ROMANI WORLDS:

ACADEMIA, POLICY, AND MODERN MEDIA

A selection of articles, reports, and discussions documenting the achievements of the European Academic Network on Romani Studies

Edited by ———— **Eben Friedman / Victor A. Friedman**

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EUROPE'S NEO-TRADITIONAL ROMA POLICY: MARGINALITY MANAGEMENT AND THE INFLATION OF EXPERTISE

Yaron Matras (University of Manchester)

Introduction

My aim in this paper is to offer a brief comment on the direction of current European policy on Roma, and to illustrate the impact of this policy at local level, drawing on a case study from Manchester, UK. Since the fall of communism, European policy on Roma has been shaped by Western anxieties around the immigration of Roma from Eastern Europe. Western responses to the extension of EU freedom of movement treaties in 2004 and 2007 have combined two seemingly contradictory narratives. The first is the historical depiction of Roma as a threat. The second is the EU's post-1990 commitment to the social inclusion of Roma. The resulting blend might be labelled a 'neo-traditional' ideology, since it bears some similarities to the assumptions underlying historical policies such as the edicts of Maria Theresa and Joseph II in the late eighteenth century: It depicts Romani culture as a threat to its own people, especially to the vulnerable members of its community; it puts forward 'trafficking', 'safeguarding', 'early and forced marriage', and Roma's supposed reluctance to engage with public institutions such as education and health care as being among the principal challenges facing policy. In this way the ideology makes the inclusion of Roma conditional on containment and control. The operational response is presented as 'mediation', which

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implies that individual Roma's interactions with public institutions need to be managed by trained professionals as Roma are unable to manage these interactions themselves.

The EU's National Strategies for Roma Inclusion from 2011 have set a framework for participation standards in education, housing, employment, and health care as well as anti-discrimination. However, these remain not just aspirational but largely theoretical. The strategic side of EU policy now targets primarily the allocation of funds to a secondary sector in an effort to launch and sustain mediation interventions. There is little evidence so far that this approach can help remove obstacles to participation, either by changing attitudes toward Roma or by enforcing existing equality protocols. But it offers financial incentives for agencies at local level to specialise in the provision of support and mediation services. Potential beneficiaries of designated EU funding schemes are in this way incentivised to frame Roma – their presence in general, and their alleged cultural pre-dispositions in particular – as a problem that necessitates targeted intervention. The competition to secure EU funds has opened up opportunities for consultancy work, the objective of which is to certify interventions and the agencies that lead them. This has created a genre that presents itself as enquiry-based research but which in reality is commissioned on demand by clients hoping to strengthen their position in the bidding process for funds. As a result, the distinction between enquiry-based research and commissioned appraisal becomes blurred and policy bodies and media alike are confronted with an inflation of expertise on Roma.[4]

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[4] For related arguments see already Trehan 2001; Timmer 2010; Nacu 2011; Trubeta 2013; van Baar 2013; and Matras, Leggio & Steel 2015.

Migration and European discourse on Roma rights

I have argued elsewhere (Matras 1998, 2000, 2013) that European policy toward Roma since 1990 has been shaped by Western reactions to the East-West migration of Roma. Two phases can be distinguished: The first followed the increase in migration in the years immediately after 1990. It was characterised by the emergence of a European discourse around the protection of Roma from human rights abuses and their empowerment in the origin countries in the East, as a way of preventing migration to the West. The second phase began with the EU enlargement in 2004 and especially in 2007. It features unease among policy makers toward the extension of freedom of movement rights to all new accession states and the legal presence of Roma migrants in the West, and an effort to alleviate what is seen as the burden that Roma impose on local authorities and local services across Europe.

Western governments' policy toward Roma migrants in the 1990s targeted the removal of migrants to their origin countries. In response to public protests at local level and concerns raised by human rights organisations, removal was often accompanied by gestures of expression of interest toward the situation of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. Political interventions to support social inclusion in the origin countries were pitched as a way to prevent or curtail migrations to the West (see Matras 2000). This rationale became embedded in the Copenhagen criteria toward EU enlargement (cf. Simhandl 2006: 108). Meanwhile the removal of migrants was accompanied by tokenistic gestures such as financial support by the German government for the re-settling of Roma in Macedonia in 1991 and for housing projects in Romania in 1993 (cf. Matras 1998: 60). These developments triggered interest among transnational organisations in the link between the social exclusion of Roma in the East, and their migration attempts to the West. Reports focusing on this link were commissioned among others by UNHCR (Braham 1993) and by the Council of Europe (Matras 1996).

The interest in the status of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe prompted a shift in the political discourse at European level from the traditional 'Western' narrative that regarded Gypsies as defined by a nomadic lifestyle, toward the 'Eastern' narrative that acknowledged their shared ethnic and cultural identity (cf. Simhandl 2006, Marushiakova & Popov 2005). Two landmark documents in this direction were the report by Josephine Verspaget to the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly from 1992 (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 1993), and the report by the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities Max van der Stoel entitled *Roma (Gypsies) in the CSCE Region* from September 1993 (van der Stoel 1993). Measures introduced by the Council of Europe in response to the Verspaget report included setting up a regular policy drafting and reporting mechanism on Roma through MG-S-Rom ('Council of Europe Group of Specialists on Roma, Gypsies and Travellers') and the Coordinator for Roma Affairs, giving Romani culture consideration within frameworks such as the European Charter for Minority or Regional Languages, setting up networking initiatives such as the European Roma Youth Forum, information initiatives such as the Fact Sheets on Roma, and especially the granting of consultative status to Roma via the European Roma and Travellers Forum. At the civil society level, the period between 1990-2007 saw an emphasis on capacity building through subsidies awarded to Romani NGOs by the EU's PHARE programme and George Soros's Open Society Institute, and the emergence of a 'Roma sector', which promoted a new European discourse on Roma (cf. Marushiakova & Popov 2005, Vermeersch 2006). It has been argued that this public discourse, strongly associated in Central and Eastern Europe with the EU accession, later provoked a backlash in the form of extremist reactions and anti-Roma incitement as disappointment with the EU grew in the years following accession (cf. Stewart 2014).

Freedom of movement and the emergence of the 'neo-traditional' discourse

A new phase in European policy on Roma accompanied the extension of freedom of movement to new accession countries in 2004 and especially in 2007. As policy could no longer focus on wholesale removal on a legally or politically acceptable basis, emphasis shifted to a public discourse that sought to criminalise the mobility of Roma (cf. van Baar 2014). One of the best examples of this discourse is Operation Golf, launched with EU funding in 2007 as a partnership between the London Metropolitan Police and the Romanian Police. This enterprise became highly politicised, portraying trafficking, child exploitation, and organised crime as directly entrenched in Romani society and so-called 'clan structure' and as inherently linked to migration. It promoted a picture of vulnerable Romani children who were being abused by their own community and therefore required the protection of authorities. In this way, it reinforced a trajectory that focused on safeguarding issues and on early and forced marriage, and which argued that Roma show a propensity to disengage from mainstream public services, especially in education and health, such that they require mediation, intervention, and perpetual support.

Some of these images were incorporated into the Council of Europe's Strasbourg Declaration of October 2010 (Committee of Ministers 2010), which became the manifesto for the new European policy on Roma. The Declaration mentioned the need to combat trafficking and announced the launch of mediation projects. In effect it shifted the focus away from the human rights agenda of the Verspaget declaration and toward the delivery of contracted service-delivery projects. Some of these, such as Romed/Romact, which purport to provide training, have been criticised for not offering any accreditation (cf. Liégeois 2012); others, such as the Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion, have been flagged informally by Council of Europe officials as failures. Yet they continue to constitute the Council of Europe's principal engagement focus on Roma.

The Sarkozy government's expulsions of Roma migrants from Romania and Bulgaria in the summer of 2010 revealed the EU's incapacity to protect the rights of Roma to be treated equally under its own freedom of movement treaties (cf. van Baar 2011). In response, the EU adopted a compensatory strategy: In 2011 it launched the National Strategies for Roma Inclusion. The lack of a key concept behind the strategy is clear from the comparison of definitions of the target group adopted by the various states (see Matras 2013); these vary, some focusing on Roma as an ethnic group, others on different groups of Travellers, or even on populations that live below the poverty line in particular settlements. The ambiguity surrounding the target population is also reflected in European organisations' definitions of 'Roma' as a so-called "cover term for diverse populations" (Official Journal of the European Union 2013). This is an inherent feature of the neo-traditional ideology on Roma, one that licenses the traditional image of 'Gypsies' as a lifestyle but re-packages this image under a politically correct label (cf. Simhandl 2006, Matras 2013).

A further illustration of the ideological dispositions that accompany post-2010 policy toward Roma is the EU Council Recommendation from December 2013, which flags the need to coordinate the mobility of Roma and to combat trafficking and forced marriage (Official Journal of the European Union 2013). The Council of Europe's Ad Hoc Expert Committee on Roma (CAHROM) received reports at its meeting in May 2015 on "how to address and combat human trafficking within Roma communities (with a focus on street children and prostitution), [and] how to promote gender equality within Roma communities (with a focus on early and/or forced marriages)" (Council of Europe 2015). The focus on mobility as a menace, on Romani culture as a threat to its own people, and on vulnerable Roma (women, children, and young girls in particular) as alleged victims of their own community lends a patronising character to interventions. Not only does the narrative pathologise Romani culture, but it is wrapped in a seemingly progressive, emancipatory discourse that claims to be protecting Roma. It might be argued that it serves to shift the blame for the exclusion of Roma away from majority society's prejudiced institutions and onto Romani society itself.

The EU's report from April 2014 on the implementation of the National Strategies for Roma Inclusion (European Commission 2014) provides various examples of good practice; but for most there is little evidence that they are directly linked to an explicit National Strategy. For example, Romania is highlighted as having introduced a programme to train Romani language teachers, but this programme has been in place since the early 1990s. Examples are also cited from countries that lack a formal National Strategy, such as the UK. In effect, then, the EU's National Strategies for Roma Inclusion have merely created a reporting mechanism that is independent of an actual intervention strategy. Aware of this fact, the EU report from April 2014 complains that available EU funds are not being claimed by member states to support Roma. In 2015, the EU scaled up its effort to encourage potential beneficiaries to claim funds for Roma inclusion. A communication by DG Justice from June 2015, which set out new priorities for the National Strategies, flagged as its first agenda point "new approaches to funding Roma integration", stating that €90 billion were available for consortia of "civil society, local authorities, and social partners" (Jourová 2015). The parallel *Report on the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies 2015* emphasised the need to create greater administrative capacities "in order to absorb available funds" (European Commission 2015: 6). Tellingly, it flagged the Council of Europe's Romed and Romact programmes as models of "administrative capacity building". Soon afterwards, in August 2015, the Council of Europe issued a Call for Expressions of Interest on behalf of its Romact programme, announcing that it was looking for "experts in the fields of local government and access to EU funding" to work in Romania and Bulgaria.[5] The focus had thus shifted since the inception of the National Strategies in 2011 from a long-term vision for inclusion, to middle-term strategies of fundraising and fund allocation.

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[5] http://coe-romact.org/sites/default/files/leaflets/ROMACT_Call_Experts_BG_RO.pdf

The period since 2007 thus has seen European institutions responding to the persisting inequality of Roma first by flagging an abstract vision for inclusion, but then by setting strategic priorities that often portray Roma as victims of their own community. The operational consequence that is derived from this narrative is to create and strengthen a sector that specialises in targeted interventions and which aspires to manage Roma behaviour and Roma's interaction with public services. This sector, flagged as made up of partnerships between local authorities and civil society (NGOs), in effect assumes the role of 'marginality management'. Perhaps the most dramatic development in this context is the transformation of the Council of Europe's engagement with Roma: In the 1990s it had taken the lead on drafting a political vision for Roma participation. But since the Strasbourg Declaration of 2010 it has become part of the sector of local agencies that are themselves beneficiaries of EU funding for mediation interventions. In this role it often acts as a middleman, managing large-scale EU contracts and sub-contracting the implementation of work packages to third sector agencies at local and national level.

Local responses to Roma migrants: A case study

In order to illustrate the manner in which this European policy percolates down to local level, I draw on the case study of Manchester.[6] Roma from Central and Eastern Europe had begun to settle in Manchester in the mid-1990s. The presence of Romanian Roma migrants in the city became politicised in 2009, when local opposition politicians used it to challenge the City Council's community cohesion policy. The targeting of Romanian Roma coincided with the publicity around Operation Golf: The investigation focused on Roma from the southeastern Romanian town of Țăndărei, which was also the place of origin of most Romanian Roma who had settled in Manchester. The images flagged in the public debate were similar, and

[6] For a more detailed discussion see Matras, Leggio & Steel (2015) as well as the University of Manchester MigRom Extended Survey report (Matras et al. 2015).

petitions organised by local politicians accused the Roma of organised crime, trafficking, truancy, causing public disorder, il-legal dumping, over-crowded residences, failure to pay taxes and reliance on benefits. In response Manchester City Council set up a 'Roma Strategy Group', which operated for around two years and which brought together representatives of the city's various public services. For the most part, the Roma Strategy involved specialised services working through a list of indicators to confirm that 'expected norms' were being adhered to. In some cases, measures were taken to appease those who raised complaints, such as a tokenistic police raid which resulted in no arrests and the formal admission that there was no evidence of either trafficking or organised crime, and a door-to-door round of visits by council tax officers that specifically targeted Roma households and raised a total of £3,000 in revenue – most likely just a fraction of the cost of the operation itself. In its final document on the Roma strategy from March 2013, the City Council acknowledged that the issues revolved primarily around negative perceptions of Roma rather than the actual behaviour of Roma in any of these domains (Mills and Wilson 2013). In practice, then, the Roma Strategy ended up confirming that Roma can and should fall under generic protocols of equality, that they did not constitute a threat to public order or to public safety, and that they did not require any dedicated or targeted intervention measures, although at the insistence of the City Council's Children's Services (see below) the issue of 'safeguarding' was mentioned as still unresolved.

But Manchester's Roma Strategy also gave birth to a secondary trajectory. A group emerged within the City Council's Children's Services that focused on issues of school attendance and safeguarding. In partnership with a voluntary sector agency, Black Health Agency for Equality (BHA), the group received a City Council grant to support Roma in schools and subsequently an EU grant to continue that engagement (see Matras, Leggio & Steel 2015). In a series of publications they put forward the need to cater for what they described as specific "Roma learning styles" (see Matras et al. 2015: 32-38, 52-57). They claimed in memos to schools that Roma showed "promiscuous behaviour" and that weddings of underage

Roma girls took place at a local park. Much of the material published by their projects romanticised and pathologised Romani behaviour: It advised teachers that Roma have a special ability to "navigate the world without the need for reading and writing", that they are "unable to sit still for longer periods", and that they are "unable to listen without talking at the same time". It recommended that schools should follow a "Roma admissions protocol" that monitored whether "the child smiles at teachers" and whether it "understands that words symbolise concepts". At a local secondary school, a segregated pathway for Roma was set up by the BHA, which continued for around three years. It employed Roma as classroom support assistants, flagging the arrangement as one that employed Roma role models but in fact embedding the very small circle of young Roma who had some kind of community work experience into the structure that was used to contain members of their own community. Paid by the hour, their ability to put forward any critique of the intervention was thus neutralised.

The BHA served both as sub-contractor and partner to the City Council on this activity. It also absorbed City Council personnel, who were moved from the City Council's payroll to BHA on a part-time or temporary basis. In this way, the City Council was able to demonstrate that it was implementing austerity measures by reducing personnel costs while at the same time keeping its staff on the payroll of a de-facto subsidiary, funded by a City Council seed corn investment that was supplemented by EU grants. In an effort to secure continuous funding, BHA put forward reports and applications to the City Council claiming that Roma suffered from contagious diseases, and that their culture encouraged early marriage and school drop-out, and that the Roma community showed a disproportional rate of teenage pregnancies – all claims that lacked any backing through evidence (see Matras et al. 2015: 32-38, 52-57).

In order to lend authority and credibility to their claims, BHA commissioned researchers to write affirmations and appraisals of their interventions. The first such report (Lever 2012) stated that the goal of BHA's engagement with Roma was "to

investigate claims of criminal activity whilst maintaining social cohesion" and went on to assert that Roma have a "strong cultural aversion to integration". In conclusion it presented a list of recommendations that pertained exclusively to the need to provide funding for further interventions and to guarantee the involvement of "third sector agencies" in the process. A further report (Scullion and Brown 2013) presented interviews with BHA staff – those who commissioned the report – themselves and concluded "it was difficult [for respondents] to argue for additional financial resources to provide support to communities when they were unable to accurately state the size of the population they were required to support" (p. 42).

Drawing on this conclusion the authors – a team based at Salford University – proceeded with the release of a controversial report in partnership with Migration Yorkshire, another consortium of third sector agencies working together with local authorities in the north of England. The work formed part of Migration Yorkshire's 'Roma Matrix' project, itself funded by the EU's DG Justice to showcase third sector and local authority engagement with Roma. The report (Brown, Scullion & Martin 2013) estimated the number of migrant Roma in the UK at 200,000 – around four to five times higher than prevailing estimates (for a critique see Matras 2015). Fundamental flaws in the Salford team's research methods were pointed out immediately after the release of the report in October 2013 in a series of contributions to the EANRS email discussion list (see documentation in Part 3 of this volume): The team relied on questionnaires sent to local authorities asking about the number of Roma in their locations, of which only 12% were returned with a numerical estimate. Even that small set was not coherent, because it consisted of responses from practitioners in different fields, based on different estimation methods (mainly anecdotal, since hard data are seldom available), and using different definitions of 'Roma'. The authors did not disclose the actual figures received, so the sample remained impossible to verify. Yet they used the sample for a projection, 'scaling-up' the figures to fill in the missing locations – a staggering 88% – based on the unrealistic assumption that Roma migrants distribute themselves evenly across the country. It is telling that the findings were never published in any peer-reviewed outlet.

Presenting the team's findings in an "exclusive" interview on Channel 4 national television news in late October 2013, lead researcher Phillip Brown stated that it was necessary to provide a revised estimate because "population magnitude will guide the spending of EU budgets."[7] In a follow-up article, Brown, Scullion & Martin (2014) reiterated that the lack of an official estimate of the number of Roma migrants made it difficult for local authorities and "community based organisations" to make use of the European Social Fund's considerable budget for social inclusion, and that providing a population estimate would help gain "high level recognition as to the impact this migration was having at a local level." The purpose of the report was, in other words, to amplify the problems triggered at local level by the migration of Roma and to underline the need to channel EU funds to local practitioners in third sector agencies who were sub-contracted by or worked in partnership with local authorities.

That the financial incentives motivate agencies to frame Roma as a 'problem', and to further essentialise the problem as deriving inherently from Romani cultural practices, is illustrated by the repeated attention given in agency reports and funding bids to the themes of safeguarding and early marriage and alleged disengagement with education. In January 2013, BHA requested funding from Manchester City Council in order to set up special "protocols to track hard to reach Roma girls at risk of school drop out and criminal activity". Faced with criticism that it was making unfounded generalisations about Romani culture (see University of Manchester 2014), its partner organisation Roma Matrix sought to provide 'proof' that Romani culture encouraged early marriage by featuring the story of a newly wed young Romani girl on its website.[8]

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[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iH5nQ4An7qg
[8] https://romamatrix.eu/making-arrangements

The expertise sector: Enquiry vs. appraisal

The Manchester case study shows how negative perception of Roma prompted a local authority to take interest in a small community (around 300-400 persons) of Romani migrants. This interest opened up a niche opportunity for an open-ended intervention pitched around the need to support Roma, supposedly, around health and education, a need that was purported to arise out of behavioural traits that were said to constitute an inherent part of Romani culture. The availability in principle of EU grants for such interventions created an incentive for a third sector agency with close links to the City Council to continue to flag Roma as a problem population even after most departments in the local authority had agreed to dismantle the 'Roma Strategy' and mainstream their engagement with Roma rather than sustain dedicated, targeted intervention structures. In order to secure grants, the beneficiaries commissioned reports from academics. This in turn provided researchers who had no background at all in Romani studies with an entry point into the public discussion on Roma and into the pool of funds for Roma-related expertise reports.

In a recent study, Surdu (2015) shows how expert reports on Roma that are published by international organisations receive much wider attention and circulation and thus have arguably a higher impact than those published by academics in peer-reviewed outlets. The work of the Salford team was circulated in the form of online reports, which were promoted by Migration Yorkshire, a consortium of local authorities and the lead partner in Roma Matrix. It received publicity through 'exclusive' media interviews and a parliamentary motion tabled by Jeremy Corbyn MP (at the time of writing, the leading candidate in the race for the UK Labour party leadership), who referred to it as "pioneering research".[9] Despite that fact that

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[9] http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2013-14/788

it has been widely criticised in academic circles, the Salford report from October 2013 continues to be referenced in mass media as well as in some policy briefings.

Two factors link current EU policy with the inflation in the quality of expertise. The first is the shift from a genuine commitment to the removal of barriers to inclusion, not least in the form of conditions linked to EU accession before 2004, to what is now essentially a reporting mechanism that revolves around the showcasing of good practice at local level and which to that end is keen to disburse funds to help proliferate local interventions. The second is the persistence of an ideological view of Roma as perpetually in need of external support and mediation. Put together, these two dimensions license a sector of marginality-management, which in turn gives rise to a sub-sector of commissioned expertise. As parameters shift from the field of enquiry to that of affirmation and appraisal, it becomes difficult for governments and inter-governmental organisations to define a reliable threshold for academic expertise. The fact that an emerging consultancy sector is linked to funded project interventions also creates a conflation of interests, whereby organisations that are contractors for service delivery projects avail themselves of commissioned appraisers. In this constellation it seems that academics whose work is devoted primarily to enquiry-based research, and who seek to protect the standards and evidence threshold of academic enquiry, risk embarking on a course of permanent collision and confrontation with both their fellow academics who are commissioned by the funding beneficiaries and with the commissioning agencies.

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