Eastern Transylvania is largely rural but with some medium size towns that experienced intensive development and industrialisation in past decades which resulted in considerable change in local ethnic balances. The workforce for the new industries was imported partly from neighbouring villages but also from other regions, mainly from distant areas with an overwhelmingly

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Romanian population. In spite of these changes Hungarians remained in the majority followed by Romanians and then by considerable numbers of Roma. Roma communities are divided by self-identification, occupation and language. The languages spoken by Roma here are mainly Romanian and Hungarian with only a small proportion speaking Romani. This division provides an opportunity for categorising Roma along national lines into 'Romanian Gypsies' and 'Hungarian Gypsies'. This classification is made by non-Roma, but Roma also distinguish themselves according to their mother tongue, although some of the 'Romanian Gypsies' identify themselves as Boyas (*Baiesi*).[11] However, the majority of Romanian speakers and also those who speak Hungarian assert they themselves are not 'real Gypsies'.[12]

The representation of Roma by outsiders is significant since it defines Roma identity in terms of the wider context of ethno-national competition, specifically the continuing contest between Hungarians and Romanians.[13] Therefore, depending on which side is doing the categorising, in addition to the national classification a distinction is drawn between 'allied Gypsies' and 'non-allied Gypsies'. Such a possibility arises because of the absence of a powerful third party claiming to define Roma as a distinct category. This situation is specific to this region alone and perhaps to some other places in Transylvania, but the interpretation suggested here is more general. In spite of the legal recognition of Roma as a national minority only a low profile of self-representation, as such, can be observed.

This lack of self-representation (or under-representation) can be attributed partly to the marginalisation and stigmatisation of Roma but also to the different strategies adopted by particular Roma communities. In the following two cases the local politics of non-Roma authorities and the response of Roma meet/avoid each other in different ways. In the first case, a village where Hungarians and Romanian-speaking Roma live together, Roma inhabitants decided to avoid the national classification by using an entirely different representation – the alternative offered by Pentecostalism. This strategy aimed at social integration for these Roma at a quite different level. The second case, of a town in the region, exemplifies the relationship between Hungarian-speaking Roma and local Romanians and Hungarians. This case reveals some characteristic features of the relationship between Roma and local authorities and the role of Roma middlemen in the relationship but also uncovers some contradictions in the representation of these Roma as 'allied Gypsies'.

The first case of Romanian-speaking Roma in a Hungarian village could be an example of Hungarians using the representation of them as 'non-allied Gypsies', although in reality the situation is more complex. For a long time the Hungarians ignored the problems of their Roma fellow-villagers – poverty, bad housing conditions and unemployment that worsened after 1989. However, their attitude towards Roma gradually changed as they began

to notice a considerable increase in the Roma population, related to their differing age structure, so that there are now roughly equal numbers of Roma and Hungarians in the village. A feeling of anxiety replaced the previous disregard and some Hungarians began to speak about a deliberate state policy behind the growth in Roma numbers. A member of the local council is elected from among Roma but in spite of this limited political representation the problems of their community remain largely unresolved. Meanwhile the growing influence of the Pentecostal church is perceived by Hungarians as a kind of institutional support offered by outsiders to the local Roma community. Here we will focus on one important element of the relationship between these two groups, language use in different social contexts.

The language spoken by village Roma is actually a dialect of Romanian, but Hungarians do not distinguish between the local dialect and the official language of the state.[14] For them, Romanian is the language of power, which they speak mainly in formal situations when dealing with the state administration and yet many of them are far from fluent in this language. Therefore, communication in Romanian implies for them the inferior role in an asymmetric relationship. Roma speak Hungarian too, as a second language, and likewise communication in Hungarian implies for them a similarly disempowered position in many situations as speaking Romanian does for Hungarians – but for different reasons. The fact that Hungarians form the majority in the region and the economic marginality of Roma both contribute to this perception. Therefore, in inter-ethnic encounters Hungarians prefer to speak Hungarian rather than Romanian to Roma in order to maintain their instinctive feeling of superiority.

The growing importance of Pentecostalism in the local Roma community in recent decades has also influenced language usage. Roma use official Romanian in church services and bibles are also printed in this language. Pentecostal services are attended almost exclusively by Roma, Hungarians being largely Calvinists, and the few Hungarians sometimes present adapt to the situation. The Pentecostal service is an important formal setting where Roma can define the rules of interaction. In this church interpersonal relations are expressed in universalistic religious terms, taking no account of ethnic or national divisions, but the fact that the service is held in Romanian ensures the relative superiority of Roma. A growing awareness of their linguistic advantage can be observed inside the Roma community. Institutionally, the network of Pentecostal communities provides an alternative space for social organisation that avoids the domination of non-Roma representatives and offers Roma a way to escape their stigma and subordination at local level. In a wider sense these developments have stimulated the Roma community to seek resources other than those provided and regulated by the local authorities.

In some respects the second case illustrates the opposite of the above

process since the situation of Hungarian-speaking Roma in a town inhabited by a Hungarian majority and a Romanian minority (around 25 per cent) yields insights into the function of 'allied Gypsies' being represented by Hungarians. The proportion of Roma in this town is about the same as that of Hungarians in Romania (roughly 7 per cent). In spite of the urban setting a considerable number of the Roma inhabitants live in a fairly traditional 'Gypsy settlement'. Communication between municipal institutions and the Roma community is carried out through a set of well-established 'channels'.

These channels are mainly maintained by mediators or middlemen among the Roma, who developed their special function to fill an important gap. On the one hand they meet the need of the administration to communicate and control, while on the other the need of Roma community members for some access to municipal institutions. To some extent these mediators can be considered as representatives of Roma in the institutional environment but they also serve as the informal representatives of municipal institutions in the Romani world. In order to illuminate these processes and their implications for local and low-level policy making we consider the case of the town council.

In 1992 a Roma councillor was elected to the local council on the list of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR). Other political parties also tried to persuade the Roma community to support them but none could gain their trust. A sense of historic affinity and the common language both favoured the Hungarian organisation. But the decisive factor was the role of the person who agreed to be the Roma representative. Men from his family had traditionally assumed the role of middleman in communication with municipal institutions.

In the subsequent elections of 1996, however, he was unsuccessful due to his low ranking on the DAHR list[15] but instead was appointed to the post of permanent consultant. With good reason he saw this change as a worsening of his position, brought about by DAHR scheming, but he did not give up his role as a mediator. For not only did his position, both inside and outside the Roma community, largely depend on performing this role but in any case the long established channel, kept open by middlemen, was needed by both sides to maintain successful communication between them.

To conclude that in this case the local DAHR was discriminating against the Roma population would be misleading. Focusing on the local situation and its context, a structural explanation would appear more plausible. As described above, the role of the mediator is crucial in the interaction between Roma and the local administration. Consequently this role requires a person with the ability to assess situations shrewdly and to communicate effectively, and moreover who can sustain relationships in both worlds. However, the rewards offered by the mediator role are more symbolic than material and, in so far as the prestige of the mediator within the Roma community depends

on performing the middleman role, his capacity for autonomous policy making is correspondingly reduced.

Media case study

Anybody interested in researching hetero-representations of Roma would find rich materials in the Romanian press. These representations are invariably sketchy and constructed around common stereotypes of *ţigani* as thieves, who are also dirty and make disastrous ambassadors for the image of Romania abroad. There are cases, however, when Roma have had the chance to represent themselves in the media or to respond to gadje interlocutors. We chose one of these situations when two important Roma leaders debated for more than an hour on a very popular Romanian talk-show.[16]

The Tuca show (named after its moderator) featured two Roma leaders – King Cioaba and Mădălin Voicu MP, a deputy representing Roma in the Romanian parliament. The debate was an interesting performance focusing on who was a 'real Rom' and who had the better claim to legitimacy in representing Roma in Romania. Marius Tuca 'moderated' the discussion in a fairly aggressive and provocative manner, trying to reveal conflicts between the two leaders. In fact, at the time of the discussion, there was a dispute between the leadership of the Roma Party (*Partida Romilor*) and the organisations of King Cioaba. One of the reasons for the split was the decision of the Roma Party (RP) to lend its support in the coming elections to the party of Ion Iliescu, which was in the lead at that time in the opinion polls.

Other disagreements lay in differing perspectives about ways in which Roma should become involved in politics and also about what kind of claims should be made on the state. At the 1996 elections Voicu was elected to a legally guaranteed place for Roma on the RP list. At that time the RP was a coalition of fourteen smaller organisations and parties including those of Cioba, who had also been elected to the county council in his native town of Sibiu on the list of the same coalition. However, because Cioba rejected the agreement made with Iliescu, the RP had retaliated by declaring it would withdraw its support from him.

Part of the discussion revolved around how party support could be withdrawn from Cioba, as an RP member and leader of two smaller organisations in the coalition, with Cioba naturally arguing that this action made no sense. However, expulsion could have adverse consequences for him, since the RP as a parliamentary party was entitled to state funding, enabling it to build an infrastructure and thus increase its power to mobilise. The problem of funding was touched on once during the discussions but did not become an issue. Instead, the question was raised whether the RP was seeking hegemony over the entire Roma movement in Romania.

Cioba accused Voicu of trying to monopolise the representation of Roma

or at least attempting to subordinate other parts of the Roma movement to the RP. In making this charge Cioba used the metaphor of the 'chamber orchestra', mocking Voicu as its 'conductor'. This allusion to the occupation of Mădălin Voicu, a professional musician, stemmed from the underlying provocative strategy of the moderator, Tuca, in trying to show that there were serious contradictions and animosity between Roma groups. In fact, apart from this allusion, there were no hostile exchanges between the two leaders that derived specifically from their origin in different groups.

The question of authenticity took the form of a discussion about miscegenation. Cioba was strongly against intermarriage between Roma and gadje and maintained his position both against Tuca, who accused him of being against love between a man and a woman, and Voicu, who criticised this endogamy as discriminatory. Voicu, from a mixed marriage himself, felt excluded by Cioba's position but at the same time stated that he himself was a Romanian. He modified this claim (to half-Romanian) only after being challenged by Cioba, who demanded what he was doing in a discussion which was supposed to be for Roma leaders. Voicu saw himself as a representative of the Roma, serving this ethnic group, and so he was indignant that his authenticity should be contested: 'The fact that I represent you, for better or worse as I am doing now, should be respected. You shouldn't ask: "What is that Romanian or gadjo doing there?" You should say instead: "Here is a guy who has put his heart and soul and everything into serving an ethnic group which is very hard to unite."'[17]

As well as ethnic endogamy, the maintenance of the Romani language and cultural traditions were elements in Cioba's strategy for Roma to make progress in Romania. In his view the Pentecostal religion, of which he was a follower, could produce satisfactory changes in the way of life of the Roma without leading to assimilation. Voicu, in contrast, proposed orthodoxy (the faith of the majority) as an alternative option.

For his part, Voicu derided the institution of the 'king' as feudal backwardness, while Cioba interpreted his title as a truly contemporary European tradition, citing the examples of England and Spain. By these attacks on Cioba's title, Voicu tried to undermine the legitimacy of the traditional type of Roma leadership as anachronistic. He proposed instead his 'republicanism' and displayed openly assimilationist tendencies. He also labelled himself a social democrat in order to make the RP agreement with Iliescu's party more plausible. In his defence Cioba argued that his title was not in contradiction with the Romanian Constitution; he had inherited it from his father, and it was functional within the ethnic community. However, as a would-be modern representative of Roma, Voicu proved relatively uniformed about Romani democratic institutions, knowing hardly anything about the Working Group of Romani Associations (GLAR).

In this heated debate[18] it was clear to viewers that behind the personal

conflicts real political alternatives were at stake. Divergent approaches to politics and competing mobilisation strategies were advocated by the two leaders. While Voicu adopted a more centralist and inclusive line and followed the policy of the RP – to ally itself with a powerful gadje party, Cioba opted for a more devolved system, favouring 'independent politics' or the 'politics of minorities'. This provoked Voicu into distancing himself from allegedly 'anti-national actions' for which Hungarians and the DAHR were often blamed. Pursuing this theme he criticised Cioba for promoting federalism and accused him of wanting to split the Romanian state in order to create a divided Transylvania. In these arguments the security concerns of the unitary Romanian state were clearly evident as the backdrop to what might otherwise have been naively regarded as purely Roma politics.

Conclusion

In this chapter we proposed to consider the changing representations of the Roma in Romania. Our presumption was that in looking at the processes by which these representations are produced and maintained we could understand something about the social situation of the participants involved. Furthermore, the representations through which social reality is perceived significantly influence political actions. At the outset we distinguished between two basic categories: auto-representations and hetero-representations. Consequently, part of the chapter addressed hetero-representations, such as historical accounts, ethnographic and sociological studies, reports by human rights organisations, etc. Although some of these were written by Roma, we addressed the problem of auto-representation in a separate case study, drawing attention to the more political sense of the concept *representation*.

As elsewhere, hetero-representations have a long pedigree in Romania. Interest in the situation of Roma began in the 1830s, stimulated by the debate on the abolition of slavery. It was renewed at the end of the First World War, when unification created the modern Romanian state. The third period of heightened interest followed the fall of the Communist regime in Romania. These events brought to the attention of the general public a series of problems which had been ignored, hidden or considered non-existent beforehand. Roma were brought to the attention of the public partly by the overwhelmingly negative, stereotypical images in the media but also by news reports about the violent attacks on Roma communities.

These alarming accounts later became the main mobilising factor at national and international level in offering protection to the victims and prompting legal action against the perpetrators. Such violent conflicts have not recurred in more recent years. In this respect the pressure from locally-based and international civil society was crucial. This could be seen as the

start of a trend which could continue in the future: the increasing impact of Roma and non-Roma NGOs on more conventional political processes.

Roma were acknowledged as a national minority for the first time in the history of Romania in 1991. This completely new situation offered Roma communities the possibility of articulating their positions and representing themselves in the political life of the country. As a result recognition marked the beginning of a new period for Romani politics in Romania. Initiatives making use of the political space offered by minority status are clearly visible today and probably will intensify in the near future. At the same time embryonic regional co-operation will be crucial in developing and co-ordinating strategies with other Roma organisations in neighbouring states.

However, another new factor in the post-Communist situation is international involvement in the problems of Roma in Romania. Indeed, many of the domestic changes have been driven by the influence of supranational organisations. Their involvement is expected to remain constant or even to increase in order to deal with problems that are too broad to be considered as limited to a single state.

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Notes

1 The authors wish to express their gratitude to Michael Stewart and Will Guy without whose encouragement and comments this chapter could not have been written.

2 Viorel is Romanian while László is an ethnic Hungarian from Romania.

3 Traditional historical accounts agree that Roma reached the territory of present-day Romania around the mid-fourteenth century. However, an alternative hypothesis places their arrival as early as the twelfth century (Crowe 1999:57). The first documents mentioning Roma in Romanian territories date from 1385 (Wallachia) and 1428 (Moldavia). See also Achim (1998: 21–2).

4 Achim (1998: 10) considers Mihail Kogălniceanu's study (1837) the first major contribution to the history of Roma in Romania, describing their situation in Moldavia and Wallachia on the eve of emancipation. An early account of the Roma in Transylvania was published by Heinrich von Wlislocki (1890).

5 Achim (1998) devotes about half of his book (87 pages) to the period of slavery and emancipation with many references, while periods like the Antonescu regime and the deportation of Roma during World War Two are restricted to 20 pages (based mostly on archival research) and the Communist regime to only 10 pages (with very little data).

6 For example: Păun (1932), Boia (1938) and especially Chelcea (1944). See also Achim (1998: 122–7).

7 Antonescu came to the power after King Carol II abdicated on 6 September 1940.

8   According to Human Rights Watch (1994) up till 1994 there had been twenty such incidents where Roma were victims.

9   Pavel (1998) points out an important exception: the attacks on Roma in Bucharest neigh-bourhoods during the events of 14–15 June 1990, when the miners from the Jiu valley went there in order to 'restore the peace'.

10   In the case of the Hădăreni events, the subsequent legal proceedings were extremely compli-cated. Indeed, before 1996 was difficult to obtain any convictions (Haller Istvan, personal communication).

11   Elsewhere referred to as Beash-speaking.

12   The terms in quotation marks are those used in practice by Roma. We distinguish between the categories used by social participants themselves and those used by us for analytical purposes.

13   We characterise this relationship as competitive although a closer look at relations between Romanians and Hungarians living alongside each other reveals non-competitive aspects as well. Nevertheless, the maintenance of the symbolic boundary between the two is a power-ful factor indicating group mobilisation on both sides, which is quite different from the normal presumption of individual competition.

14   The linguistic situation of the Roma can be described as diglossia where the local Roman-ian dialect is the familiar language variant they use in everyday communication and the lit-erary Romanian is the language they use mainly for church services and in other formal situations.

15   The local council consists of twenty-four members of which six are usually Romanian councillors, depending on the ethnic population proportions in the town. Therefore, the first eighteen nominated on the DAHR list are virtually safe seats. He was put in nineteenth place on the list.

16   The transcript of the discussion is more than 30 pages long, therefore it would be impossible to review all the topics covered.

17   'Faptul că eu vă reprezint în forma proastă, bună cum o fii ea în momentul de faţă, ar trebui să vă onoreze, n-ar trebui să vă pună problema că ce caută românul ăla sau gajiul ăla. Ci uită domnule, un băiat care şi-a pus şi sufletul şi obrazul şi tot în slujba unei etnii, care e foarte greu de unit.'

18   Tuca with his inadequate questions and comments usually supported Voicu's position, but his main contribution was simply to add heat to the discussions.