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Grassroots Gypsies, Roma Representatives: Political Disjuncture and Ethnicity in Romania

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Chapter 1

> Let us now reflect on how different they are from Europeans; the one is white, the other black. This cloaths himself, the other goes half naked. This shudders at the thought of eating carrion, the other prepares it as a dainty. Moreover these people are famous, and were even from their first appearance in Europe, for being plunderers, thieves and incendiaries: so that the European not only dislikes, but hates them. For the above reasons, Europeans have always driven the Gipsies away from them, and it is only a few simple people, who have made a nearer acquaintance, in order to consult them in matters of superstition.
>
> *Heinrich Grellman, Die Zigeuner, translated by Matthew Raper, (1783):xv.*

> Roma are not Roma, but Ţigani. Ţigani are thieves, criminals, pickpockets etc. Ţigani are a migratory people who migrated here from India. They have no culture – Survey respondent.
> *Shannon Woodcock,"Romania and EUrope: Roma, Rroma and Tigani as sites for the contestation of ethno-national identities,"(2007):54.*

Introduction

To the many in Central and Eastern Europe, Gypsies are the ultimate Other. This view of Roma is deeply entrenched and has been present in European conceptualizations of Gypsies for almost a thousand years. At times, Gypsies are romantically depicted as free from societal pressures, wanderers who live without the stresses of daily life; other times, they are seen as vagabonds and thieves, pathological in their rejection of social norms. The Gypsy subject, as viewed by non-Gypsies, has a "strange dual identity, where anti-Gypsyism– rooted in racism– meets the Gypsy of the romantic imagination" (Beissinger 2001:25); in either construction, Gypsies are not seen as part of the social body but oppositional to non-Gypsy Europeans. Yet how to define Gypsies when they are not difference itself remains unclear; definitions of who is Roma, what constitutes them as a group, and the characteristics that are attributed to them continues to change in concert with sociopolitical changes in the surrounding society.

Ethnonyms: Gypsy or Roma?

The ethnonyms 'Gypsy' and 'Roma' both have political histories and 'Gypsy,' in particular, has profoundly negative connotations. Since my thesis is focused on Roma politics, and based in field research amongst Roma in Romania, I pay particular attention to the use of both Gypsy and Roma in my analysis of that data. The term Roma is generally considered politically correct, yet for many of my informants that ethnonym is seen as a political identity and not an identity that is relevant to them. When referring to interviews, then, I use the English translation of whatever ethnonym was used by that particular interviewee. When my informants use the Romanian singular *rom* or plural *romi*, I translate it as Roma. When my informants use the Romanian terms *ţigan* or *ţigani,* I translate them as Gypsy. When not directly referencing interviews, I will alternate between the use of Roma and Gypsy to convey the contestation over these terms as part of the political struggle of Roma mobilization in Romania.

Situating my argument in context

Since the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, social and economic factors have combined to reconstitute an internationally recognized 'Roma Problem.' Since the political change, Gypsies have begun to mobilize aid initiatives as well as political parties. Gypsies are free to pursue ethno-political mobilization. By Roma ethno-political mobilization, I mean the process by which Roma actors organize collective efforts in order to bring about political change. In discussing ethno-political mobilization in Romania, I include NGO work not only because there is considerable overlap between political efforts and non-governmental efforts, but also because there is a shared acceptance of a politicized Roma identity by both politicians and NGO workers that mutually support ethno-political mobilization. This is perhaps most evident in

the work of Roma NGOs that have elaborated projects that aim to create Roma representatives by training individuals (Klímová 2002).

Since the early 1990s, Roma have taken advantage of these possibilities and have organized political parties and NGOs in Romania. With the entrance of the country into the EU as a New Member State in 2007, these mobilization efforts have gained new recognition and support in the form of EU policies, directives, commissions, and funding opportunities.

In the current Romania, there are many efforts in the name of Roma by NGOs, government offices, Gypsies, non-Gypsies, elites, and grassroots leaders. Given this plethora of initiatives in the name of Roma in Romania, my discussion of Roma mobilization must necessarily exclude certain efforts while highlighting others. I limit my discussion of Roma mobilization to the efforts made by Romanian Roma for Roma. While non-Roma are often integral to the functioning and support of Roma mobilization efforts, I did not have the time or the resources to address the relationship between Gypsies and Romanians within mobilization contexts. Instead, I focus on the way in which Roma elite frame their own efforts for Roma in Romania, and how those efforts, in turn, are received by Gypsies who are not involved in mobilization efforts.

In discussing Roma mobilization with both elites and non-elite Roma, it is clear that the space of post-communist possibility is also riddled with obstacles. The process of deindustrialization and the rise of democracy left many Roma unemployed and 'de-skilled,' poorly educated and segregated. And while elites have successfully mobilized Romanian governmental support and EU backing, they apparently face apathy and serious distrust from local Gypsy communities. Gypsies in local communities challenge the concept that elite Roma represent local Gypsy interests, depending instead on local forms of leadership.

In their work for the Roma mobilization movement, Roma elite, who are integral to the Roma mobilization project, are faced with the prospect of having to navigate between interest- and identity-based advocacy as well as between international, national, and local actors. They are simultaneously accountable to the sometimes divergent interests of powerful individuals, private foundations, the state, and the European Union. While most in the Roma movement are steadily working toward the goal of Roma social and economic integration by seeking anti-discrimination policies and economic aid, the navigation of these different demands and the weakness of networks between Roma mobilizers make the movement fragmented and lowers the confidence Gypsies have in it.

In my thesis, I argue that the current formulation of the Roma mobilization project suffers from a crisis of legitimacy that is based in the weak connections between national level efforts and local Gypsy communities. At the grassroots level, Gypsies challenge the idea that Roma leaders represent their communities. By upholding local leaders who are in constant contact with local communities of Gypsies and who have 'earned' their right to represent local Gypsy interests through community service, Gypsies illustrate the type of leadership they deem to be legitimate and challenge the representative rights of Roma on the national level.

The Roma movement in Romania has thus far failed to appeal to Roma voters despite the existence of many necessary conditions for success because of the disjuncture between the national and the local level of the movement. This disjuncture is partially due to the centralized nature of the political structure in which Roma are mobilizing. When Roma leaders describe the benefits to Roma that would result from successful mobilization, Gypsies on the grassroots level do not recognize themselves as the beneficiaries. Given the local affiliation and loyalty of many Gypsies, the lack of connection between local representatives and the national level lead Gypsies

to suspect that their communities are not taken into account in forming the aid projects and that the Roma movement is essentially an elite one.

The tensions between the local and the national, Gypsies and Roma, direct aid and indirect representation inform the overall process of Roma integration and mobilization in Romania, and will fundamentally shape the potential of any mobilization project– whether that project is one of minority representation within the nation, ethnic mobilization, or international human rights within the framework of the EU. Thus, questions about these processes and tensions within Romania formed the basis of my ethnographic fieldwork.

Methodology

While abroad in Hungary and Romania in the spring of 2010, the aim of my independent research was to gather a cross section of discourses about Roma mobilization in the context of the international objective of Roma integration. In order to get a wide variety of opinions on Roma identity and political mobilization, I resolved to conduct interviews with people both within and not affiliated with the mobilization movement.

My primary research was done within the framework of a semester-long study abroad program located in Hungary and Romania. The first part of my semester was spent in Budapest– coincidentally a hub of intellectual production in the study of Roma. I spent my time there situating myself within the discourses of nationalism, ethnic mobilization, and Roma Studies. The latter allowed me to get a sense of the ways in which intellectuals viewed the Roma and issues of Roma integration and mobilization. During the second part of the semester, I moved to a small city in Transylvania, where I had access to a government funded minority research institute. At this institute, I had access to fieldwork advisors who helped me formulate my interview questions and also provided interpreters for my interviews.

With only two weeks in which to do interviews, I decided to focus my attention on interviewing Roma living in Transylvania. I did this for two reasons: first and foremost, most of the academic work available on Roma issues in Central and Eastern Europe came from non-Roma scholars, and often did not include any Roma voices. I was interested in how Roma described their own efforts. Secondly, since my research deals heavily with identity mobilization, I wished to understand how Roma individuals processed and thought about their own identity within the movement.

Some of my informants were government employees working for specialized Roma departments and others were Roma NGO workers. The rest were from a small settlement on the edge of an old industrial town, and were not employed in the Roma mobilization efforts. This particular area was chosen as the site of my interviews within this town because the settlement had more distinctive boundaries and a clear Roma makeup. My advisor at my host research institution also had the contact information of a central figure in this Roma settlement, facilitating contact with this community. In order to differentiate between these two sets of interviewees, I will refer to interviews by an anonymous marker of location. Those I interviewed in the urban center will be referred to as City interviewees, those from the edges of the industrial town will be referred to as the Settlement interviewees.

From April 30 to May 17, 2010, I conducted interviews. Four of my informants were NGO and government employees of Gypsy origin who were working on Roma issues. One of my informants was a Roma woman active in a Roma student organization within this city, and another was a non-Roma sociologist working in a nearby settlement, who provided commentary through which to situate my findings in a larger context. All six of these interviews were conducted within the Transylvanian city in which I lived. For the remaining interviews, I went to

the Roma settlement in the industrial town and conducted interviews with two community leaders and seven community members. All of the interviews except one were done with the help of a paid interpreter, and all interviews were recorded on a digital tape recorder with the permission of the informants.

Though I attempted to conduct my interviews in such a manner as to hear as many different voices as possible, my methodology poses certain limitations. Firstly, I mostly conducted the interviews through an interpreter, thereby causing concern about the translation of both my questions and the informants' answers. Secondly, while I talked to many non-Roma and Roma alike about these issues, I only recorded interviews with fifteen people, and those were people who were either in contact with the research institution I was affiliated with, or who were willing to talk to me based on my connection to local leaders.

In the Gypsy settlement in the industrial town, my access to interviewees was physically limited because the community leader refused to let me walk through the settlement unaccompanied, and felt it was improper to let me wander into the poorest parts of the settlement. Thus, the interviewees I had within the settlement were wealthier, and were aware that I was affiliated with the community leader who introduced me to them. Though this certainly limited the range of opinions that I heard, it is interesting to note that my affiliation with this community leader seemed to make people in the community more comfortable with me, since he vouched for me and helped my interpreter explain my research goals in terms that were more familiar to the community.

Another factor that should not be ignored is that I am a foreigner. In some cases, interviewees said that my foreignness made me easier to talk to about Gypsy-Romanian relations. Others mentioned that the answers I would receive from poor Roma would be skewed

because of their attempts to gain either material resources or sympathy from me. Either way, interviews were further complicated by the fact that my main interpreter was a Romanian woman. That fact in itself also meant that the interviews were conducted in Romanian, since my interpreter did not speak Romani. Therefore, I was simply unable to interview the people within the settlement who did not speak Romanian.

Situating my work in the literature

The conversations I had with Gypsies and Roma working toward ethno-political mobilization in Romania underscored the commentary of many authors on the unpopularity of the Roma movement at the grassroots level. In my thesis, I will argue that the Roma movement in Romania is relatively unpopular on the grassroots level not because it is a new movement or because Gypsies are apolitical, but because the movement is framed in such a way as to appeal to powerful non-Gypsy authorities rather than local Roma communities. In fact, I argue that many Gypsies are involved in local politics and are involved in validating local Roma leaders. These Gypsies choose not to vote for the Roma parties in national elections because they do not support these parties, which is in itself a political statement.

In making this argument, I draw broadly from two types of literature: that which addresses identity politics broadly, specifically the literature on nationalism and ethnicity, and that of Roma Studies.

The first body of literature dealing with nationalism and ethnicity is useful in order to explain the ways in which many in Eastern and Central Europe think about collective identity and legitimate identity-based politics. In this context, as in many other parts of the world, nationalism and ethnicity are used to justify certain social rights by collectivities deemed nations

or ethnic groups. Not surprisingly, actors within the Roma movement in Romania draw from these discourses.

Roma Studies, on the other hand, deals more broadly with Roma history and identity. In focusing on the Roma case, Roma Studies illuminate the difficulties in situating Gypsies within the nation as an ethnic group through Roma ethno-political mobilization.

Nationalism and Ethnicity

Roma mobilizers employ ethnicity in order to stake their claim to Roma rights as minorities in the nation. Those attempting to mobilize Roma aim to secure and increase Roma representation on the national level, solidify an ethnic Roma identity as opposed to narrower Gypsy identities, and to mobilize popular support from Roma in Romania to address the lack of Roma integration and equality.

Nationalism and ethnicity are central organizing principles in the creation and mobilization of social identities in order to access rights. As Calhoun writes, "nationalism has become the preeminent discursive form for modern claims to political autonomy and self-determination" (Calhoun 1993:213). Similarly, ethnicity has been used to claim minority rights within modern nation-states.

As Brubaker points out, there has been a shift in understanding nations and ethnic groups as bounded or substantial things that exist and can be defined to a more processual and dynamic understanding which focuses on how nations and ethnic groups are created and maintained through nationalism and ethnicity (Brubaker 2009). I take as a starting point these processual approaches, lines of inquiry heavily influenced by Frederik Barth's view that ethnicity is not about the "cultural stuff" (Brubaker 2009:29) but about the maintenance of ethnic boundaries according to whatever us/them distinctions members of the ethnic group consider salient at any

given time. For Barth, the focus on boundary maintenance allows for change over time and interaction with other ethnic groups without the dissolution of ethnic identity. This approach to ethnicity is useful in that it allows us to understand how Roma activists may reference a Roma group that does not necessarily share any cultural content but maintains a distinction between the group and non-Roma– a phenomenon that is certainly visible in my work with Gypsies in Romania.

Others have pointed to the long-term creation of nationhood and ethnic groups through processes of cultural unification and homogenization within a shared territory (Smith 1989; Hroch 1993; Gellner 1983; Hechter 2000). As Gellner and Hecther argue, these processes of cultural homogenization occur to aid the switch to direct rule in modern industrial states, enabling more effective dissemination of government policies and economic growth (Balakrishnan 1996; Hechter 2000). In the process of nation creation, language and culture often become linked as homogenization of both allows for better communication across the various sectors of modern states. As Hroch points out, a "density of linguistic or cultural ties enabl[es] a higher degree of social communication with the group than beyond," thus creating a sense of unity and making the daily transactions of society easier (Hroch 1993:5). These processes of linguistic and cultural homogenization occur through the assimilation of different groups into a dominant culture through education and literate high-culture (Hechter 2000).

For some, the creation of nation is not guaranteed by the availability of networks of shared cultural and educational institutions, but require the active formation of “national sentiment” by “nationalist actors” (Smith 1989:342-3). For Smith, national sentiment is created by drawing on or creating myths of a common past that are spread “downwards through the strata of the population” (Smith 1989:343). This highlights the role of individual actors, often

elites, in creating a sense of collective identity. But Smith also highlights the importance of the collective sentiment and solidarity for all the people who are meant to be included in the collective identity that is being forged.

Benedict Anderson also highlights the constructed nature of the nation as "an imagined political community"(Anderson 1991:6). For Anderson, this imagination is a central part of what Smith considers to be national sentiment, since Anderson points out the no nation exists in which all members know each other, yet in the minds of those in the nation "lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1991:6). For Anderson, like Barth, nations exist with boundaries, since no nation encompasses all of mankind; yet Anderson points out that a nation's borders are permeable and "elastic" (Anderson 1991:7). Anderson's view of nation as imagined draws attention to the ways in which nations are constructed without delegitimizing that process or implying that nations are constructed communities in a world where natural communities exist.

I will address the position of Gypsies in Romania during the period of nation-formation in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in Chapter 2. For now, it is enough to point out that Roma, in general, were not considered to be part of the imagined communities of either Hungarians or Romanians in Transylvania, or the rest of Romania for that matter. They remained outside the nation and often, nationalist rhetoric was used to further cement their position as outsiders in the nation-state.

Yet Gypsies weren't the only people to fail to create a nation and gain autonomy and self-determination in the era of nation-state formation. Ethnic groups are often distinguished from nations in that nations are attributed the right to self-determination, whereas ethnic groups have no such right. Calhoun argues that "ethnic groups are defined in relation to the nation-state as subordinate internal and/or cross-cutting identities" (Calhoun 1993:220-1). As Calhoun points

out, a nation is “an ethnic group that has proved its superiority in historical struggle” (Calhoun 1993:221). Ethnic groups, however, can make claims to collective minority rights within nation states. Thus, while ethnicity cannot be used to lay claims to the same types of sovereignty that nations can, ethnicity is often successfully used to mobilize for language and political rights in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe and elsewhere.

Roma ethno-political mobilization follows the trend of many successful ethno-political mobilization projects in the region. Roma leaders in Romania cite the need for minority protections, language rights, economic integration, and anti-discrimination statutes in an agenda that directly reflects the successful demands of ethnic Hungarians in Romania. Myths of a common Roma past are being disseminated, linguistic homogenization of Romani is encouraged by the Romanian state, and NGO and government bodies are working toward the institutionalization of Roma representation on all levels and Roma protections in all sectors of society.

In many ways, the Roma movement has access to the structures that many authors point to as necessary for successful collective mobilization. Yet after twenty years of post-communist mobilization in Romania, the Roma movement is still unable to mobilize mass support from Gypsies across the country. With that in mind, I find it particularly useful to draw on the work of Rogers Brubaker who, through his introduction of the term ‘groupness,’ lays the groundwork for a line of inquiry of moments in which group solidarity fail to crystallize.

According to Brubaker, groupness is the feeling of solidarity between individuals. Groupness is often the end-goal of what Brubaker terms "ethnopolitical entrepreneurs" (Brubaker 2006:168). These entrepreneurs might be the agents of the state or of a movement based on claims to ethnicity. In grassroots identity-based movements, individuals can play with

categorizations imposed on them by the state in order to foster a greater sense of groupness. Thus, actors at all levels of society can influence groupness, but the extent of solidarity can vary widely from context to context. Importantly, despite the "group-making efforts" of these entrepreneurs, "groupness may not happen, high levels of groupness might fail to crystallize...even in situations of high elite-level ethnopolitical conflict" (Brubaker 2006:168).

Brubaker's theory is useful in that it points to the importance of a felt sense of solidarity and the fact that the sense of solidarity is highly variable. Individuals can draw on whatever points of commonality are useful to create a sense of groupness in any given context, and the factors that are drawn upon can change from the local level to the national level, from place to place, and across time. There is no one set of relations between individuals in an ethno-political collectivity, no clear boundary that is salient across all segments of that group at any given time.

Brubaker's theory is useful in that it bridges the literature on nationalism and ethnicity with the literature which addresses situational ethnicity, allowing for individual choices in identification as well as highly contextual group identity and solidarity. Ethnic identity is not just contextual in the sense that individuals have a "subjective perception of a [social] situation" and make decisions about identification in that moment (Okamura 1981:454). Relations of solidarity and ethno-political meaning, according to Brubaker, are by no means constant on the level of the so-called group.

In sum, different members of an ethnic group can change the criteria with which to differentiate between those that belong to 'their group' and those that are outsiders and can choose to identify or not to identify based on ethnicity at any given time.

Categorization and self-identification

Brubaker's cognitive approach to ethnicity lays the foundation for a discussion of categorization and self-ascription, processes that are of central importance to the Roma political project and to the lack of salience of the Roma identity for many Gypsies in Romania.

Categorization has been largely employed by modern nation-states that seek to "monopolize not only legitimate physical force but also legitimate symbolic force" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:15). This symbolic force "include[s] the power to name... to state what is what and who is who" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:15). This process of inscription occurs simultaneously through the interaction of social subjects with various social institutions. In turn, the existence of categories and norms enables the reproduction of society by facilitating bureaucratic control and moral citizenship.

The processes of categorization and self-identification "take place in dialectical interplay" and "need not converge" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:15). The classification of an individual as part of an ethnic group does not guarantee similar self-identification, and certainly does not lead to commitment to that ethnicity. Individuals might deem certain types of ethnic categorization deleterious in social relations, and can choose to self-identify differently. This is especially relevant in cases where ethnic categories are stigmatized, as in the case of Roma.

All in all, the literature on nationalism and ethnicity illuminates much of the reasoning used by Roma activists and leaders in framing their mobilization project; it also highlights the potential barriers to group formation in regards to this population. As my thesis is a consideration of some of the reasons why the Roma movement in Romania has thus far failed to appeal to non-elite Roma, my work is in line with that of Paul Brass, who also considers some reasons why ethnic movements might fail. In his work on the Maithili movement in Bihar, Brass points to a similar existence of necessary "objective conditions" for the creation of a mass consciousness

and subsequent mobilization, yet a failure on the part of elites to transmit this movement to the mass of Maithili speaking peoples. The reasons for this, though distinctly different from that of the Roma, are nonetheless useful in illuminating what is so often left out of the literature on mobilization: specific examples of failure.

As will be elaborated below, Gypsies often have a sense of groupness with local communities that are based on a specific locale or a narrower Gypsy subgroup while feeling no solidarity to other Roma. Thus, when Roma leaders attempt to draw on Roma culture and Roma tradition, their claims based on ethnicity may clash with local claims to 'subgroup' ethnicity or groupness.

While these local groups may not be entirely averse to employing a more respectable and socially supported ethnicity, which Roma ethnicity aims to be, the lack of connection between Roma leaders and local groups currently inhibit this transition. In my interviews, many Gypsies cite a failure by Roma leaders to appeal to their interests as the reason for the lack of their support– rather than an individual choice to avoid stigma or a lack of awareness of the mobilization movement. In the next section, I will lay the foundations for a discussion of the particularities of the Roma in regards to political mobilization, and potential reasons why groupness may fail to crystallize despite the fact that many necessary conditions are in place for that formation.

Roma Studies

In attempting to understand why Gypsies in Romania have so far been relatively unresponsive to Roma mobilization despite the use of various initiatives to build group solidarity, it is necessary to consider the current forms of Roma and Gypsy identity that Roma 'ethno-political entrepreneurs' are attempting to mold.

Recent work on the subject of Roma are often introduced with the caveat that the Roma are extremely diverse; often, the authors admit that placing all the people who are classified as Roma under one umbrella term is more a matter of expedience than a social reality of group identity, since the functioning of local identities often challenge or even inverse the foundations of Gypsy identities in other locales (See Arias 2002; Beissinger 2001; Gay y Blasco 2000; Klímová 2002; Okely 1983; Rat 2005; Silverman 1988). It has been noted of Gypsies in Spain, for instance, that local identities are strong, and communities are relatively bounded; but these Gypsies are highly segmented and do not imagine themselves to be the same as Spanish Gypsies in other neighborhoods, let alone part of an overarching Roma people (Gay y Blasco 2002; Arias 2002). Across Europe, researchers are finding the same to be true for many Gypsies, including those in Romania (Beissinger 2001; Gay y Blasco 2002; Rughinis 2010; Vermeersch 2005).

The origins of Gypsy subgroups

In addressing the fragmentation of Gypsies in Europe, it is useful to consider the idea of Gypsy subgroups– groups that can supposedly be united under the Roma ethnicity.

Kamill Erdős, a Hungarian scholar, provided the seminal classification of Hungarian Gypsy subgroups that has been echoed by many other scholars. He classified Gypsies according to language and vocation. Erdős first divided those whose mother tongue was 'the Gypsy language' from those whose mother tongue was not the Gypsy language. These two groups were further subdivided, since Erdős believed there to be two main Gypsy dialects– the Carpathian and the Romani (Vlach) dialects. Those whose mother tongue was not a Gypsy language were according to whether they spoke Hungarian or Romanian. Erdős then further subdivided these linguistic groups according to the occupations in which they were traditionally employed (Kállai

2002:14) This focus on linguistic and vocational differences became central to the way in which many early scholars viewed Gypsy 'subgroups.'

Though later scholars became critical of the existence of subgroups with such clear boundaries, many continue to discuss the Roma in Europe in such a way as to highlight linguistic and occupational differences. This approach is certainly relevant for some Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, including some in Romania. Yet the changing economic conditions in this region have affected the social organization of Gypsies as much as non-Roma in this region, with many in Romania becoming more mobile and mixing more frequently. I believe that the persistence of the notion of Gypsy subgroups obscures, to some extent, the lived reality of Gypsy identity in present-day Romania, and can be problematic in terms of understanding Roma politics.

The history of Roma labor provides a good entry point into understanding the evolution of Gypsy subgroups. Many authors have pointed to the origin of different Roma subgroups during the medieval period in Central and Eastern Europe through differentiation in labor. Some groups developed different sets of skills as they travelled as niche laborers in medieval Europe, while others were forcibly separated into different labor groups under slavery; these differentiations became magnified over the centuries, until groups could be distinguished by clearer linguistic and cultural differences (Beissinger 2001; Kemény 2005).

In many parts of the region, Gypsies were a mobile labor force that could supplement stationary peasant labor. Gypsies were historically employed as skilled metal- and wood-workers, building weapons and defenses and producing tools for soldiers and farmers. Many Gypsy groups specialized in this type of production during the turbulent times of war in Central Europe with the Ottoman Empire around the middle of the millennium. When these wars came to

an end, and the Ottomans occupied Romania, Gypsies became known as kettle-makers and menders, spoon-makers and trough-makers as the demand shifted from weapons to farming and household goods (Kemény 2005:38).[1]

Yet as István Kemény meticulously points out, the nature of work in Central and Eastern Europe changed drastically with the rise of industrialization, and labor demands began to shift. In the Hungarian census of 1893, which tracked the occupations of a few thousand Gypsies, it became apparent that many Gypsies no longer roamed about in caravans as blacksmiths, woodworkers, or metal-workers, but were instead settled. At this time, day-labor was by far the most common form of work for Gypsies. The second most common occupation for Gypsies by the late nineteenth century was industry; the third most common occupation, employing a significantly smaller percentage of Roma, was that of a being a musician, and there were a handful of Roma that were involved in farm work on a more permanent basis than daily work (Kemény 2005:33).

One of the only traditional occupational groups that remained salient throughout the nineteenth century was that of the blacksmiths, since their work continued to be fundamental to the functioning of farms (Kemény 2005:36). Yet as Kemény notes, by the end of the 1930s in Hungary and Romania, the economic landscape had changed so significantly with steady increases in industrialization that Roma blacksmiths– practitioners of the oldest trade and one of the most respected– had been "completely pushed out of the economy" (Kemény 2005:45). They, like other Roma, were forced to adapt to new working conditions, pursuing jobs in industry and performing day labor.

The distinction between Gypsies and non-Gypsies in work life shifted to that of remuneration and documentation of labor. While both Gypsies and non-Gypsies worked in

1 The historical relevance of Gypsies doing niche work will be further explored in Chapter 2.

factories and fields, Gypsies were far more likely to be day-laborers without contracts, and also far more likely to be paid less for their work. I believe this foreshadows the development of a popular distinction between Gypsies and non-Gypsies according to poverty, participation in the informal economy, and unemployment. Furthermore, these changes in occupation are relevant because Gypsies began seeking jobs based on what was available rather than affiliation with a distinct Gypsy cultural group. This set the stage for more inter-mixture between Gypsies in Romania under communism and in the post-communist period.

Gypsy groups in post-communist Romania

The impact of economic and political changes– especially the rise and fall of communism– on the social organization of Gypsies in Romania is not well explored in the literature. In attempting to link my own findings with those of others, however, I find it useful to consider the work of Cosima Rughinis, who systematically investigates Roma identification through surveys in post-communist Romania. Rughinis defines Gypsy subgroups in Romania, *neam* or *neamuri*, as "groups based on common social institutions and a certain degree of consanguinity, maintained by intermarriage. Members of a particular *neam* often share similar occupations, a mother tongue, religion or social position." These traditional occupations and lifestyles are transmitted "through family and endogamy" (Rughinis 2010:146-7).

In assessing the relevance of *neam* affiliation in modern Romania, Rughinis notes the decrease in traditional occupations and continued changes within Gypsy life in Central and Eastern Europe, arguing that the relevance of identification with a *neam* affiliation is not well understood. In a recent large-scale survey of Romanian Gypsies, sixty percent of self-identified Roma respondents stated a *neam* affiliation; forty percent declared themselves 'just Roma/Gypsy.' However, two Romanian Gypsy groups seem to have preserved both this group

classification system and duties based on *neam* affiliation to a larger extent,[2] and still prefer marriage within the group (Rughinis 2010:347).

Most of the Roma I talked to insisted that such classifications did not describe their social lives; marriage was not limited to an 'in-group' of Gypsies, and people moved into communities with different Gypsies and non-Gypsies in order to seek employment. In this sense, many of my informants insisted that the organization of their social lives were very similar to Romanians, and that they made choices about their schooling and occupations with the same criteria as Romanians rather than affiliation with a Gypsy equivalent to clans. The implications of this for issues of integration, a major goal of Roma politicians and advocates, will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

For now, it is important to stress that I did not interview any Roma who considered themselves to be 'traditional' Gypsies, nor did I work with any Roma who claimed to uphold any cultural or moral standards that were notably different from those of Romanians. The people I interviewed seemed to share the opinion that, while there might be slight linguistic and cultural differences between themselves and Romanians, those differences were no larger than the differences between Romanians and Hungarians, or even between Transylvanians and southern Romanians.

Self Identification Amongst Gypsies and Roma

The question remains, what has the crumbling of subgroup identification, the inter-mixing of different Gypsies across Romania, and the rise of a Roma minority movement meant for self-identification?

2 The Caldărari and the Lăutari (musicians) still preserve traditional occupations as well as what is often thought of as a more traditional Romani lifestyle.

Kállai Erno insists that, despite fewer visible foundations of difference between Gypsies and non-Gypsies, many Gypsies continue to express differences "with real and symbolic instruments" (Kállai 2002:25). Angus Fraser complicates this claim, addressing the highly variable nature of differentiation. Some individuals, Fraser writes, express a sense of solidarity with other Gypsies on ethnicity. Gypsies are 'the people,' and others are *gadzo*.[3] Yet while many Gypsies accept other Gypsies to be not-*gadzo*, they do not necessarily see other groups as being the same type of Gypsy, nor do they necessarily feel any affinity for Gypsies of other communities (Fraser 1992:8). Though small sections of the Roma population may share "a common language, a common culture" and "can be readily distinguished from their neighbors" (Fraser 1992), many cannot be distinguished as visible minorities and share more cultural symbols with local non-Gypsies than with other Gypsy groups across the country.

All in all, it seems that while subgroup affiliation might have decreased in the sense that Roma have begun to intermix more frequently and no longer maintain subgroup vocations in the same way, Gypsy identity has not become less local or narrow. Roma who have positive relationships with local Romanians might identify with a more respected local definition of Gypsyness or, in those cases where neam affiliation is still maintained, with a more respected subgroup. In general, though, Gypsies are extremely discriminated against. Gypsies who seek to be upwardly mobile might attempt to obscure their Roma origins in order to increase their chances of success. Gypsies who face prejudice and do not have the ability to pass might attempt to navigate prejudice by distinguishing between themselves as 'good Gypsies' and others as 'bad Gypsies' in order to avoid discrimination.

3 Gadzo/gadze and gadjo/gadje are some of the variations of a common way of referring to non-Gypsies. The concepts of Gypsy and non-Gypsy are found in Gypsy communities across Europe.

The impact that new local affiliations, mobile and mixed Gypsy communities, and differentiation between 'good' and 'bad' Gypsies in the face of discrimination have on the success of the Roma movement in Romania will be further discussed in Chapter 5, since all these factors contribute to the resistance of local Gypsies to national ethnic mobilization.

Roma as an ethnic term

Given the historical differentiation between Gypsies and the factors in self-identification discussed above, the rise of the term 'Roma' as the politically correct ethnic term for all Gypsies is interesting. The ethnonym 'Roma' is meant to reflect the "rich heritage and cultural dignity" of a group with a "common history and identity of interests," rather than carrying the pejorative connotations of the word Gypsy (Gay y Blasco 2002:174) Yet despite occasional efforts to mobilize so-called Gypsies, "for over five hundred years, the Gypsy diaspora has been characterised by its extreme political and structural fragmentation, and by the weakness or even absence of any overarching Gypsy imagined community" (Gay y Blasco 2002:173).

An important caveat is the fact that while few people who fall into the category of Roma or Gypsy indicate that they are part of a larger social entity of Roma, they are routinely discussed, represented, and oppressed as a distinct group. In Central and Eastern Europe, people continue to categorize others as Gypsy whether or not they self-identify as Gypsy.[4] And while Roma Studies scholars can meticulously point out the arbitrary nature of such classifications by pointing to the immense diversity between those grouped together, for many of the majority society Gypsyness is very real and is a basis for discrimination. The social stigma and discrimination linked to the idea of Gypsies makes the concept of a Gypsy group a socially and

4 Though none of the people I interviewed mentioned this, several other Roma researchers noted that those Romanians who were poor enough to live in the Gypsy parts of town were in danger of also being classified as Gypsy, which often caused significant ethnic tension in those communities.

culturally powerful one. Thus, social scientists and policy-makers continue to write, study, and make policy for Roma as if they are a coherent social collectivity.

Organization of Chapters

In what follows, I will present the project of Roma mobilization in Romania in order to explore the dynamics of identity, leadership, and legitimacy. In order to prepare for the analysis of my interviews, I will present a brief overview of the history of Gypsies in Central and Eastern Europe and expand on some of the concepts already presented in Chapter 2. Then, in Chapter 3, I will consider the interview material I gathered from Roma elite. In Chapter 4, I will present my analysis of the material I gathered from the Gypsies in the poor settlement. Finally, in Chapter 5, I will consider the discontinuities in how Roma elites and non-elites formulate their identities, their political projects, and legitimate leadership, and further expand my argument that the Roma movement lacks grassroots support.

Chapter 2: Brief History of Roma in Europe

Introduction

In what follows, I will situate my ethnographic data geographically, historically, and socially. As a student entering the field in Romania, I encountered a lively field of work with regard to the Roma Problem, making it clear that my fieldwork was not happening in a vacuum. While Roma studies is relatively little known in the U.S., I realized quickly that in the European context, the sociological if not anthropological study of Roma was routine and widely supported. In order to understand why this is the case– why the "Roma Problem" is so widely studied and talked about both academically and in civic life– it is necessary to understand the history of the Roma in Europe as well as the place that the Roma have in the Romanian imaginary.

In contextualizing my fieldwork, I hope to point to the importance of attempting to understand Roma political life in anthropological terms, since much of what is claimed and represented as natural and essential in the political struggles around Roma issues is, in fact, contingent and contested at the grassroots level. In what follows, I will first address how the Roma came to be a relatively unintegrated minority population in Europe. Secondly, I will address the history of Roma in Romania, paying special attention to the specificities of Transylvania, the region in which I did my fieldwork.

Situating the Gypsies in European History

Sources discussing the Gypsy presence in Europe date back to the 1300s. Linguistic analysis and a survey of historical sources mentioning Gypsies suggests that migration into Europe happened in waves, and not all people considered Gypsies followed the same path of migration. Indeed, it has been argued that the belief that Gypsies were beggars, thieves and

vagrants allowed for the classification of local vagrants as Gypsies, and that some individuals or even whole groups considered Gypsies might have no common origin with other Gypsies. This theory is particularly applicable to groups such as the English Travellers (Okely 1983). For most Central and Eastern European Gypsies, however, origins outside Europe seem more likely, and can be more easily traced. There is substantial evidence to suggest that at least part of the modern European population of Gypsies migrated from India.

By the 1400s, discussions of Gypsies were relatively widespread. The first accounts of Gypsies in the Balkan countries occurred in the mid 14th century; accounts of Gypsies in Transylvania arose around 1400 (Kemény 2005:1). Gypsies were noted in Western Europe a couple of decades later. The reception of Gypsies by local societies depended heavily on the socio-political that the Gypsies entered, though in general Gypsies were seen as outsiders and were viewed with distrust. For instance, in feudal times, the mobility of Gypsies irked some nobles, who wished to settle them alongside the peasantry in order to tax them and use their labor.

This was especially true in western parts of Europe, where Gypsy persecution began shortly after their arrival. Gypsies were declared spies in the Holy Roman Empire and were expelled as early as 1479, though more sources point to the expulsion orders of the 1490s. At the completion of the Reconquista in 1492, the Spanish monarchs issued an order of expulsion of the Gypsies from Spain. Similar policies were found in surrounding countries (Kemény 2005:3). In England in 1554, the death penalty was instituted for all Gypsies who did not leave the country; it remained in place until 1783 (Okely 1983:4). These policies of exclusion, however, could generally not be fully enforced.

During the same time period in the region that would become southern Romania and Moldova, Gypsies were enslaved. The first official records of Roma slavery dates to 1385. Gypsy slaves were owned by boyars,[5] monasteries, princes, and even the state. Gypsy slaves were "subject to sale, transfer, and abuse by their owners" (Beissinger 2001:28). Sometimes Roma slaves worked as coveted court musicians or blacksmiths. Mostly, they worked as "itinerant" laborers, or field and domestic slaves (Beissinger 2001:29). Roma slavery lasted for five hundred years.

On the other hand, Transylvanian princes were known for issuing passes to Gypsies for freedom of movement and security against other nobles in foreign lands. The fact that they were a mobile working force was especially favored in this region at the time because the Kingdom of Hungary and its Transylvanian principality were facing the threat of Ottoman expansion. Princes were constantly engaged in defending their borders, pushing back Turkish advances, and defending Christian Europe. In this context, the mobility of skilled Gypsy blacksmiths and carpenters who traveled from village to village, repaired farms and manufactured weapons, was considered militarily useful. This prevented Gypsies from being categorically persecuted as outcasts (Kemény 2005:6). Feudal lords sometimes directly employed the Gypsies and provided them with a measure of protection. However, documentation from this time suggests that while Gypsies were relatively free to move in a way that set them apart from most peasants, payments for their services were very low and the majority of Gypsies were impoverished (Kemény 2005:12).

Interestingly, the first documents describing Gypsy leadership stem from this time period. It seems that Roma began to institutionalize positions of chief or elder in order to "facilitate

5 In the Wallachian and Moldovan region, boyars were princes who were originally elected but became hereditary rulers.

external representation in dealing with non-Roma authorities" (Klímová 2002:106). That is to say, the so-called 'traditional' leaders of Gypsy subgroups seemed to have come into existence primarily in order to interact with non-Gypsies and to serve as representatives in relation to princes and regional authorities. These leaders did not have any authority in relation to laws or policies, but had authority in negotiating with majority leaders. Later, these leaders continued to have considerable internal authority, such that one Roma leader I talked to made a point to mention that he was the son of such a traditional leader.

Once the Kingdom of Hungary fell to the Turks in the battle at Mohacs in 1526, Ottoman decrees were issued stating that Gypsies as a "race" were not to be "harassed" in the Ottoman Empire, which set the Turkish treatment of Gypsies apart from most other major empires and kingdoms in Europe (European Commission 2004:7). However, with the fall of Hungary to the Otttomans, anti-Gypsy sentiments and policies arose in Habsburg territory, where Roma were seen as "a fifth column of the Ottoman Empire" (Vermeersch 2006:47). When the Habsburgs regained the region at the very end of the seventeenth century, Gypsies were subject to persecution as traitors.

Once Habsburg control was thoroughly re-established in the first half of the eighteenth century, the first efforts were made to assimilate Roma. Maria Theresa issued a number of decrees between 1753 and 1772 in order to encourage the transformation of Roma from a separate population into "new peasants" (Kemény 2005:17). The decrees demanded permanent settlement of the Gypsies, and begging (the assumed occupation of Gypsies who were not working the land) was outlawed. A dress code was instated to ensure that Roma would dress like the majority population. The decree of 1772 prohibited the use of Romani, and also prohibited marriages of Roma to each other. Finally, it was decided Gypsy children should be removed

from their homes at the age of four and placed with peasants. These decrees were widely ignored, and were not enforced in Hungary or what is now Romania (Kemény 2005:17).

Gypsies during the rise of nation-states

During Ottoman control of Transylvania, the principality had more independence than other Turkish regions. The daily rule of the vassal state fell primarily to Transylvanians, who developed a unique social hierarchy. Most medieval European states only had one one *natio*– a Latin term indicating a group that was comprised of all those with political rights and privileges. In Transylvania, on the other hand, there were three *nationes:* the nobles (most closely linked to the nobles of Hungary proper and often speaking Hungarian), the Saxons,[6] and the Szeklers[7] (Brubaker 2006:57). All three groups had special legal privileges that set them apart from the peasants and serfs, though they were also differentiated by legal status from each other.

Those with noble status were primarily but not always of Magyar[8] descent, though by the time that the *nationes* were inscribed into Transylvanian law, the Szeklers were linguistically indistinguishable from the nobles– if they were ever distinct. The Saxons lived in towns as traders and city dwellers; despite the nomenclature, the Saxons were not from the same region. They were in fact drawn from regions across Germany and the Low Countries and were not necessarily culturally homogeneous, though their legal status in Transylvania forged them into a distinct group (Brubaker 2006:59). Romanian speakers, though a significant popoulation in Transylvania since its earliest history, had no such group rights. Most of them were peasants or serfs and had very limited rights or freedoms, though a few of them managed to gain noble status

6 Germanic Transylvanians who settled steadily in the region after an invitation for settlement from the Hungarian rulers.
7 Szeklers were free peasants without a hierarchy who were forced into military service to protect the borders of Transylvania, but who also had a number of liberties that put them alongside the nobles and Saxons as a legally recognized group with rights.
8 Hungarian

(Brubaker 2006:58). Gypsies, who were neither part of these *nationes* nor part of the peasantry, did not fit easily into the civic organization.

By the mid eighteenth century, a group of Romanian intelligentsia formed, and "graft[ed] emerging modern ethnocultural understandings of nationhood" (Brubaker 2006:60) onto the older institutions of *nationes* in this region. This ethno-political awareness was meant to provide the grounds upon which Romanians could access more rights within Transylvania. In the meantime, Hungarians were rallying around the concept of a Hungarian nation, and demanded that Transylvania be incorporated formally in Hungary. This happened in 1848, and sparked revolutionary uprisings by the Romanians within Transylvania that resulted in a type of "war within a war" (Brubaker 2006:61-3). Hungarians and Romanians were struggling simultaneously to establish nation-states, with both sets of people claiming Transylvania as their heartland.

Vienna defeated the revolution, and separated and directly governed both regions (Brubaker 2006:61-3). This struggle marked the beginning of Transylvania as a region situated "on the margins of two nations, yet imagined as central to each" (Brubaker 2006:56). In 1867, Hungary effectively gained its liberty despite a formal connection to the Habsburg Empire. From this time onwards, Transylvania passed back and forth between Romania and Hungary four times: the region belonged to Hungary between 1867 ad 1918, Romania between 1919 and 1940, split between Hungary and Romania between 1940 and 1944, and was given to Romania following WWII. After each one of these changes, nationalizing policies were enacted or renewed in an attempt to make Transylvania an "integral part of the putatively unitary and indivisible Hungarian or Romanian nation-state" (Brubaker 2006:63).

At no point in the rise of nationalism in this region were Gypsies imagined as part of any nation that was laying claim to Romania.

World War II and the Rise of Communist Romania

The fight between Hungary and Romania over Transylvania came to a fore during World War II. Initially, both countries were aligned with the Axis powers, and Transylvania– as a contested region– was split between Hungary and Romania for the purposes of cooperation. Yet as the tide turned and Russian troops entered Romania, Romania switched to the Allies for the remainder of the war. The fact that Romania was on both sides of the war had a significant impact on the Gypsies for two reasons: firstly, the Transylvanian and Romanian Gypsies were subjected to the Holocaust; secondly, the presence of Soviet troops in Romania resulted in the installation of the communist regime in that country which had a significant impact on the later formation of 'the Gypsy Problem.'

Romania entered WWII in June of 1941, joining the Axis powers in the invasion of the Soviet Union. Within the first month of joining the war, Romania was engaging fully massacres of the Holocaust. While the Jewish Holocaust is generally better known, the Porrajmos[9] is often overlooked. Yet estimates indicate that at least 10 percent of Romanian Gypsies were killed on trains and concentration camps in Transnistria, the region between the Dnestr and Bug Rivers that was under Romanian control between 1941 and 1944. Perhaps the only reasons why more Roma were not expelled is that accurate demographic information for Gypsies– because of their diversity and a lack of agreed-upon ethnic boundaries– are notoriously hard to find on official records. For the most part, those Roma who were more easily targeted during the Holocaust were the ones that were still nomadic, and thus easier to mark as Gypsy (Beissinger 2001).

9 A Romani term for the Roma Holocaust coined by Ian Hancock, a renowned Roma Studies scholar.

With the Soviet threat advancing from the east, however, Romania joined the allies, and supported them through the rest of the war, letting Soviet troops enter and move through the country. At the end of the war, the Romanians anticipated Transylvania to be passed to them as part of the Allies rather than to the Axis affiliated Hungary. Yet the Soviets occupied it, with their seat in Cluj-Napoca, until such a time that the Romanians appointed a communist-dominated administration. The Soviets allowed Romanian administration to resume in Transylvania once communist rule of Romania began (Brubaker 2006:105-7). Transylvania was officially recognized as an integral part of Romania in the 1947 Treaty of Paris.

Romania During Communism

Ideally, communism was supposed to eliminate national sentiment, creating a universal class of proletarians. Yet in practice, communist regimes recognized that different communities had different needs, and instituted policies aimed at specific nationalities. These policies were meant to equalize everyone in the population, such that national approaches would become obsolete. In that vein, communist Romania began by recognizing Hungarians as a national minority, and retaining Hungarian language education and as well as bilingual Hungarian signs (Brubaker 2006:117). But Roma were not granted the status of national minority in Romania; they were considered to be a "group distinguishable merely in terms of its problematic social and economic position" (Vermeersch 2006). This attitude reflected the longstanding conflation of Gypsies with poverty, illiteracy, and antisocial behavior. It also reflected the fact that Gypsies were not included in the historical construction of the concept of community, nationhood.

So while Romania became increasingly nationalistic in the late 1950s under the leadership of Ceau escu, some measure of legal protection remained for Hungarians, Germans,

Serbians and Ukranians but not for Gypsies.[10] Because Roma were seen primarily as a social problem and not a nation, Romani language, cultural expression and music were prohibited in public (Beissinger 2001:31). And since communist ideology dictated that the state should "take care of those groups who, as a result of 'capitalist exploitation' in the past, were found to live in 'social and cultural backwardness'" (Csepeli and Simon 2004:130) – which Gypsies were considered to be– several policies were written explicitly in order to 'improve' the Roma. Schooling was considered an integral way in which to properly socialize citizens into communism, and also necessary to allow Gypsies to integrate successfully into a society with a considerably higher amount of formal education. The Romanian government also worked to radically decrease Gypsy unemployment, since all members of society were to be productive. Assimilation was the end goal, so these policies were to be enacted in such a way as to avoid letting Gypsies "define their identity in ethnic terms" (Vermeersch 2006). Instead, this approach reinforced a purely socioeconomic definition of Gypsy identity.

Like many other socialist policies, the communist policies toward Gypsies in Romania were not universally applied and enforced. The desire to assimilate Gypsies was pervasive in discourse, but in practice, the feeling of difference between Gypsies and non-Gypsies remained. What is significant, however, is that most Gypsies had access to regular, documented work under communism. Gypsies were employed in the factories alongside Romanians and Hungarians, and while they may have been less likely to be advanced to higher positions than their non-Gypsy co-workers, they had a steady income.

As Ceau escu's regime became increasingly distanced from the rest of the communist bloc, everyday life became a struggle. In the 1980s, as people spent hours waiting in line for

10 Most of these legal protections did not have much impact on daily life, yet the establishment of workers' councils and education programs geared toward these communities nonetheless allowed for the maintenance of these non-Romanian identities.

basic resources, and the people of Transylvania struggled to continue life as normal with highly erratic supplies of heat and electricity, some suggest that "ethnicity came to seem less important." There was a feeling of common oppression and hopelessness, universal exploitation and struggle that created a sense of commonality if not complete equality (Brubaker 2006:117). Whether or not that was the experience of Gypsies in this county is difficult to argue either way, since there are no contemporary sources to refer to; however, the ability of Gypsies to earn regular wages during this time alongside many Romanians who were also earning just enough to survive may have "blurred the boundary between Gypsies and non-Gypsies" to some extent (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006:137).

The Fall of Romanian Communism and Post-Communist (Re)Construction of Gypsy Poverty

In 1989, the Berlin Wall came down and Romanians became aware of the potential for political change (Brubaker 2006:119). By December 20, Romanians began to rally en masse across the country, and shortly afterwards the Ceau escu regime fell (Brubaker 2006:121). By December 23, 1989, Hungarians began organizing ethno-political mobilization in the city, and the moment of solidarity was over (Brubaker 2006:121). Shortly after this, Roma began making ethno-political claims as well.

Yet these political claims came at a time of significant transitions in the way in which the majority society viewed Gypsies. After communism fell in Romania, Gypsies were characterized once again as impoverished. Their existence as a 'social problem' in democratic Romania was reaffirmed. Yet in a transitioning capitalist democracy, the Roma were not considered the victims of 'capitalist exploitation'; they became opportunistic exploiters of welfare. It is not immediately apparent why the switch from communism to capitalism in Romania would leave Gypsies in

poverty and allow Romanians and Hungarians to adapt and thrive. The answer seems to lie in a combination of factors including work, location, and discrimination.

In communist societies in Central and Eastern Europe, poverty was "mainly a demographic phenomenon" (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006:155). This trend seems to have held true for Roma as well as the majority population. Gypsies who had single mothers and multiple siblings, for instance, were very likely to live in poverty during communism. The presence of other adults capable of bringing in a monthly income or having less siblings significantly reduced the probability that Roma lived in poverty during socialism. The education levels of parents had only a marginal influence on poverty, since communism provided employment opportunities for virtually everyone (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006).

Yet the nature of poverty in this area of Europe would change drastically during the transition to market economies. After the transition, "low levels of education combined with poor labor market conditions were major predictors of declining living standards." Interestingly, in the relatively large samples taken by Ladányi and Szelényi for their study of Roma exclusion, one-third of Roma respondents in Hungary reported becoming poor only after 1988 (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006:160). Widespread accounts of Roma poverty in Romania suggest a similar pattern. After the transition, the decline of heavy industry– the main sector of employment for Gypsies during communism– created high levels of unemployment among the Roma, and a return to traditional styles of employment became impossible since these 'traditional' skills had been abandoned during communism (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006).

These patterns were also very visible in neighboring Romania, where the overall deterioration in living standards of could also be contributed mainly to the "lower than average education levels of Roma" compared to Hungarians and Romanians, and the loss of unskilled

labor jobs (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006:162). Before 1986, eight years of formal schooling made it easier to find work; by 1993, "a primary or basic vocational education was no longer sufficient" (Kemény 2005:64). So when factories closed, Roma tended not to be amongst the factory laborers who could transition easily to other types of employment. Gypsies also experienced a sharper decline in living standards compared to Romanians because a larger percentage of the Roma were concentrated in rural areas where the rates of unemployment were significantly higher than in urban areas. Discrmination must have taken place in the process of transitioning employees to new job sectors as well, since controlling for other factors still leaves some unemployment unexplained (Kemény 2005:65).

Through the process of transition, Gypsies once again became a population characterized by poverty and marginalization. The social situation of Gypsies throughout Central and Eastern Europe became known as the 'Roma Problem.' In Chapter 3, I will trace the rise of the Roma problem and the rise of Roma mobilization through the lenses of elite Roma who work as Roma representatives and leaders on the regional level in Transylvania.

Chapter 3: Regional Roma Elite

Introduction

Historically, Roma leaders have been representatives who were appointed by non-Roma or were appointed by Gypsies in order to communicate with non-Roma. In general:

> Romani representatives have been handpicked by officials of the majority government and have received no popular mandate from the Roma. The modalities of such selections have of course differed over time…During the Communist period, loyalty to the Party was one of the main selection criteria. Since 1989, representatives for various advisory bodies are selected on the basis of personal skills and perceived ability to co-operate constructively with the government. [Klímová 2002:130]

In Romania, as of 2000, most Roma officials are nominated by the Roma Party. The Roma Party received the most votes in national elections since the end of communism, and thus represents the party with the most Roma support. However, Klímová insists, even this party is relatively unsuccessful in elections, since a very small percentage of the estimated population of Roma seem to be voting for it (2002:130).

In my interviews with Gypsies in Transylvania, significant distrust regarding national leaders surfaced. People often doubted the motives of Roma elites in pursuing Roma mobilization, and insinuated that Roma politics is a sector in which a number of people are making their fortunes. However, in my research in Transylvania, I never encountered Roma officials who operate on the national level of NGOs or government positions. Instead, the Roma whom I consider to be elites are in fact regional elites, who are quite distinct from national leaders.

I define the Roma elite as Roma "with college or university degrees and all those with top and mid-level decision-making and management posts in government, administrative, economic,

educational, political, and mass organizations and units" as well as those with ascribed elite status based on traditional Roma leadership designated to represent Roma interests to outsiders (Fuller 2000:586).[11] I do not mean to make an argument that the people defined as elites function as a coherent, politically active group, nor do I mean to indicate that the people I categorize as elites identify themselves as such. Rather, by naming them Roma elites, I mean to point to the possession of various types of social capital that are not generally found in the Gypsy population of Romania. Often, elites have increased access to political and civic spaces and, increasingly, lay claim to a politicized ethnic identity encapsulated by the term Roma.

In this chapter, I will analyze interviews I conducted with regional Roma leaders in an urban center in Transylvania. I will explore the role of these elites as mediators between the national mobilization movement and the local implementation of projects. The people I interviewed spend much of their time getting to know local communities and their needs, and trying to implement policies effectively and creatively to meet those needs. By analyzing personal narratives of this work alongside considerations of meso- and macro-level political structures, I hope to illustrate two points: first, while regional elites come from different backgrounds than the most marginal Gypsies in Romania, they are intensely aware of anti-Roma discrimination and marginalization and work to address those issues across Romania. Their commitment to a Roma identity comes from a conviction to include all Gypsies in Romanian society, rather than to silence and ignore the experiences of Gypsies on the fringes of society. Secondly, Roma advocates work as mediators between the national and the local. As mediators between these different levels of society, they face the paradoxical realization that the diversity

11 As mentioned in Chapter 2, Roma leaders were appointed to interact with non-Gypsy nobility. These leaders eventually became conventional, and gained status with Roma. There is not much written about these leaders in the Romanian context, however. My only knowledge of traditional leaders comes from those leaders with both traditional status and achieved status.

of the Roma population necessitates locally generated responses while the prevalence of anti-Roma sentiment in Romania requires large-scale funding and cooperation between all major actors working toward Roma integration.

In their work as mediators and facilitators, regional Roma advocates insist that national policies can be enacted in local communities to ensure the end of discrimination. In that sense, they are more optimistic than many Romanian Gypsies, who simply feel that in the process of passing the plans and the money for these projects through the hands of the specialists and the politicians who have no special connection to the local communities that they are meant for, the projects are corrupted and weakened, and the money often disappears before it reaches its destination. Yet as advocates and leaders in the region point out, the ineffectiveness of decentralization in Romania and the lack of collaboration between different actors in Romania may in fact account for the waste of funds and lack of results seen on the local level.

In order to tease out the role that the fragmentation of Roma advocacy and the lack of decentralization might have in harming Roma efforts on the grassroots level and thereby undermining the legitimacy of national Roma projects, I will consider the work of Roma leaders in Transylvania. In doing so, the tension between the hopes that these leaders have for Gypsy communities and the acknowledgement of limitations in Roma mobilization lays the groundwork for the discussion of some barriers to the success of Roma ethno-political mobilization in Romania. The discussion of some problems in aid and advocacy work done by elites in the name of marginal Gypsies also lays the foundation for my discussion of how marginal Gypsies in the Settlement rework the vocabulary of victimization to make their own political claims.

Who are the regional Roma elite?

The people whom I classify as Roma elite all– with the exception of one– identified themselves actively as Roma or responded that they were Roma when I asked about their ethnic identification. The one man who did not identify as Roma came from a mixed Roma and Romanian family. He identified as a Romanian citizen with Roma origins and, as part of his ethnic background, he felt that he had "an inclination toward the Roma minority" (Interview 2.2).[12]

All of the people whom I interviewed were advocates for the Roma.[13] While the forms of advocacy of these interviewees varied widely, each of these Roma possessed or were pursuing at least one university degree or upper level professional qualification. Degrees in social work, administration, and teaching were common for my interviewees because these were seen as particularly fitting for the pursuit of government or NGO positions. These degrees also correspond with the first departments at the universities that had "special entrance quotas" for Roma students, since the Romanian government wanted to encourage the training of Roma origin teachers, social workers, and officials (Horvath and Scacco 2001:269).

For almost all of my interviewees, the possession of tertiary education seemed to be the primary means through which they were able to pursue their careers, though family support was another significant factor. One interviewee stands out in this sense because she belonged to an elite musician family with the means to establish their own Roma NGO, and she became part of

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12 Despite the fact that this public figure does not identify as Roma and that he comes from a mixed family, people who knew him referred to him as Roma. One man even went as far as saying that even if he doesn't identify as such, it is widely known that he 'is really Roma.'

13 One interviewee is involved in a Roma student organization at the local university, another is a sociological researcher for Roma in a minority research institute, another is a co-founder of a national Roma NGO, another is a Roma councilor in a local government, and yet another is an government employee in the headquarters of a regional office for Roma integration. Finally, one interviewee is trained as a Romani language teacher, though she works with a regional Roma NGO doing social work in addition to her teaching job.

that work despite the fact that her training was in the medical field and not in social work (Interview 8:1).

The work of regional Roma advocates

One of the most enduring critiques of post-communist politics is corruption, and Roma politics in Romania is not exempt from this criticism. In my interviews with Gypsies, national Roma leaders were often painted as pursuing individual goals rather than representing collective needs. In contrast, Roma advocates in Transylvania working in regional efforts pursued work that consisted almost entirely of finding ways to implement the projects that others have proposed. In that sense, these Roma leaders are very actively involved in implementing projects that speak to communities or groups of Roma rather than individuals.

Through the discussion of how my interviewees became a part of the Roma mobilization movement and what type of work they do, it becomes clear that despite the fact that many of these Roma leaders come from backgrounds dissimilar to those of the marginal Gypsies they are representing, their work as facilitators and mediators force these leaders to be constantly accountable to the demands of local communities of all types.

The rise of Roma to regional leadership positions

The vast majority of regional advocates and leaders came from families that were relatively financially stable– if not middle-class– and that lived in mixed ethnic communities rather than segregated Roma settlements. Most of these interviewees did face obstacles in pursuing their goals because of their Roma origins, however, and these obstacles enabled them to develop a more politicized ethnicity later in their careers.

One woman stands out amongst my interviewees for her access to significant economic and political resources in the process of building her career. She belongs to a musician family,

and as such came from a type of traditional Roma elite. Her father was one of nine children, each of whom became the head of an orchestra. Growing up, her family had the means and inclination to help her in her education, and supported her in her studies to become a nurse and in the establishment of her first home (Interview 8:1-2).

One side of another interviewee's family worked as less prestigious musicians, while the other side of her family were cobblers, and were richer relative to her neighbors than the musician side. This woman's parents struggled over conflicting values, with her mother valuing formal education and its potential for upward social mobility more than the rest of her family. Thus, while my interviewee was still young, her parents moved onto a street with many other Romanian and Hungarian families in another city in order to pursue a better formal education for their children than was available to them in their former Roma community.

In her earliest schooling, this woman had a number of Roma classmates; yet by the time she reached high school she was the only Roma student. When she graduated high school, she decided not to pursue a university degree because the standards for entrance were extremely high and she did not have access to tutors. She also could also not afford to pursue a degree without a scholarship. In the absence of further schooling, she was assigned a factory job by the communist government.

When the communist regime came to an end, the loss of her factory job resulted in some downward socio-economic mobility. In order to access better jobs, she took a sewing class and worked as a seamstress. In 2003, she began working for a Roma NGO, through which the principal of a school approached her and offered her a position as a Romani language teacher. The terms of this position required her to undergo schooling that would be paid for by a pre-accession instrument of the EU called Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their

Economies (PHARE).[14] She agreed readily, and enrolled in a certification process through which she did most of her degree by mail. Through cooperation with the PHARE project and the availability of getting a degree through the mail, she was able to overcome three primary barriers to her higher education: cost of tuition, cost of travel to a university away from her family, and the familial expectation that her husband would accompany her to her classes, thus making an education in another city impossible.

Another interviewee grew up in a high rise in a mixed area, with many Hungarian families; he never felt that they were materially different from these other families. As he put it, he never felt "inferior" to his Hungarian and Romanian classmates in any way, and was always able to pay for the same types of things they were able to pay for, including class excursions and clothing (Interview 1:4). Upon completion of the eighth grade, he had difficulty deciding whether to pursue a general education high school or go to professional school.[15] His mother valued education and felt he would do well to pursue a high school degree through a theological school in his town. Yet his father felt that a professional degree would be more practical option since it would more likely lead to an occupation. He decided to pursue a professional degree in auto-mechanics because he could not "properly evaluate [his] potential" (Interview 1:2) at that age, and was afraid that he would not be able to pass the entrance exams for general schooling.

A month after finishing the professional school, however, he decided to pursue a high school degree through night classes. Luckily, his friends and family used their contacts to get him a job while pursuing night classes, since as the eldest of five children, he felt some obligation to contribute to the family income. He passed his baccalaureate exam in 2002, and

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14 The PHARE program has expanded its scope as the European Union considered and then accepted New Member States in 2004 and 2007.

15 In Romania, professional degrees approximate high school technical training, and general education high school are like American high school in the sense that they cover broader topics and are less technically and vocationally focused. A general education is needed to pursue university training.

decided to apply to get a degree in sociology. The decision to pursue a sociology degree was based on the fact that he knew two Roma students– one of them a family member– who were pursuing their sociology degrees; they also told him that the sociology department designated spots for Roma students through affirmative action policies (Interview 1:1). A year later, when the theology department opened up spots for Roma students through a similar policy, my interviewee successfully managed to pursue a second degree there despite a previous failed attempt (Interview 1:10).[16]

After graduating from the sociology faculty, he got a job as a Roma school counselor through a project funded by a private foundation. Several Roma school counselors were placed in schools to guide Roma students through their education and advise them on their futures (Interview 1:4-5). My interviewee worked as a school counselor for a year. However, at the end of the year, the program failed to be adopted by the local county and funding ran out. This was generally believed by the Roma employees to be a result of a lack of local interest in continuing the program rather than a lack of local funds (Interview 1:9) When the program ended, my interviewee got a job working as a sociological researcher for a state-funded institution studying minority groups in Romania, which was the context in which I met him.

As these stories illustrate, Roma elite come from diverse backgrounds. Yet there are some commonalities: namely, increased access to education, support of family members in the pursuit of degrees, and interestingly, being part of an ethnically mixed community. Not one of my elite interviewees lived in a Roma settlement through their educational years, which perhaps speaks of the limited opportunities available in these settlement schools.

[16] He had previously attempted to pursue a theology degree but had failed the examinations, and waited until the affirmative action policy was applied in this field.

Experiences of discrimination and identification

Despite the fact that these interviewees grew up in conditions that were not particularly marginal, all of my interviewees who discussed their childhood also mentioned discrimination toward Roma as part of their history. These experiences were incorporated into the narratives of how these elites became committed to working for the Roma rather than attempting to assimilate into the Romanian community– an option that many of them hinted was available to them given their university degrees.

While access to mixed schooling was a common theme and enabled these elites to have access to better schooling than many who attend segregated schools, one of my interviewees highlighted that non-Gypsy teachers and students often reacted differently to Roma students. When he was in first grade, for instance, this man had a *Romungro* (a Hungarian-speaking Roma) classmate. Though in general teachers placed children in a seating chart according to height, his teacher put him and this other Roma classmate at the back of the classroom at the same bench, which placed him much further back than his height warranted. When the Romungro girl dropped out of school, this man remained alone at the back of the classroom for four years.

Thus, while my interviewee was able to compete with those Hungarian and Romanian families financially while growing up, the fact that be was labeled Roma– based on his last name, which was considered to be a Roma one, and his darker skin tone– resulted in experiences of discrimination (Interview 1:4). Only after he graduated and worked as a school counselor in a locality where about half of the children were Roma did he start to recognize this and other experiences from his past as discrimination based on his ethnicity, and began

wondering how those subtle forms of marginalization affected his sense of self-worth as a student (Interview 1:3).

The sentiment was echoed by another interviewee who did not grow up in poverty, and lived in a mixed neighborhood with Romanians and Hungarians.

> I always had this feeling that I was the only Roma person in the community, and I would always feel the discrimination even if I am not really dark skinned and not dirty or anything … I could feel when they were speaking about Roma people… I was touched by it. [Interview 3.1]

Clearly, even those Roma who were able to compete with Romanians in school and did not have markers of poverty were still affected by the lack of positive associations with Roma in whichever settings they entered.

In some cases, my interviewees described the combination of personal experiences of discrimination with new understandings of structural marginalization into the basis for a politicized Roma identity. One interviewee took a seminar on Roma issues, which allowed him to connect his personal experiences with those of others, forming the basis for his eventual acceptance of the identity 'Roma.' Yet despite the growing confidence in his Roma identity and the ideological support of the sociological material– which highlighted the problematic nature of anti-Roma sentiment– my interviewee still did not feel comfortable identifying himself in his department as Roma:

> It was difficult because among the two hundred and forty students in the sociology faculty, I was the only Roma student. And of course, once I learned about these things, I didn't say to my colleagues, "Hey, hey I'm a Roma." This process was a more gradual one. I was also lucky because I had the support of my parents, the support of my background, and through this I had good support in understanding, working, and developing the abilities to understand the situation of the Roma generally. [Interview1:6]

He felt that Roma students who came to the university faced real challenges in revealing their identity precisely because negative stereotypes of Gypsies abounded.

Overall, this man felt that he was better situated to understand the political incentive to identify as Roma than many other Gypsies, and was also better situated within support networks to take a political stance on issues of discrimination. He told me that until the understanding of what it means to be Roma changes, he does not believe that it would be possible for most Roma students to claim Roma ethnicity (Interview 1:7).

Reasons for entering Roma advocacy

The elites I interviewed viewed their work as necessary forms of representation and activism that need to be done in order for Roma integration to occur. They were critical of others whom they believed to be part of the Roma movement in order to profit– a critique of the national movement that is often heard at the grassroots level. To make the distinction between themselves as legitimate Roma workers and those who were in it for convenience and profit, these elites highlighted the fact that their work entailed significant amounts of thankless work.

In considering the reasons my interviewees stated for pursuing their careers in these government or NGO positions, perhaps the clearest trend is that these interviewees chose their careers based on a compromise of personal convictions with necessity. Some found employment in the Roma industry more easily than in other sectors, and developed their careers accordingly. Others were involved in Roma issues throughout their education, making their transition to NGO or government work involving Roma issues easy and desirable. Even for those who did not expressly state a desire to enter a job involving Roma issues, however, an active desire to help the Roma in Romania was always presented as central to their work.

Government work aimed toward Roma integration was generally depicted as farther-reaching than NGO efforts; the ability to affect more people by working for a national government was even cited as a reason to switch from NGO to government work:

> An NGO can produce only very limited changes, and NGO can have very limited influence, it cannot elaborate public policy. It has short term and segmented influences on issues. If you work for a government agency you can have a global view. You can pick up one good practice an NGO does, and that's what I have done. You can transform it or make it part of public policy. So it's very different if you work for one hundred persons in an NGO and if you work for twenty thousand persons in a large government structure. [Interview 2.3]

This argument was enforced by the example of the health mediators– a project first elaborated by the Bucurest-based NGO called Romani CRISS, and funded by the World Bank in the mid-1990s. Roma people who were respected by the local communities in which they were employed were trained as health mediators, whose duties involved "fostering mutual trust" between medical staff and public authorities and the Roma communities, encouraging pre- and post-natal care as well as providing information on family planning, promoting hygiene and proper nutrition, facilitating health insurance coverage, and mobilizing community members to participate in health campaigns, amongst other things (Harda and Florea 2006).

In 2002, the government began collaborating with the Romani CRISS in order to translate the highly successful program into public policy. The public administration of Roma health mediators has been so successful since then that the Romanian form of this program is hailed as the most successful one in Europe (Harda and Florea 2006:5). As my interviewee pointed out, fifteen years ago, there were a handful of these mediators working in communities across Romania supported by an NGO. Now, six hundred health mediators are employed and paid for by local councils across the state (Interview 2:4).

Yet the government does not always hold a clear advantage over NGO efforts precisely because government policies take longer to institute and, in some cases, may be less responsive to local needs than local NGO efforts. The process of decentralization following the end of communism in Romania has been a slow one. While the current government is in favor of state

decentralization, “most of the decisions are central, and this generates frustration at the local level” (Interview 2:5).

The process of decentralization is important in the efforts to aid Roma in need because no community has the exact same set of problems as any other; therefore, local councils need to implement projects based on the needs expressed by the local Roma communities. For instance, depending on the general education levels and linguistic abilities of adults in a community, projects for professional qualifications need to be tailored. And while the regional governmental office for Roma integration usually understands the different needs of the different communities in its domain, the more centralized approach to these issues can slow down community actions (Interview 2:6).

NGOs are generally considered faster-paced and more responsive to local needs, since they often only have the resources to approach issues in a handful of communities rather than across the country. However, NGOs can benefit from having stronger affiliations with government agencies, since there is a flow of funding from the government.

One of my interviewees was the head of such a Roma NGO, which was started in 1990 as “subordinate” to the Roma Party, thereby giving the NGO a “bit of power” (Interview 8:1). This NGO approached the Roma population in terms of ‘social problems,’ meaning marginalization, poverty, and discrimination, and ‘cultural problems,’ meaning a lack of support for Roma music, dance, and language (Interview 8).

Unlike the government projects, the initiatives of this NGO isolated certain problems and approached them piece by piece, rather than approaching the issues of integration ‘universally.’ The projects of the NGO focused on support to cultural projects such as dance troupes; it also provides significant support for Roma students and Roma prisoners. Finally, the NGO is also

involved in a historical project to unearth evidence of medical experimentation on Roma during the Holocaust in an attempt to highlight the destruction of the Gypsy population at the time–something that is rarely acknowledged as a significant issue (Interview 8:1-2).

NGO and Government Projects for the Roma of Romania

Most of the efforts of Roma NGOs and government projects that are aimed toward the Roma population involve issues of unemployment, poverty, educational segregation, and discrimination. The workers whom I interviewed readily understood that these problems were connected, and therefore any action taken to solve these problems must involve a number of issues simultaneously for the results to be sustainable and positive. As a head of a governmental department on Roma integration told me:

> It is in vain to go in and facilitate school-going and you have children of vulnerable groups go to school, but you neglect the family. Then the parents, in some cases, tell us "How can I send a child to school and he has no shoes and no proper clothing?" …So what we are trying to do when we do these integrated programs that have many tasks is trying to help the community as a whole, globally, not just one aspect. [Interview 2:5]

This comment demonstrates a very active awareness of the way in which educational segregation, poverty, and 'vulnerability' in the sense of marginalization are mutually reinforcing issues that must be tackled together.

One of my interviewees works in a national department for Roma within the Romanian government aimed specifically at "improving the Roma condition" (Interview 2:1). This department was established in 2001 as part of a ten-year initiative to "integrate" the Roma in Romania. Initially the department was extremely small, but grew rapidly and gained a significant amount of autonomy from the overarching governmental institution aimed at interethnic relations in which it was initially embedded. As of 2004, this department was able to act relatively independent of other offices, and was able to establish its own ties to all levels of government,

including national-, county-, and local-level structures. It also gained the ability to implement policies (Interview 2:2). Throughout the first few years, the department for Roma integration financed "infrastructure development" in Roma communities, building schools and reconstructing houses (Interview 2:3).

Changing policies within changing political opportunity structures

With EU accession in 2007, however, new funds for Roma integration became available, and this government office "changed its approach" to Roma integration to fit EU approaches (Interview 2:3). As my interviewee explained, the national office for Roma integration was "running" six EU "structural fund programs," all of which have the goal of "investing into people and human resources." Alongside these European projects, Romania is also running several national programs that are overseen by this office (Interview 2:5). In these Romanian programs, for instance, workers enter Roma communities and "organize the local community" and create local initiative groups to assess the needs and the desires of the community; projects can be implemented to address infrastructure development as well as human resource development through educational or social programming. It is noteworthy that grants for these types of programs are granted to local councils on a competitive basis (Interview 2:4).

Proposals to this department for grant money for Roma integration projects are judged according to the applicability and relevance to the community as well as how likely the project is to succeed. Because of the diversity of the Roma population and the diversity between Roma communities, projects are rarely applicable across settings. For instance, in:

> one [Roma] community where the education level is a bit higher and the people are more assimilated, there you can more easily influence the human capital in comparison with so-called traditional communities where the formal education is very low. So we usually know these communities, and we can make recommendations for one or the other project, whichever is more suitable for the community. [Interview 2:6]

Clearly, one type of project that the Romanian government funds for Roma integration is local projects that are tailored to the needs of individual communities. As noted above, however, these projects are often elaborated by NGOs and funded by the government, rather than elaborated by the government itself. In cases where these types of projects are not created by NGOs, they come from local councils based on the recommendations of local, influential Roma or Roma councilors.

The national government and its Roma departments serve not only to control large, EU structural funds and implement national policies, but also oversee the local implementation of the myriad other Roma projects happening throughout the country. In this way, government employees constantly interact with NGO workers and their projects, and creatively draw from these projects to create policies for Roma integration.

The Roma Political Party

The link between NGOs and the government does not end here, however; some of the most mentioned partnerships in the process of Roma integration are between the Roma Party (*Partida Romilor)* and various NGOs.

The Roma political party is the national party representing the Romani minority in Romania. As such, it has one guaranteed seat in the Chamber of Deputies which can be increased if the votes surpass the required five percent mark, which it has not done since its establishment in 1990. Party representatives are appointed locally, and are situated within local councils. The appointment of these representatives occurs through a combination of party sponsorship and an assessment of the popularity of the candidate with the local community. Ideally, local communities support all the appointments made. These representatives serve as nodes of

connection between local communities and the national Party. The relative success of the Roma Party and the links between local and national interests will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

The approaches of NGOs and government offices in their work with the Roma illustrate a number of points about the problem of Roma integration and attempts at mobilization: firstly, Rome elites are diverse but often come from a considerably different background than non-elite Roma. Secondly, Roma advocates face the paradox that the diversity of the Roma population necessitates local responses while the prevalence of social and economic marginalization amongst Gypsies in Romania requires nothing less than well-funded, coherent national strategies of integration.

As regional Roma elites move between local communities, Roma NGOs, and conferences with national Roma leaders, they symbolically navigate this paradox. With the integration of Romania into the EU, external pressures for integration of the Roma have increased significantly, and Roma advocacy has gained higher priority across the nation. Yet there is still "a lack of capacity" to deal with the "complex and multi-dimensional nature of the problem" as well as a "vast gap" between "operational reality" and policy (European Commission 2004:16). And these regional elites are constantly reminded, by virtue of their roles as mediators between the national project and local realities, that links between the Roma movement and grassroots Gypsies are weak.

The Roma elites in my research are those that are most often held accountable for the disjuncture between policy and practice, not because they have control of the reality of integration, but because they are the most accessible segment of the Roma political elite. They carry the brunt of the burden of accountability to local Gypsies, while those with more power and influence on the national level of the movement are relatively safe from direct challenges.

Yet as mediators between the national and the local, I will argue in Chapter 5, these regional elites are in a crucial position to aid the Roma movement in gaining legitimacy on the local level, since the lack of legitimacy is a direct reflection of the weakness of the link between these levels.

Chapter 4: The Settlement

Introduction

The experiences of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe are almost universally described in terms of problems. The Gypsies living in the Roma settlement on the edge of an old industrial town– a segregated settlement that I will refer to as the Settlement– like many reports and government officials, describe their lives in terms of problems and victimization. Yet there are significant differences in the ways in which the discussions of problems are utilized on the local level versus the national and international level. The way in which Gypsies play with issues of identity and leadership through their discussions of problems suggest that the vocabulary of victimization has been politicized on the local level. These 'victims' are in fact using the discourse of victimization to challenge national and international visions of Roma ethnicity and representation, reworking a discussion in which they are cast as apolitical entities to redefine legitimacy in the case of Roma elites and activists.

National and international actors assessing the 'condition' of Roma in the EU often focus on problems. "The Situation of the Roma in an Enlarged European Union," a report sponsored by the European Commission, is standard in its assessment of the Roma as a population facing a considerable degree of both social and economic exclusion. The report notes that "throughout Europe Roma…live in sub-standard accommodation characterized by a "ghettoisation," inadequate infrastructure and services, segregation from other settlements, a high incidence of disease and threat of eviction" (European Commission 2004:2-3). Roma face discrimination in access to healthcare services because of "persistent discrimination," and "there is strong

evidence of reduced life expectancies among all Roma, Gypsies, and Travellers" (European Commission 2004:2-3). Despite unemployment rates amongst many Roma that continue to be "as high as 80 percent in new Member States," these states "fail to target" the Roma as a group in need of specific accommodations in their National Action Plans. Finally, the report warns, "social protection systems across Europe often allow Romani individuals to slip through the safety net, either deliberately or through neglect" (European Commission 2004:2-3). In a report of Roma in Romania from 2001, researchers state that "economically, the Roma population is the most disadvantaged in Romania" (O'Grady and Tarnovschi 2001:12) and studies done by the European Commission (2004) concluded Roma households are "over-represented in the lowest quintiles of disposable household income and the majority of the Roma are living below the poverty line" (Rat 2005:6-7).

Since Roma are less fully engaged in the formal labor market than Romanians, "most Roma either do not participate in social-insurance schemes (other than health-insurance) or their period of contribution is too short to entitle them to insurance-based benefits" (Rat 2005:8). When Roma are employed, they are often the first to be let go when downsizing is deemed necessary by employers (O'Grady and Tarnovschi 2001:12-13). The length of employment, then, is generally unreliable. Furthermore, in Romania in 2000, only 12.5 percent encompassed a wage-earner with a working contract– a basic requirement to be entitled to social insurance benefits. Of those Roma in Romania who reported engaging in regular or temporary working activities, 84 percent reported doing so without a contract (Rat 2005:12). Therefore state pensions, insurance-based paid maternity leave and parental child-care leave have relatively lower influence on the well-being of Roma households than those of the non-Roma" (Rat 2005:8).

The life expectancy of Roma in Romania is also estimated to be 15 to 20 years shorter than the life expectancy of non-Roma Romanians, with Roma life expectancy averaging between 50 and 55 years. This, researchers postulate, is at least partially due to “substandard living conditions” and the fact that Roma “prefer not to [go] to the hospital” (O'Grady and Tarnovschi 2001:12-13). This is seen as a result of anti-Roma discrimination within medical settings, which has gained considerable attention from NGO and governmental institutions in an effort to address public health needs.

Entering the Settlement

In entering the Settlement, I believe that people were predisposed to discuss their problems with me. Most outsiders come into Gypsy communities to discuss issues that need to be fixed, and since the Settlement is a poor one, it is not an exception. Also, a discussion of grievances might have been considered less invasive to privacy than a discussion of other aspects of life with an outsider. Roma problems are very much part of public discourse, whereas other aspects of Gypsy life are less well-known and less widely discussed.

Yet the way in which my interviewees framed these discussions indicated that these issues were not merely apolitical descriptions of everyday life. Despite their poverty and problems, these interviewees "appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade or transform" discourses about them rather than being passive recipients of social meaning (Brubaker 2006:170). In this chapter, I work from the premise that these Gypsies have agency in their presentation of their lives to me, and chose to emphasize problems over other aspects of their lives when talking to me.

The way in which the people I interviewed in the Settlement presented their lives and values to me reflects their conceptualization not only of what it means to be Gypsy in their

community, but also constructs a narrative of what it means to be a legitimate Roma leader in Romania. Their discussions suggest that the vocabulary of problems and problem solving is tied closely to conceptualizations of Gypsyness and leadership, such that leaders are defined by their ability and willingness to solve Gypsy problems rather than by the fact that they are of 'Roma' origin and are in a position of power.

In order to illustrate the ways in which this community thinks about Gypsyness and leadership through their discussion of their problems, I will first outline the views of Gypsies I interviewed on the issues facing their community. Then, I will transition to the way in which they talk about local leadership in dealing with these issues. Finally, I will consider some of the ways in which local leaders talk about the problems facing this community and how they frame their roles as leaders.

Discussion of problems and issues facing the Settlement community

I was first introduced to the Settlement through a contact at the local school. My interpreter and I travelled from the City to the center of the town in which the Settlement is located, and took a taxi to reach the outer limits of the town. We stopped in front of an old school. As we walked into the schoolyard and spotted the children running around on the dirt playground and the teachers smoking by the door, I noticed the differences between this place and the other Romanian schools I had seen. The playground was bare dirt with a single rusty pole sticking out of the ground in the back. Behind the pole stood an uneven concrete wall behind which shacks with tin roofs were visible. The lower part of the school's old white walls were covered in a gradient of mud that slowly gave way to off-white paint. The windows had communist-era burglar bars covering them, and a number of windows were cracked and broken. Many of the children were running around barefoot, and most were wearing clothes that were

worn with age. As I looked over at the teachers, I noticed that the man standing closest to us had a number of teeth missing– which surprised me since he appeared to be in his early forties.

The teachers were the first to spot us, their conversation halting in its tracks; the children's movements soon followed. For a second, everything seemed to freeze and it felt like every pair of eyes was focused on us. The moment passed, and the younger children resumed their play. The teachers and the older children began talking again, periodically looking over at us. I had the distinct feeling that I was trespassing. My interpreter moved away from the noise to call the person we were supposed to meet. As I stood there trying to look both friendly and undisturbed by the attention I was getting, a teenage boy marched up to me, grabbed my arm, and started laughing and shouting something to the teachers and older students.

When my interpreter came back, she explained to me that he was confirming that we spoke Romanian, not Romani. At that point, our audience seemed confused as to why we were speaking English, and my interpreter introduced me as an American student. The boy let go of my arm and ran off to rejoin his peers as our interviewee came out from the school to greet us and take us to her classroom for the interview.

This scene lends itself to descriptions that emphasize otherness—the marginality of the settlement, the poverty, the naïve curiosity about outsiders and foreigners, the joviality of the children who are playing in the mud, seemingly unaware that there are paved streets, clean grassy yards, schools with computers, and eclectic coffee shops with customers discussing philosophy and texting on their iPhones just a few miles away. In the popular imagination, Gypsies are free spirits who do not want to join the rat race and live in apartments in cities with nine to five jobs. They work only insofar as they have an immediate need for cash; they do not plan ahead or save. They are the masters of living in the moment.

The reality, in this settlement at least, is quite the opposite. People in the Settlement are not isolated from life in the town. They shop in the town, catch buses through it, and search for jobs in local stores. In fact, community members are aware that they are much poorer than the surrounding residents, and often talk wistfully about finding steady employment. Yet humor punctuates their vocal complaints of discrimination, and they carry on with community life despite hardships. But in talking to me, emphasized that some aspects of their lives could be made easier with steady incomes and permanent housing.

In the Settlement, houses are crammed into narrow lanes with little space between them, and range from permanent structures built mostly out of bricks and wood to semi-permanent ones built with plywood and supplemented with cardboard. Most of the houses "don't have any toilets… [or] sewage" (Interview 3:3). Until three or four years ago, the settlement had no municipal means of disposing of their waste, and had a "big pile of trash on [the] field" at one edge of the settlement. Many, if not most, of the members of the community live "without gas, electricity, or anything" (Interview 3:4).

An elderly woman whom I interviewed on the doorstep of her single-room house amidst a crowd of onlookers captured much of the sentiment of worry about the future of the community in her discussion of her family's monetary troubles. She has four children, eighteen grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren– yet none of the adults are formally employed. The whole family is dependent on welfare and scarce opportunities for informal day labor. She receives her pension, and her children receive a "child allowance" each month– a meager sum meant to help with the costs of the family (Interview 4:1).

Voicing a common belief that Gypsies were much better off during communism, she asserts that under Ceau□escu, "everything was good, there was food, it was cheaper…. Everyone

was working then." Before the political change, she insists, "there weren't these problems of people not being able to afford to live, and to kill themselves, to kill each other" (Interview 4:1). The school mediator, a popular local leader who is affiliated with the Roma Party, interrupts to reinforce this point: "Under Ceau□escu," he says, "there wasn't such a big Roma population here. There used to be more Romanians than Roma in the past" (Interview 4:1).

He explains that the settlement grew and became a Gypsy ghetto after the end of communism, whereas previously this poor community had an ethnic composition more representative of Romania's ethnic composition. The Roma people, he explains, were the first to lose their positions in the factories and were unable to enter the skilled labor market. Now, with the widespread economic troubles, the Romanian government has been forced to make cuts to their welfare and pensions. These cuts, the mediator insists, came as a surprise for most community members who had voted for the President and interpreted this as a betrayal since so many Roma depend on these government sums (Interview 4:1).

Changing basis for poverty: Socialism and Post-Socialism

This discussion highlights another aspect of this community's experience of poverty: that the basis for poverty can shift along with political regimes. In communist societies in Central and Eastern Europe, poverty was "mainly a demographic phenomenon." Roma who had single mothers and multiple siblings, for instance, were very likely to experience poverty until such a time as they were old enough to work. As mentioned in Chapter 2, with the deindustrialization after 1989, education became highly predictive of income levels– (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006:155). In post-socialist Romania, Gypsies are more likely to experience poverty than Romanians primarily because of lack of formal education and technical training.

Education

Since education became increasingly important as a means to find employment and avoid poverty in post-socialist Romania, it featured consistently in my interviews. Many in this community simply did not have sufficient formal education to qualify for most jobs in the new economy. As an unemployed young man said, a large number of the residents that grew up within communism do not have more than a fourth grade education, and even within the younger generation eight years of formal education is considered prestigious (Interview 6:4).

Three of my informants within the settlement mentioned that poverty was the primary barrier to education in the community. Some families could not afford to give their children more than one set of clothes, they said, so on laundry days, the children would have nothing to wear to school and would have to miss it. Given that the community was covered in dirt and most children did not have more than one set of clothing, laundry had to be done relatively frequently and could cause a child to miss school if, as is likely, some of those laundry days happened to coincide with school days. Similarly, when the children's shoes wore out or their only pair of clothes were torn, the children felt too embarrassed to attend school.

Parents also felt pressure to provide the children with pocket money when they attended school in order for the kids to be able to buy snacks, which was simply outside the budgets of many families (Interview 4:3). Though families did not explicitly raise the issue, a teacher in the community school mentioned that the inability for many families to provide breakfast to students made the students difficult to manage until such a time as the school provided the free lunch, after which students were more able to concentrate (Interview 3).

With the exception of the last issue, these concerns are actually more a reflection of the social expectations regarding caring for one's family than literal barriers to education. The relevance of these statements to community policing and resistance to Roma stereotypes will be

further discussed below. For now, it is important to note that my Gypsy interviewees experienced poverty and the social perception of poverty as a disabling factor in regards to education.

The school mediator, whose job it is to encourage school attendance, knows both how crucial formal education can be for professional success in the new Romania and how difficult it can be to gain that formal education as an adult. Having dropped out of school before getting a degree, he is currently enrolled in high school to get his diploma as a means to forward his own career and to set an example for the community. Yet as his daughter-in-law points out, "some people think it's a joke that he goes to school at his age" (Interview 6:3). Adults in the community face the prospect of needing more education to get jobs, yet they may feel embarrassed to re-enter school.

Even more problematic than humiliation at the prospect of going to school again is the widespread distrust that education makes it easier to secure a job as a Gypsy. Many Settlement residents were concerned at the apparent lack of employment opportunities after graduating from the local school, since a number of them had a high school diploma yet were unable to find a job. "A lot of parents say to their children, 'It doesn't matter if you go to school because you won't find a job anyway,'" said a young unemployed, high-school educated woman to me (Interview 6:3). This woman had worked for some time as a seamstress, but had lost her job when the textile workshops in the area closed at the beginning of the recession. At the time of the interview, she had been unable to secure any other type of employment, and was hoping to use her family network to get a job. As her case, and many other young adults' experiences demonstrated, when the economy was doing poorly even an education did not prevent Roma from being the first to be laid-off.

It is important to point out that the only type of education available in the Settlement past eighth grade is professional education rather than general education. In Romania, professional schools give occupational qualifications much like technical schools do in the U.S., except that the training supplants other high school studies. Generally, professional education does not allow for advancement into tertiary education. Furthermore, in Romania, entrance exams are required for all forms of secondary school. After eighth grade, students must take exams to enter into professional schools (which require passing mathematics and Romanian language), or general education high schools (which has additional academic requirements) (Interview 1:2).

Thus, even for those who complete the eighth grade and wish to continue their education, options are limited. The only training the local school provides past the eighth grade is two years of sewing qualification for women, and auto-mechanics training for men through the local professional school (Interview 6:1). And qualification for a general education in a nearby city requires additional exams and often additional tutoring as well as the ability to pay for a student to travel to a non-local school. Few, if any, of the children in the community have the option of commuting to school elsewhere, since transport costs are prohibitive and parents are unable to monitor their children's behavior (Interview 6:2). Adults that graduate from this school compete for work as seamstresses and auto-mechanics, or they work as unqualified and often undocumented daily laborers. The inability of individuals in the community with the professional qualifications to find employment has added to a sense of cynicism about the value of education (Interview 6:3).

Language

Apart from needing more formal education in order to qualify for jobs, some of the older generations are not fluent in Romanian. The oldest generation of Roma, who were part of the

community that existed here before communism, speaks a dialect of Romani that draws from Hungarian (Interview 6:5). Most of the community speaks a less Hungarianized form of Romani as their first language. Most of the Gypsies in the community who were educated before the end of communism speak Romanian as a second language, and often are not fluent enough to use Romanian in social settings or in the workplace. This is partially because Romanian is learnt almost exclusively through Romanian language education within the school, and many people in the settlement do not have much formal education (Interview 5:1). Needless to say, this poses a serious problem in the search for employment from Romanian employers or institutions.

Anti-Roma Sentiment

In the discussions of unemployment, nearly all of my informants mentioned anti-Gypsy sentiment. Only one informant in the settlement did not mention discrimination toward Roma explicitly, though even she mentioned that "Roma people and the Romanians don't really work together well," and that problems can arise because of "the differences in ethnicity" (Interview 5:1). The awareness of prejudice by community members is best captured in this statement, which ties together issues of unemployment and lack of education through an analysis of discrimination:

> For example, [a Gypsy man] goes to get a job somewhere … eighty percent of Roma don't have that much schooling. Then if he goes to work in construction, to build materials, he's told 'no.' But not because he cannot work, but because of his ethnicity. [The employer] thinks "Oh yeah, this person is going to steal." There is this prejudice. [Interview 6:5]

According to this man, Gypsies are limited by their lack of education in seeking employment, but even in their quest to find jobs for which they are qualified, they are often met with rejection because they are Gypsy.

In general, my informants agreed that interactions with Romanians are made more difficult by signs of Gypsyness. In Romania, darker skin color, illiteracy, and a 'different' way of life, often marked by marginality and poverty, are considered to be markers of Gypsyness (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006:141).[17]

When talking about the reality of categorization, a couple of my informants in the settlement mentioned that some level of passing, or at least an active distancing from these stereotypical Gypsy characteristics in public, is convenient in everyday interactions with Romanians. Since some Gypsies are not native Romanian speakers, language and intonation is another means by which Gypsies can be identified. Those Roma who are fluent in Romanian may try to "control [their accent] when [they] go somewhere," and follow Romanian conventions of greeting and interaction in an attempt to avoid being labeled as Gypsy (Interview 6:4).

Overall, the people I interviewed felt that the lack of education and professional qualifications combined with Romanian racism against Gypsies helped to create and reinforce poverty in their community, and that this poverty caused further barriers to education and employment. The experience of marginalization was also seen as reinforcing the lack of education and employment, since people were sometimes demoralized by racist encounters and further discouraged from pursuing a more integrated way of life.

Community models of 'good' Gypsyness

It is of some interest that all of my interviewees in the Settlement referred to themselves as Gypsies (not Roma), and the term 'Romanian' was universally employed to mean non-Gypsies. That is, except for those instances where my interpreter used the Romanian word 'rom,'

17 In a large-scale study conducted by Ladányi and Szelényi, a sample of 296 Romanian interviewers identified interviewees as Roma and described their methods for performing the classification. 52 percent of interviewers ranked skin color as very important in Gypsy classification, 46.9% remarked that a distinct 'way of life' was important in marking Roma, and 36.5% identified language as very important in classifying Roma. 46.3% said that the self-identification of the interviewee was not an important factor in classifying someone as Roma.

after which one interviewee temporarily used the word ‘rom’ before switching back to ţigan, or gypsy.

The most interesting distinction came from a conversation in which one young man made a distinction between the people in the settlement and ‘real Gypsies’ in Transylvania, and made a further distinction between the Gypsies in Transylvania and those Gypsies in southern Romania. “My grandfather was a real ţigan person,” he said. Real Gypsies “have different occupations, like making clothes, making pots, singing, building roofs and working with iron. Every person was doing something in the community. But in time, these things are lost” (Interview 6:5) He adds that real Gypsies speak real Romani, not “different dialects” like his community speaks. He then draws a further distinction between Gypsies from Transylvania and those of southern Romania, mentioning that those in the south have different dances and different food. They are also seen differently than Gypsies in Transylvania. He ends this line of thought with the assertion that “this community is seen as the worst one in the city, but the nicest people are here” (Interview 6:6).

The way in which he drew these lines of distinction are telling of the types of Gypsyness that he sees as desirable, and aligns well with the ways in which other community members talked about what types of lifestyles were acceptable in their community. The idea of having lost touch with ‘real’ Gypsy culture– including non-Romanian ways of life and traditional occupations– is pervasive. The discussion of employment made it clear that no traditional crafts remained in this community, yet the loss of craft was not mourned; traditional crafts require the makers to travel for at least part of the year to sell their wares. Community members mourned instead the loss of standard, formal factory employment close by.

Speaking Romanian rather than Romani in order to get a job was also considered wise. A number of interviewees emphasized the importance of increasing knowledge of Romanian in the community, and even disparaged Romanian attempts to institute Romani language classes in their school:

> First people should learn Romanian and be able to master it, because when you go somewhere you're supposed to talk Romanian because if you speak Romani nobody will know what you want to say. You don't go to the store and ask in Romani, you ask in Romanian. [Interview 5:3]

Similarly, the Romani and Romanian language teacher at the local school insisted:

> I teach bilingually but I emphasize the development of vocabulary in Romanian. Because we're in Romania. I love Romani, but I think it's a mistake. We're not ready yet to have teaching in Romani language. … We don't have any books, and you confuse them. You teach up to the fourth grade in Romani and then you switch to Romanian… The children can't keep up, and then you get real segregation. [Interview 3:3]

Whatever the political incentives to teach or preserve Romani, these informants had a strictly practical outlook that emphasized the need to be able to integrate educationally and socio-economically.

A number of other informants criticized those in the community who they felt did not make sufficient strides to integrate into Romanian society. First and foremost in these criticisms were those who did not get the proper amount of formal schooling. As one woman said, "a lot of people don't have four classes, and cannot read, and had the chance to come here and go to the school and study, and didn't go," concluding that "there are people who just settle for less than others" (Interview 6.4). Another woman told me proudly that she has taught her daughter some English, but voiced concern, however, about the current quality of schooling. She mentioned, though, that the presence of the mediator himself, who is an intimidating and respected figure, has helped improve schooling in general (Interview 5).

Several people also voiced concerns over being nice Gypsies, as opposed to those Gypsies in other parts of the town who were rough and not considered civilized. One young woman insisted that their community was the nicest Gypsy community in town, but had a bad reputation because of "a few families who have a lot of children and don't have control of them" (Interview 6:4). These families were headed by irresponsible parents who are "drinking, and not working," and were thus poor. These parents "send their children to beg" rather than sending them to school. They give the community a "bad reputation" despite the fact that the town's police know the community is not violent and is very rarely called to come to the community (Interview 6:4).

Another woman similarly relates that the community is a good one, but she makes an exception for the disrespectful youngsters who are unemployed and bored and become violent. However, she insists that the school mediator, the local leader, is in control of the situation (Interview 5:3). Other informants expand this view, noting that some of the adults in the community do not understand how to be polite, and that this embarrassed the other Gypsies in the community (Interview 3:4; Interview 6:3). These are contrasted with the good behavior of upstanding Settlement residents such as the leader and a few other figures.

Finally, as if to cement the fact that the community is a very civilized one, a man recounts his work in the downtown area as a bus ticket inspector. His co-workers and bosses, who he insists did not realize he was Roma, were worried that he did not treat the town's Gypsies the same as he treated the Romanians on the buses. Despite pressure from his managers, he did not want to change his behavior toward these town Gypsies, who he felt were "very violent" and difficult to deal with for "a very small paycheck" (Interview 6:5).

The discussion of these issues suggests that community members, who consider themselves Gypsies rather than Roma and who do not have a *neam* affiliation, wish to distance themselves from narratives of Gypsyness that cast Gypsies as violent, lazy, welfare dependent, and illiterate through stressing education, commitment to work, and politeness. The norms for how to be a good Gypsy in this community involve successful navigation of public Romanian spaces, respect for elders and community leaders, and work toward education and employment. Gypsies in the Turda settlement are distinct from Romanians, but they are 'moral' the way Romanians are moral, and modern the way Romanians are modern. They are not 'real,' traditional Gypsies who are out of touch with the modern workforce and modern fashions. But they are also not violent Gypsies who have lost touch with all values. Economic hardship does not eliminate social expectations of providing for one's family and being a good community member.

Who is respected in the community, what they do to be respected

In discussing the problems of the community and proper norms for behavior, I believe the Gypsies of the settlement framed what they believe are legitimate issues for a leader or representative to address, and also outlined the way in which these issues should be addressed. Throughout the discussions of problems, they mention the work of their local leader, the man who doubles both as a city council representative from the community and as a school mediator.

In discussing the work of this leader, the emphasis is always on the fact that he has earned respect and obedience from the community through his good work for them. One of the most frequently told stories is that of the "big pile of trash" that plagued the community before the appointment of their leader. The dire trash situation of the community was widely ignored my municipal leaders until the Roma leader "went constantly to the city hall until he finally

managed to find some machines to clean everything" (Interview 5:2). His persistence and commitment to a better environment for the community paid off, and local officials finally did what they should have done a long time ago. Similarly, the community had mud roads that caused havoc whenever it rained; standing water made the whole settlement dirty and impossible to navigate. But when the school mediator was given his community leadership post, "he went to the city hall a lot and he brought stones and gravel to cover and level it up a bit" (Interview 5:2).

Before the school mediator was appointed, children skipped school and the community had even lower levels of education and less Romanian training. But when the school mediator was put in charge, Settlement residents told me laughing, he began going around the community every morning and waking up any children who were not in school and chaperoning them to their classes. He addressed the concerns of families who felt that education was useless, and now school absenteeism is considerably less of an issue in the community (Interview4; Interview 5; Interview 6).

As the Settlement leader himself said to questions about his job description:

> I don't really do what I'm supposed to do. I do more. If I did only what I was told to do, not enough would get done... I do more volunteer work than anything. Many people in the community don't know how to read and write, and even if they do, they don't know how to fill in an application. And that's why they come to me, and sometimes they call me at ten in the night. [Interview 3:8]

This man's description of his own work is echoed throughout the community as the reason the Gypsies in the Settlement respect him. He works harder than he is supposed to, takes individuals' concerns upon himself, and is always available and ready to represent a community member at the city hall. Interestingly, the description of the mediator as 'volunteer' is repeated by others despite the fact that he has at least two paid positions through the city hall to work for the community.

The local Roma leader became a leader through the intervention of a PHARE project, which insisted that the community choose a representative with whom they could communicate about project details. So the school mediator was appointed through the initiation of the PHARE project, but was chosen by the community. Yet not all school mediators can be considered community leaders, the teacher explains:

> Generally, they make themselves be listened to. It just depends on the person and how involved the person is in the troubles of the people. The acts they do, in time, speak for themselves. And not everyone does quality work. [Interview 3:7]

This specific school mediator has managed to gain the trust of the community and has established himself as a respected leader with the right to intervene in family affairs as well as the right to speak for the community on the local level.

A Gypsy woman told me that when people in the settlement encountered problems, they do not really trust the intentions of the city hall workers enough to approach them with their issues because they hold prejudices against those that are jobless. Not knowing that I have already met the school mediator, she tells me: "There is a leader, and people tell the leader their problems. The leader goes, and he puts in a lot of work for the people in the community." He is usually helped, she tells me, because "he has more authority than the common person" (Interview 5:2). This authority in relation to the city, I am informed, comes from the fact that he is well-connected with local officials, he is a member of the Roma Party, and the community has given him permission to be their representative (Interview 6:3).

Reframing leadership through discussions of problems

Throughout the interviews I conducted with community members in the Settlement, it was repeatedly stressed that the school mediator was a respected leader because of the work that he did for the community, and that he would not have been considered a leader had he not done

this work. His leadership and representative power did not rest on his affiliation with the Roma Party or his appointment through PHARE. This concept was reinforced by a sociologist who worked with a community a walking distance away from the settlement on which I focused. This community often sent students to the Settlement school, and many had members of their extended families in the other community. This other community also had a school mediator, yet the Roma community she studied did not consider this mediator a leader. Rather, a teacher at the local school is the main leadership figure. As an explanation of this, the sociologist offered the following:

> Somehow… it has to do with personal traits too. The school mediator, she's very young, and usually when she goes and visits the families she's somehow scared, and she needs to take someone else with her. You know? And the teacher, she's a really strong figure. And she has done quite a good work with the children. So they have the results there. [Interview 7:6]

The legitimacy of the leader in this neighboring community, too, rests on the work that the leader has done for the community.

In Chapter 5, I will consider these foundations for a legitimate Roma leader on the local level in relation to the type of leadership advocated for by Roma elites. The discontinuities in the views of what constitutes a legitimate Roma leader from the point of view of local Gypsies and that of Roma elite will be discussed in relation to the unpopularity of Roma mobilization in Romania on the grassroots level.

Chapter 5

Introduction

In this chapter, I will argue that the Roma living in the Settlement, though economically and socially marginalized, are not out of touch with Roma politics or Romanian politics more broadly. Rather, these Gypsies– like many other Gypsies across Central and Eastern Europe– are critical of Roma politics and often make deliberate decisions not to support Roma politicians, challenging Roma leaders through their cynical dissociation to be accountable to local needs and to earn grassroots support through the demonstration of positive change.

The fact that Roma leaders mention the need for decentralization and focus on local communities suggests that they are aware of this issue. While they are still facing general apathy, Roma elites and leaders draw heavily from "non-Gypsy political modalities" to establish their legitimacy (Gay y Blasco 2002:180). Simultaneously, Roma elite reframe Gypsy challenges to Roma authority as an absence of political awareness rather than alternative, grassroots definitions of leadership and Gypsyness. For the elite, the lack of Gypsy support results from the apolitical short-sightedness that comes from conditions of Gypsy poverty. Therefore they do not see it as a legitimate challenge to the Roma political agenda.

The general dismissal of Roma politics on the local level, I believe, is not a sign that local Gypsies are unaware of the political agendas of Roma elite. They are simply at odds with the Roma elite; they do not trust the Roma elite to represent their interests, and in withholding their support of the Roma political movement they are not politically inactive, but are challenging the intent and foundation of legitimacy of Roma leaders. These local Gypsies continuously model

the type of leadership they would support and even lament the lack of such leadership on the national level.

Despite the lack of grassroots support, Roma elite are making gains for the Roma on both the national and international level, slowly winning over allies in powerful political bodies and putting Roma integration on the political agendas of both the EU and the Romanian government. Roma leaders continue pushing their agendas nationally and internationally, hoping to win over the support of local Gypsies in time. The struggle to bridge macro-level support structures with local political structures, however, is a significant one. Roma leaders face professional burnout and the threat failure as they continue sustaining what is supposed to be a popular minority rights movement without popular support.

Self-Identification amongst non-elite Gypsies

As discussed in Chapter 1, there is no such thing as a singular Gypsy identity; Gypsy identity– like other identities– may shift over time or aspects of it may be emphasized or de-emphasized according to context. Sometimes, Gypsy identity is anchored in corporate groups such as subgroups. Yet as previously discussed, these clan-like social structures have become less widespread, and often do not encourage endogamy to the same extent as they used to. In any Gypsy subgroups are useful to think through the variability of Gypsy identity.

Some Roma whose Gypsy identity are anchored in a group make a "clear-cut distinction [be] between '[their] people' and 'strange people,' where '[their] people' are solely members of the same group, and all the rest are 'strangers,' both the surrounding population and other Gypsy groups" (Beissinger 2001:32). Yet there is considerable differentiation in how Roma belonging to these Gypsy groups interpret their belonging.

Gypsyness as performance

Some enact their Gypsy identity with considerable pride, and place their Gypsyness front and center in their self-identities. The Gitanos in Jarana, for instance, "reject the label of 'ethnic minority' that is so important to the activist discourse: to them, it is the Gitanos that occupy the center of the world, and the non-Gypsies that are marginal and peripheral" (Gay y Blasco 2002:186).

Though the Gitanos of Jarana express an awareness that "there are Gitano-like populations in 'all the countries of the world,' they do not see themselves as forming with them 'one kind of people,' nor do they attempt to establish any practical links with them" (Gay y Blasco 2002:178). In fact, Gitanos are "separated from each other" by "ethnic and religious affiliations, and levels of economic success, all of which weigh heavily on their imaginative configurations of themselves" (Gay y Blasco 2002:177). Gitano-ness "is not imposed from above or from the center, but rather is dependent on the performances of particular Gitano persons" (Gay y Blasco 2002:179). With the emphasis on the performance of a very specific, community interpretation of Gitano-ness, the past is "disregarded as a source of shared identity, and downplayed through most spheres of social life" (Gay y Blasco 2002:179).

Ethnicity as ethnic trait

Still others claim their ethnic identity while playing with their class identity, reinterpreting Gypsyness as a source of desirable characteristics that can be combined with Romanian sensibilities and values to create a superior type of Gypsy identity. Lăutari, members of the Romanian neamuri that traditionally pursues musicianship, are particularly well-known for this. Lăutari gained a higher social status than any other neamuri in Romania under slavery. Known for their musicianship, it is not uncommon to hear non-Gypsy Romanians praise the

skills of these Gypsies. The lăutari perform primarily for non-Roma across Romania, and thus have more routine, professional contact with non-Roma than many other Gypsies.

The lăutari, historically, developed as a type of Roma elite. Gypsy musicians first began to become popular in this region in the 1500s (Kemény 2005:7). By the eighteenth century, Gypsy musicians were by far the most respected occupational group by outsiders, since Roma musicians were regarded as exceptional and had more access to a steady income than most Gypsies (Kemény 2005: 39). As Beissinger points out in her ethnographic work with the lăutari:

> Romani musicians play with the boundaries of ethnicity and class because in doing so they are enabled to elevate themselves, thereby gaining prestige and economic security. They are agents in the making of cultural difference… Through their discourse on ethnicity, class, culture, and politics, Romani musicians manipulate boundaries between themselves and others in order to associate themselves with the socially powerful, disassociate themselves form the powerless, and enhance their market niche and status. [Beissinger 2001:26]

The lăutari identify primarily as musicians; the emphasis on occupation translates to their sense of Gypsyness, in which they "portray the 'ethnic' part of their identity" (Beissinger 2001:32) as that which gives them their musical skills. Their Gypsyness is essential but subordinate to their profession, which allows them to enter public spaces and be received by non-Gypsies with respect.

Roma musicians in Romania claim that they are the "most civilized and well-behaved ţigani," and are the "most integrated" Gypsies of all. It is not uncommon for these musicians to "discriminate against other Roma based on their being purportedly dangerous or bad" (Beissinger 2001:38). In doing so, Beissinger argues, these musicians "construct a space in which they place themselves alongside the 'ethical Romanians'" rather than associate with the "unethical" Gypsies (2001:39). Indeed, many Roma musicians have stopped learning Romani, and Romanian is used in their community instead. In doing so, they uphold the majority language as a sign of the linkage between the musicians and Romanians (Beissinger 2001:45).

In regards to Roma politics, most of the lăutari "dismiss involvement in Romani political movements because of its perceived incompatibility with their profession" (Beissinger 2001:47). In Transylvania especially, the musicians refer to those pushing the Roma agenda as Gypsies with little power who are partaking in the politics of the capital, which has no impact on Transylvanian life. This political apathy, Beissinger argues, is partially a result of the fact that musicians, who work hard for their livings, do not have the time to partake in political movements. This apathy is also a projection of the musicians' unique identity as professionals with a "strong affinity for the dominant culture" (Beissinger 2001:48). By ignoring Roma politics, Beissinger suggests, these musicians distance themselves from the stigma of Gypsyness, realign themselves with Romanians, and place themselves in a less controversial position vis-à-vis their Romanian customers by staying out of the fray of Roma politics.

Gypsyness in the Settlement

The Roma from the Settlement whom I interviewed did not belong to a distinct neamuri; their community is an amalgamation of Roma from across the region who lost their jobs or could no longer afford to live elsewhere. Yet they share a community identity, and past-affiliations are not mentioned. Common experiences in the settlement have provided the means through which to build a new type of affiliation that stresses morality and the desire for integration, with community members providing contrasts of 'bad' or 'backward' Gypsies to cement their community aspirations. In discussing their ethnicity, they emphasize that their community is distinct (and superior) to other Gypsy communities, including those with neamuri identities.

For the Gypsies from the Settlement, Gypsyness is neither performed according to group-specific laws that are passed down through the generations, nor is it seen as a source of particular talent that enables upward social mobility. Rather, as members of a mixed Gypsy community

that is also struggling to re-enter the regular economy, Settlement Roma emphasize their desire to work, their ability to learn and adapt, and their esteem of moral and socially acceptable behavior that is compatible with Romanian social norms.

Political implications of Gypsy identification

Not surprisingly, the specific aspects of Gypsyness that people cling to or the boundaries that they create between themselves and others have implications for their reception of the Roma political movement.

The Gitanos of Jarana, for instance, perform a local Gypsy ethnicity that they consider to be incompatible with the international focus of the Roma political movement. The musicians, Beissinger writes, are highly resistant to Roma politics. In a typical effort to prevent being grouped with other Gypsies, "several in the same village indicated that when Romani activists in Bucharest," such as Nicolae Gheorghe, a scholar-activist, and Nicolae Paun, the head of the Roma Party, refer to Roma, "they mean *all* the other [Roma], but not lăutari" (Beissinger 2001:46). This "rejection of political involvement," Beissinger argues, is the result of a "distrust of officialdom and suspicions of what are seen as isolated, elite movements that relate little to their own personal lives and ongoing struggles" (2001:47).

Beissinger's argument, which accounts for the lack of political enthusiasm for the Roma movement amongst lăutari, places that dissociation at the center of their play on Gypsyness and class. These musicians, she argues, have no motivation to risk the foundation of their identity performance for a political movement that has not proven to be effective in giving the musicians more rights or resources. She concludes that these material and status considerations "rul[e] out concern for ethnic politics," leading the lăutari to "outrightly disavow Romani political parties and activities designed to better their status as Roms" (Beissinger 2001:47).

This commentary by Beissinger is reminiscent of the attitudes of many of the regional Roma advocates who often implied that the work they did for the Gypsies in Transylvania was essential because they felt Gypsies, living in poverty, often thought too narrowly to see the benefits of supporting the Roma movement. Poverty and social marginalization was given as the reason why non-elite Gypsies tend to be short-term thinkers who do not understand how to use the available resources, specifically a relatively well-funded and supported ethno-political movement, for their own advancement.

This view was most succinctly vocalized by a non-Roma sociologist who admitted that she often noticed that the Gypsies she encountered did not understand the necessity of pursuing longer-term goals such as education and professional training. She felt that this was not because of an inherent flaw in Roma ways of thinking or Gypsy culture, but rather a function of being poor. As a Romanian, she suggested, she would think similarly in a position of poverty:

> If I put myself in their shoes, and I think that I only have 10 Lei– this is all I have– and I have a starving family, no education, no prospects in finding a job, nobody I can talk to who can give me good advice… Perhaps I would also think short-term, no? I want to buy bread for my family. It's difficult to have a long-term perspective in this situation. [Interview 7:9]

In the face of material need and a lack of sources for good advice, she believes, Gypsies make decisions that are not conducive to long-term goals of integration. .

The internationally-recognized Roma scholar, Nicolae Gheorghe, similarly argues that "many Rom[a] are politically inactive," yet attributes it to the fact that they "were never part of the political process of nation-building, [and] their identity remained largely a social identity" (Beissinger 2001:47). In an assessment for the National Democratic Institute, researchers conclude that in Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia, "political disunity, economic hardship, and social stagnation conspire to suppress political aspirations and a cohesive political identity" (Denton 2003:1).

Roma participation in electoral politics

The electoral participation (or lack thereof) of Gypsies in Central and Eastern Europe is influenced by many factors. Many Roma communities "have a younger age structure [which] means that a smaller share of their population is of voting age" (Vermeersch 2005:459). In a survey of voting patterns of Roma in Hungary, Ladányi concludes that fifty-four percent of those individuals claiming a Roma identity "were willing to participate in elections," which was not much lower that the sixty percent of non-Roma willing to vote in the upcoming elections. In Slovakia, poor municipalities had a very low Roma participation rate; despite this, voter turnout on the level of districts never fell below fifty eight percent (Vermeersch 2005: 460).

In Romania, the young age of the Roma population can certainly be a factor in low voter support of Roma political parties. Perhaps more relevant to voting practices is the estimation that 20 percent of Romania's Roma population lacks government-issued identification cards. This makes registration for voting impossible (Denton 2003:5). Yet as indicated repeatedly by NGO and government officials as well as the Gypsies in the Settlement, the lack of ID is addressed by proactive measures instituted by city halls in many locales. Though it could certainly prove to be a significant obstacle to many individuals, the city in which the Settlement is located addresses these concerns by making replacement or provision of I.D.s easy.

As one local Roma leader described it to me, temporary I.D.s that are valid for a year can easily be gotten from the local courthouse. Towns have decreased the restrictions for getting these papers, even turning a blind eye to those people with no permanent addresses in order to issue them identity documents. Three hundred such identity documents had recently been issued to Settlement residents through the efforts of local leaders and local Roma Party officials

(Interview 3:4). Offhand comments by people in the settlement further suggest that people participated in the last national election (Interview 4).

Gypsy responses to Roma political movement

The lack of popular support for Roma movements across Central and Eastern Europe is widely noted (Denton 2005; Beissinger 2001; Gay y Blasco 2002; Klímová 2002). Whatever the creation of the term Roma and the rise of Roma NGOs and political parties did for international discourses and funding for Roma projects, it "did not persuade potential participants in a large-scale ethnic movement to start effectively participating in such a movement through electoral politics" (Vermeersch 2005:459). Yet unlike many observers suggest, the lack of involvement in electoral politics does not equate with an absence of Gypsies from formal or informal politics. On the contrary, Roma participate in general elections despite structural barriers on both the national and local levels. They simply choose not to support the Roma movement, which is in itself a political stance.

Given that there are significant forces that are pushing toward mobilization, including governmental structures that are increasingly receptive to Roma representation and EU funding of integration and aid initiatives aimed at Gypsies, the failure of Roma leaders to mobilize grassroots support is perplexing. In order to address this failure of Roma leaders to gain local support, I will consider relationship between national and local political and aid structures, and the perception of Roma leaders by Gypsies in Romania. I will argue that grassroots support is not crystallizing because national Roma leaders have not sufficiently established their legitimacy according to local standards.

The critique of multiculturalism and non-Gypsy political modalities

Peter Vermeersch's work on Roma political mobilization in Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia suggests that the Roma mobilization project has failed to garner public support because of the political opportunity and framing structures available to Roma mobilizers. Vermeersch argues that Roma activists and leaders "make their voice heard successfully by engaging in identity politics" (Vermeersch 2005: 454) within a political arena that filters claims to rights through the increasingly dominant prism of multiculturalism. In so doing, Roma leaders can choose to foreground marginality within their identity movement at the risk of reifying marginality as an ethnic trait of Roma. Conversely, they can choose to preference ethnic and cultural identity over those issues facing many Roma at the risk of losing pertinence to those Gypsies who are looking to their leaders to address issues of unemployment, poverty, and social marginality (Vermeersch 2005).

Vermeersch is not alone in pointing to the difficulties leaders face in posing their political agendas in such a way as to gain both national and international support while also appealing to marginal Gypsies (Vermeersch 2005:456). "One of the most striking characteristics of this movement," Paloma Blasco writes, "is its heavy ideological and practical dependence on non-Gypsy political modalities and structures" (Gay y Blasco 2002:180). The success of Roma politicians and activists in gaining international and national support, Blasco argues, rests on the tribute Roma leaders pay to non-Roma political bodies and discourses, which has in turn allowed non-Gypsies to accept Roma attempts at self-legitimization. These minority discourses, Blasco argues, "draws heavily on dominant western models of ethnicity, identity and personhood" while "contrast[ing] strongly" with those models upheld by the local Gitanos with whom the author does fieldwork (Gay y Blasco 2002:179).

In making his argument, Vermeersch draws on interviews with Roma organizers and leaders. In his work with Roma elites in the countries surrounding Romania, Vermeersch describes a distinct emphasis of Roma leaders on the project of identity formation at the expense of issue-area projects. In fact, the focus on identity made some Roma activists "reluctant to expose situations of marginality in their mobilization attempts" because they feared their portrayals of Roma need would reify Roma difference and support negative stereotypes (2005:461). Therefore, Roma leaders in these countries "rarely made unambiguous statements about whether "they were in favor of group-specific measures, such as affirmative action, desegregation, education in the Romani language, or the recognition of the Romani language as a minority language" (Vermeersch 2005:462).

Vermeersch argues that the problems of framing facing Roma activists are the same problems mobilizers of any multicultural movement would face.[18] Leaders' politics often portray a more unified group, glossing over internal dissention and heterogeneity, and can add to a sense of difference between majority and minority populations. This, he argues, is especially likely in situations where the "identity labels in question have very negative connotations and when political mobilization is hindered by a series of socio-economic obstacles" (Vermeersch 2005:465).

Given these obstacles, Vermeersch suggests that the Roma mobilization project might benefit from making a clearer distinction between "identity- and interest-based advocacy," (Vermeersch 2005:469) such that Roma activists may address the structural inequality that Gypsies face without making it a part of the identity movement. In this way, he argues, Roma leaders can both build a positive Roma identity that does not alienate Gypsies who fear

18 Vermeersch defines the Roma mobilization project in Europe as multicultural because it attempts to encompass so many types of Gypsies that do not consider themselves to be an ethnicity.

association with a stigmatized movement, while remaining relevant to poor Gypsy communities. The work of activists would no longer be plagued by fears of reinforcing stigma, since "ethnic and cultural identities… [would] only [be] important because unequal access is often experienced or socially organized in terms of cultural and ethnic difference" (Vermeersch 2005:469).

Obstacles to Roma mobilization popularity in Romania

Though Vermeersch's approach is remarkably useful in pointing to some of the reasons for the failure of popular mobilization of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, my research on local, non-elite concerns over Roma politics in Romania adds another dimension of critique. Vermeersch points out that interest-based advocacy should be strengthened and divorced from identity advocacy because the Roma are not responding well to the marriage of Roma ethnicity to humanitarian aid. Vermeersch's argument resonates well with the interviews I conducted with local Roma elites. Yet my interviews with poor Gypsies, who routinely link their ethnicity to 'problems' and constantly reinforce that leadership is only legitimate to the extent that it pays attention to these linkages, suggest that something else is at work in the unpopularity of the Roma political movement amongst non-elite Roma in Romania.

Romania stands out in the region as the site of the very successful Roma Party, which has held a monopoly on Roma politics since its inception (Denton 2003:12). The leaders of the Roma Party as well as Roma NGOs are by no means ambiguous in their goals for mobilization and integration. Leaders routinely list the need to address segregation, education, unemployment, and the desire to establish Romani as a minority language. The Roma Party is known for its linkages to Roma NGOs, and there are many powerful Roma NGOs with significant funding that routinely advocate for integration and aid.

Issues of linking marginality to Roma identity: Elites

The issues of integration and marginalization are routinely raised both by local leaders in the Settlement and by regional elites in the City, as is apparent in my previous discussion of NGO and government strategies of Roma integration. The only ambiguity centered on the use of Romani in school, where regional elites were very enthusiastic but local leaders suggested that schools did not have the resources to properly institute Romani language education. Even the local teacher who opposed the use of Romani language education professed great respect for this trend, lamenting only that it would not be practical to institute before resources could be obtained to allow for Romani language instruction all the way through university (Interview 3:5). The conflict, then, was less about the promotion of Romani language, which had already been standardized by Romanian Professor Gheorghe Sarău and subsequently popularized and incorporated into Roma politics, and more about the resources to properly implement it.

In short, national Roma leaders and local activists in Romania do not struggle with ambiguity or scruples over linking their political agendas with aid. Linkages between NGOs and the government sector in regards to the Roma are a well-established fact in Romania. According to Vermeersch's logic, then, Roma leaders in Romania have struck a balance in the representation of a stigmatized identity, effectively using strategic essentialism to juggle the need to express a unified Roma identity with the flexibility to help individual communities with different needs (Vermeersch 2005:468).

The Romanian movement is not paralyzed by its foundation in multiculturalism. Nor is it paralyzed by the political opportunity structures, since there is considerable funding and institutional support for Roma projects. Yet as many sources point out, Roma politics in Romania remains unpopular on the grassroots level. The monopoly of the Roma Party is

sustained "though its relationship with the ruling party" rather than through the "broad support of the Roma population" (Denton 2003:13). In the research done by the National Democratic Institute in Romania on political support of Roma parties, a Roma observer is quoted saying of the Roma Party, "It is a party of local party presidents and vice presidents but few followers" (Denton 2003:17).

Perhaps, following Vermeersch's argument, the very linkage of aid discourse with identity politics through the networks of political leaders with humanitarian workers in Romania is proving to be an obstacle to popularity. This certainly seems to be the case with the lăutari of Romania, who do not wish to compromise their class identity and livelihoods by associating with stigmatized Gypsies. This does not seem to be an isolated instance in Romania, since the report of political participation in Romania insists that "better educated, more urban and financially successful Roma—and Roma of dual ethnicity—often identify themselves with either the majority ethnic group or a non- Roma minority (Denton 2003:9).

The tendency of well-educated or wealthy Roma to cease to identify with that ethnicity was repeatedly brought up in my interviews with local leaders and elites. A government official stated that this was because the Roma movement has done little to disperse the connotations of poverty and illiteracy spouted by mass media in Romania (Interview 2:7). Notably, this man refused to identify as Roma himself, stating instead that he is a Romanian citizen who happens to be of partial Roma origin and takes an active interest in Roma issues through his work. A local leader in the Settlement added:

> The Roma person who goes to school doesn't feel like coming back and have people yell at him. He doesn't like coming down from where he is…. And why not admit it? They don't see themselves as being those dirty people, because they feel ashamed to be like [Gypsies]. [Interview 3:6]

For this leader, and many others, it seemed that the association with stigma was a significant personal barrier to overcome in joining the Roma political movement, and continued to be a source of professional burnout.

Yet these were issues raised by Roma elites, like those in Vermeersch's study, and not by the poor Gypsies in my study. The latter have no scruples in linking Gypsyness with problems, or linking their political support to the willingness of leader to address issues such as poverty, unemployment, and marginalization. Those issues are the very basis of their political consciousness. How, then, can we understand the lack of support by non-elite Gypsies given the success of Roma leaders in pursuing advocacy and humanitarian aid?

Connecting the local to the national

I believe that the lack of decentralization in Romania seriously undermines the Roma political project's legitimacy and effectiveness by ignoring local sources of authority and by maintaining a hierarchical structure within the Roma movement that does nothing to alleviate fears of corruption and favoritism. The lack of Gypsy support from poor communities comes at least partially from a critical reflection by these Gypsies of the weaknesses of politics in this region.

The weaknesses of Roma politics in Romania, as pointed out by many of the people I talked to, align well with those pointed out by researchers on these issues. As one local leader pointed out in regards to Roma politicians, "they talk about brotherhood, but I haven't seen it." Instead, "they're all fighting over power" (Interview 3:7). A woman who was in a position to join the Roma political movement at its inception opted to take the route of NGO work instead. "We didn't participate because we knew about the people who were in [the Roma political movement] and what kind of people they were, like all the political people in Romania today"

(Interview 8:2). Acknowledging the importance of being affiliated with political parties, however, she compromised by officially putting her NGO under the sponsorship of the Roma Party (Interview 8).

Reports on politics in Romania agree that there is a significant (and perhaps not unfounded) concern over corruption in politics in general and Roma politics specifically. Researchers suggest that individuals in Roma political parties "appear to advance the business interests of individual party leaders (which are often formed around the interests of a particular family business)" (Denton 2003:13). The survey team encountered many Gypsies who felt that Roma go into politics to make money. Cynically, the research team suggests that "from the number of late model luxury cars that the team observed among Romani political circles, it was not difficult to imagine why these remarks were made" (Denton 2003:13).

In an interview with a regional Roma activist, the man noted the perversion of the affirmative action measures through corruption. Though he stated that he no longer thought this was an issue at the time of the interview, the man admitted that at beginning of affirmative action university policies toward Roma, corruption was an issue. Roma officials signed off on papers indicating that non-Roma students who wanted to occupy the designated Roma seats in departments were indeed Roma. These incidents were widely broadcast, bringing suspicion on the policies meant to integrate Roma and the leaders meant to advance this cause (Interview 1:7-8). Luckily, after the news of these special opportunities traveled to Gypsy communities, real Roma origin candidates became the beneficiaries of those positions.

The problem that corruption poses to popular Gypsy participation in the Roma movement was summed up to me in the following manner:

> For example, the Roma hear and see on television that the European Union, or the Romanian government has financed some programs for the Roma. Then they can ask,

> "Okay, but where is our money?" Because this was money which was for the improvement of the situation of the Roma people in Romania, but the Roma communities don't feel that amount of money. And the quality of their life hasn't changed at all. [Interview 1:9]

The people in the Settlement were certainly aware of the grants available for Roma projects, and could list a number of financiers offhand. Yet when I asked about whether this community has benefitted from any Roma projects, one Gypsy told me not to bring the topic up again. The fact that they watched the money designated for communities like them disappear between the national level and the local level, he explained, caused immense distrust and was an extremely sore point.

Another person, who was in fact a beneficiary of PHARE funding for educational opportunities for Roma, related that she was extremely unhappy with the way the money was handled. "A lot of money that comes from outside, not only the PHARE project, goes for training teachers at conferences at expensive hotels– money with which they could actually do something else" (Interview 3:3). A regional government official similarly emphasized the importance of enough funds reaching the grassroots level to actually implement aid projects successfully:

> The funds are crucial because when you start to work in a community you create expectations and a lot of hope. And if you do not manage to get things changed then it's a failure. There's a big difference between you identifying a problem and getting a solution. [Interview 2:5]

Overall, the prevalence of reports of aid that are not actually felt on the grassroots level help reinforce the disillusionment of Gypsies with Roma leaders in a noticeable way in Romania (Denton 2003:15).

<u>The Symbolic Power of Good Work on the local level</u>

Notably, the same reports that point to a lack of Roma interest in ethnic politics on the national level admit that "Roma tend to be more politically active at the local level" (Denton

2003:14). In 2003, there were 160 Roma who served as city councilors around the country, and all indications are that those numbers have kept increasing over the years (Denton 2003). I believe that the type of community leadership in the Settlement garnered significant respect from the Roma community. The constant display of good work and community involvement by leaders alleviated worries about corruption and self-interest. These Gypsies continually contrast their local leaders with national level leaders, reinforcing the popularity and legitimacy of those local leaders who have earned their right to represent the community rather than claiming that right from afar.

Luckily for the Roma mobilization project, Romania is not faced with a complete disconnect between national-level party leaders and local Roma communities. The links exist, but they highly reliant on individuals rather than more official channels (Denton 2003:16). Thus, in communities where there is a popular local leader who is accepted on the municipal level, community interests can potentially be linked directly to national networks of influence.

Despite this potential, the focus of national Roma leaders is on "representation in relation with the majority societies" at the expense of the acknowledgement of "internal arrangements of leadership and representation within the Romani community" (Klímová 2002:106). As a regional official told me:

> You need to refer also to the process of decentralization, which is very slow in Romania. I am personally in favor of the process where the decision is taken to the local level. This view is also supported by the present government... Still most of the decisions are central, and this generates frustration at the local level. So we are just one element of the chain in this… we receive both the frustrations from above and the frustrations from below. [Interview 2:5]

The centralized character of the institutional framework of minority protection is a "fundamental problem" which "directly contributes to the lack of local empowerment" of Roma (Horvath and Scacco 2001:262).

The lack of decentralization of the Roma movement reduces the accountability of national leaders to local Gypsies by obscuring the processes of leadership. Combined with the lack of established solidarity between Gypsies, helps explain why grassroots support of the Roma political project is largely absent. What is of political significance to local Gypsies is the work of local leaders who are in touch with their needs. When local Gypsies feel that a Roma leader is a part of their community and works for their community, they offer political support to that leader. The invisibility of long term, national-level change allow leaders not to be accountable to their constituency, whereas short term, local aid projects enforce accountability. As long as Roma leaders continue shoring up their national legitimacy with non-Gypsy forms of legitimacy at the expense of decentralization, Roma leadership on the national level will be seen as illegitimate, and will be unlikely to do well in elections. Clearly, the process of decentralization has already begun in Romania. But that process needs to be continued and networks of cooperation between micro-, meso-, and macro- level political interests need to be strengthened in order for marginalized Gypsy communities to join in the Roma movement.

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