NÁRODOPIS ETHNOLOGY SLOVENSKÝ SLOVAK

ESCAPING THE LABYRINTH OF ROMA POLITICAL REPRESENTATION. REFLECTIONS ON COMMON CITIZENSHIP

ISMAEL CORTÉS GÓMEZ

Dr. Ismael Cortés Gómez, Central European University, Romani Studies Program, Oktober 6 u. 7, Budapest, 1051; e-mail: ismaelcortes_@hotmail.com

The paper reconstructs the genesis of contemporary debates on Roma rights in Europe, from the early 1990s up to now. It focuses on official documents and key experts' opinions, within the context of the fall of State-Socialism and the consequent Europeanization of Human Rights. The assemblage of texts analyzed here constitutes a complex field that embraces a multiplicity of institutions, individuals and discourses. In this field, texts are principle instruments of influencing and ruling politics, and they crystalize a complex process of policy institutionalization. By doing institutional discourse analysis, this paper examines the genesis of EU Roma policies pointing out two core antinomies: a) the ethnicity blind liberal concept of individual emancipation has proved to reproduce interethnic inequality, due to its incapacity to counter deeply rooted antigypsyism as a mechanism of social exclusion. b) The ethno-communitarian concept of collective emancipation has revealed the limits of civic initiatives based on NGO-networks, while power differentials in democratic elected bodies and public institutions continue to be unaddressed. To overcome such antinomies, the paper explores different political scenarios, to enable pathways for Roma equality by enacting processes of common citizenship.

Key words: Recognition; Social exclusion; Antigypsyism; Roma inclusion; Common citizenship; Political representation

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACFC: Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
CEE: Central Eastern Europe
CoE: Council of Europe
EC: European Commission

ECRI: European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
DRISF: Decade for Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation
EELV: Europe Ecologie – Les Verts
ERGO: European Roma Grassroots Organizations
ERTF: European Roma and Travellers Forum
EU: European Union
FCNM: Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
IRU: International Romani Union
NGO: Nongovernmental organization
NRC: National Roma Congress
ODIHR: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSEPI: Open Society European Policy Institute
OSF: Open Society Foundations
RIO: Roma Initiatives Office
UN: United Nations
UNHCHR: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
WB: World Bank

INTRODUCTION

The fall of State-Socialism in Europe drew up a new grammar of social conflicts, in which historical injustices and claims for recognition have been at the core of new debates on inequality. From this approach, the struggles for justice exceed the demands of economic equality among individuals (see figure 1 below). In words of the social philosopher, Axel Honneth:

> For victims of historical disrespect, [recognition] has the direct function of tearing them out the crippling situation of passively endured humiliation and helping them, in turn, on their way to a new, positive relation-to-self (Honneth, 1995: 164).

In the post-Socialist juncture, the studies in the theory of recognition designed new models of justice, aiming to transform structural mechanisms of social exclusion. In Fraser's own words, this project of social transformation: "aimed at correcting [societal] inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework" (Fraser, 1995: 82). To this purpose, economic policies of redistribution were conceived systemically intertwined with policies of cultural recognition and new strategies for political representation (Fraser, 1997; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Fraser, 2014).

In this context, the notion of "exclusion" describes a state in which certain groups are unable to participate in different domains of economic, cultural and political life, as well as the process leading to and sustaining such a state. As the United Nations recognizes: "exclusion entails not only material deprivation, but also lack of agency over important decisions as well as feelings of alienation and inferiority" (UN, 2016: 18).
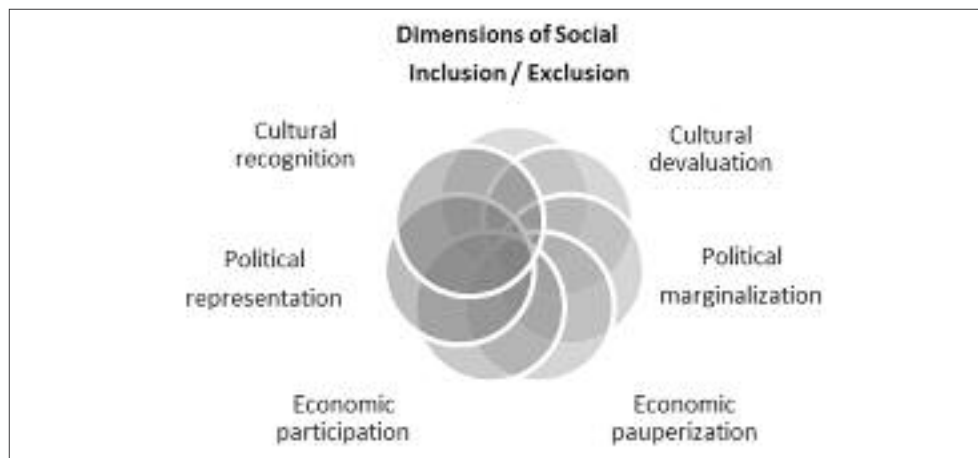
Figure 1 (self-elaboration)

In this political scenario, theoretical tools such as the feminist critique, the post-colonial theory and the critical race studies deployed a review of deliberative democracy, by tackling power relations embodied in ethnicity, gender, class and nationality (Alcoff & Mendieta, 2003; Andersen & Hill Collins, 1992). In dialogue with these intellectual and political developments, Honneth sustains that

> We may justify principles of justice only by locating them in the relations of [political] communication themselves, in their conditions of validity. This alternative procedure could thus be termed "reconstructive", because it does not accept an impartial standpoint from which to justify principles of justice, but "reconstructs" them within the historical process of relations of recognition in which they are always already at work (Honneth, 2012: 47).

At the core of this ontology of justice, beyond any *corpus juris*, it lays the right to claim rights. This requires a democratic redistribution of technical, symbolic and economic resources; as well as opened channels for dialogue with power drivers such as governmental/intergovernmental institutions and political parties.

By doing institutional discourse analysis, this study looks at the ways how texts crystalize a complex process of policy institutionalization; and how texts are principle instruments of influencing and ruling politics (Smith & Turner, 2014; Hult & Johnson, 2015; Peacock, 2017). The study examines the genesis of EU Roma policies pointing out two core antinomies: *a)* the ethnicity blind liberal conception of individual emancipation has proved to reproduce interethnic inequality, due to its incapacity to counter deeply rooted antigypsyism as a mechanism of social exclusion.[1] *b)* The

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1   There are different definitions of the term "antigypsyism": A) *Antigypsyism* is a specific form of racism, an ideology founded on racial superiority, a form of dehumanization and institutional racism nurtured by historical discrimination, which is expressed, among other things, by violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatization and the most blatant kind of discrimination (ECRI, 2011). B) *Antigypsyism* is a specific nature of racism directed towards to Roma, on a par with anti-Semitism: *a)* it is persistent both historically and geographically (permanent and not decreasing); *b)* it is systematic (accepted by virtu-

ethno-communitarian concept of collective emancipation has revealed the limitations of civic initiatives based on NGO-networks, while power differentials in democratic bodies and public institutions continue to be unaddressed. To overcome such antinomies, the paper explores different political scenarios, to enable pathways for Roma equality by enacting processes of common citizenship.

THE UNFINISHED ROAD OF MINORITY RIGHTS FOR ROMA IN EUROPE

The most important normative document for minority rights is the "UN Declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities", adopted in 1992. This declaration establishes fundamental norms for managing diversity and ensuring non-discrimination of minorities. Articles 1.1, 2.3 and 5.1 contain crucial aspects (UN, 1992):

> Article 1.1: States shall protect the identity and national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic existence of minorities within their respective territories and shall foster conditions for the promotion of that identity.
> Article 2.3: Persons belonging to minorities shall have the right to participate effectively in decisions taken at national level and, where appropriate, at regional level with respect to the minority to which they belong or of the regions in which they live, in any way which is not incompatible with national legislation.
> Article 5.1: National policies and programs shall be planned and implemented with due regard for the legitimate interests of persons belonging to minorities.

The legal duty endorsed to minority rights implies dually State protection of cultural diversity while enacting a democratic ground for common citizenship. Next we will see how, at European level, minority rights have not been completely applied yet to Roma. In contrast, special programs to combat poverty have been adopted by the World Bank and the EU.

On 2 February 1993, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe approved the first recommendation on "Gypsies in Europe. Recommendation 1203". Here the Roma people was defined as follows:

> as a non-territorial minority a special place among the minorities is reserved for Gypsies. Living scattered all over Europe, not having a country to call their own, they are a true European minority, but one that does not fit into the definitions of national or linguistic minorities (CoE, 1993).

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ally all the community); *c)* it is often accompanied by acts of violence (CoE, 2012). C) *Antigypsyism* is a historically constructed, persistent complex of customary racism against social groups identified under the stigma "gypsy" or other related terms, and incorporates: 1. Homogenizing and essentializing perception and description of these groups. 2. The attribution of specific characteristics to them. 3. Discriminating social structures and violent practices that emerge against that background, which have a degrading and ostracizing effect and which reproduce structural disadvantages (Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2016).

This definition plays a double operation: *a)* on the one hand, it recognizes the Roma people as a "true European minority". *b)* On the other hand, it denies its character of being neither a national minority nor a linguistic minority. Tracking from this initial ambiguity, the "Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities" (FCNM, CoE, 1994) applies a quite flexible approach and does not stick to definitions of national minorities. In fact, the Roma are mentioned in all opinions of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ACFC).[2] ACFC recommendations to the state parties cover major Roma issues, among others those related to articles 14 or 15 of the FCNM:

> Article 14: in areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities traditionally or in substantial numbers, if there is sufficient demand, the parties shall endeavour to ensure, as far as possible and within the framework of their education systems, that persons belonging to those minorities have adequate opportunities for being taught the minority language or for receiving instruction in this language.
> Article 15: the parties shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them (CoE, 1994: 6).

In the 2000 report on the "Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area", the High Commissioner on National Minorities, van der Stoel called attention to the actual vulnerability of Roma rights. Moreover, it acknowledged the Roma people as a transnational ethnic minority, all across Europe, sharing a common history and language. It also pointed out that the present situation of critical numbers of Roma living in poverty is the result of centuries of political persecution. At the end, the report provided two main recommendations on political engagement:

> – Inclusiveness: mechanisms for securing Romani participation in shaping major policy initiatives are most likely to be effective and legitimate if they involve a broadly representative process.
> – Involvement of Roma in implementation and evaluation: Roma should be meaningfully involved not only in developing but also implementing and evaluating the success of programs aimed at improving the conditions of Romani communities (OSCE, 2000: 161–162).

Overall, the above mentioned report influenced the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, specifically its "Recommendation 1557. On the legal situation of Roma in Europe":

> Roma form a special minority group, in so far as they have a double minority status. They are an ethnic community and most of them belong to the socially disadvantaged groups of society. Most Roma are currently faced with a rather severe

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2　See detailed opinions of the FCNM in the webpage: https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/country-specific-monitoring. Therefore, Roma are not excluded from the FCNM, though, many countries indeed do not respect their rights and deny their access to many spheres covered by articles of the FCNM (ACFC, 2016).

economic situation in most of the member countries of the Council of Europe. Despite efforts in the social field, the market economy, especially the neo-liberal version of it, has marginalized disadvantaged social groups including Roma even in the most developed European countries (CoE, 2002).

The analyses of the OSCE and CoE evolved together, influencing each other mutually. These analyses eventually led to the "Action plan on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area" (OSCE, 2003). This is a comprehensive plan that covers antidiscrimination measures, social and economic inclusion measures and political empowerment initiatives. This plan was never given the proper funding to be implemented.

In parallel, the World Bank (WB) in partnership with the Open Society Foundations (OSF) designed an alternative plan for Roma inclusion, in Central-Eastern Europe (CEE), aiming to close the gap between Roma and non-Roma in four key areas: education, employment, healthcare and housing. This came out a year before the enlargement process of the European Union,[3] when Roma poverty openly became a "security threat" for the entire EU, due to the negative perceptions on the migration flux from CEE to the West (Sigona & Trehan, 2009; Stewart, 2012; van Baar, Ivasiuc & Kreide, 2018). Already in 1999, foreseeing this scenario of tensions between EU members and accessing countries, policy commitments with special inclusion programs for Roma became a precondition to join the EU.

In the EU enlargement context, the WB published three main reports that provided fundamental arguments to adopt and implement the framework for Roma inclusion: firstly deployed in CEE through the "Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015", and later in the entire EU through the "EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020" (WB, 2002; 2005; 2010; EC, 2011). The WB brought to the table a strong utilitarian argument, by referring to the benefits that European societies would take from integrating Roma into the labor market. Thus, it prognosticated substantial societal gains such as: lowering social assistance spending; growing economic productivity; rising fiscal benefits; and lowering risk of crimes driven by social exclusion and poverty (WB; 2010: 15–21).

What have been the results of such plans so far? What are the main critiques from the minority rights' approach?

THE ROMA, AN UNACCOUNTED POLITICAL SUBJECT

In its last assessment report, the Secretariat Foundation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion concluded that: "the Decade has failed to make an impact on the daily lives of the majority of Roma" (DRISF, 2015). There is a general consensus on the causes

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3   On 1st of May 2004, eight Central and Eastern European countries (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia), plus two Mediterranean countries (Malta and Cyprus) were able to join the European Union. Although Romania and Bulgaria were deemed initially as not fully ready by the Commission to join in 2004, they acceded nevertheless on 1st of January 2007.

that led to this failure: *i)* disproportional correlation between the gap to intervene on and the invested funds; *ii)* unclear and insufficient role of Roma actors in decision making processes; *iii)* lack of involvement of high level authorities in the implementation of the Decade at national level; *iv)* local Roma communities were not aware of the existence of such an integration plans (Brüggemann & Friedman, 2017).

It is also relevant to mention that five years after the adoption of the so called "EU Roma framework", the European Commission (EC) recognized in its last communication on the midterm review: "insufficient Roma participation in decision making processes, and therefore the need to promote an active role of the Roma, taking an integrated approach to policy interventions" (EC, 2017).

From the point of view of framing analysis, the assessment of the "EU Roma Framework" commissioned by OSEPI to the analyst Anna Mirga, underlined that the EU Roma framework leads to inconsistent approaches toward the issue of "inclusion", confounding social and ethnic categories (Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2017). In default of such imprecise definition, the debate has been misled into economic terms, by labeling the Roma as an underclass population. In the meanwhile, the debate on the political dimensions of racist exclusion has been overshadowed. Indeed, as indicated by the "EC Report on the implementation of the EU framework for Roma inclusion" (2014):

> Roma communities are funded mainly under the objective of social inclusion, in particular from measures financed through the priority "integrating disadvantaged people" [...] It should be emphasized however that in most cases non-Roma disadvantaged people can benefit from the same measures (EC, 2014: 13).

To understand the logic behind this framing, we must acknowledge that the EC has "no competences on the recognition of the status of minorities; their self-determination and autonomy; their governing regime; the use of regional or minority languages" (Carrera, Guild, Vosyliute & Bard, 2017: 14).

Based on the commitment of EU member-states to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria on protection of minorities (European Council, 1993), the EC assumed that the EU-15 satisfactorily resolved all questions relating to ethnic or national minorities. Thus, protection of minorities has constituted a pre-condition among the list of political criteria for accession in the context of EU enlargement with Central-Eastern Europe (CEE). This has led to the so called "Copenhagen dilemma": while most of CEE countries formally recognized the status of ethnic minorities or national minorities (including the Roma), such recognition still is lacking by a significant group of Western European countries (see the table below).

EU MEMBER STATES WHICH DO NOT RECOGNIZE THE ROMA NEITHER AS AN ETHNIC NOR AS A NATIONAL MINORITY
Belgium
Denmark
France
Italy
Spain
The Netherlands
The United Kingdom

(Table 1) Self-elaboration.Consulted Source: Council of Europe

Besides the Copenhagen dilemma in the EU, scholars like Galbreath and McEvoy pointed out three fundamental critiques to the Europe-wide "Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities":

– First: it lacks a definition of "national minority". This lack of a definition raises fundamental questions about to whom the Convention applies – all minorities within a state or just those that the state chooses to recognize.
– Second: it establishes a monitoring system of state policy but not a "supranational enforcement mechanism".
– Third: the Convention does not specify what the appropriate government policies should be to ensure effective implementation. A considerable limitation of the Convention's potential impact is that its implementation is at the mercy of domestic politics and legislation (Galbreath & McEvoy, 2012: 85–87).

The inconsistent minority rights scheme in Europe makes it very difficult for the Roma to consolidate a recognized democratic and legitimate voice (or voices). Therefore, Roma participation in governmental/intergovernmental institutions lacks the power to meaningfully impact decision-making processes. What political ways have been explored so far? And what possible scenarios can be imagined for the future?

ROMA VOICES CLAIMING REPRESENTATION

On 1st January 2001, the International Romani Union released its "Declaration of a Roma Nation", under the presidency of Emil Ščuka. It states a very ambiguous claim:

Individuals belonging to the Roma Nation call for a representation of their Nation, which does not want to become a State. We ask for being recognized as a Nation, for the sake of Roma and of non-Roma individuals, who share the need to deal with the new challenges nowadays [...] we have a dream, and we are engaged in fulfilling it. We are a Nation, we share the same tradition, the same culture, the same origin, the same language; we are a Nation (Acton & Klímová, 2001: 216–217).

One may ask: representation where?/recognition by who? In the 1980s, IRU was given consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council. In the 1990s, it created relevant institutional links with the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the UNHCHR. So, one can guess that IRU was asking for representation as a "nation" in such intergovernmental bodies. But again, a series of questions comes up: What are the constituencies represented by IRU? On which legal basis could IRU claim nationhood for a transnational diaspora such as the Roma people? What are the political limits of NGO-networks taken as representative structures?

Given the reference of the First World Roma Congress (London, April 1971), IRU's model for Roma representation was established in the Second World Roma Congress (Prague, April 1978): connecting Roma communities through small local organizations, federating them under an international umbrella organization, and claiming legitimacy from (virtually) the entire Roma people. Since then, different international Roma movements have followed the same pattern: the Roma National Congress (RNC,

Hamburg, 1980), the Secretariat of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF, Strasbourg, 2005) and the European Roma Grassroots Organizations (ERGO, Brussels, 2008). However, this will to self-determination and self-representation has not been significantly translated into actual political power (van Baar, 2011; Kocze, 2012; Rostas, 2012; Vermeersch, 2017).

In the 1990s, Nicolae Gheorghe explained that

> within the framework of a new Europe extending its democratic standards and borders, Romani elites are attempting to enter European politics and to gain political representation and recognition of their ethnicity. The Roma are among the last groups in Europe to discover the potential and power of ethno-nationalism and to struggle for a political space of their own (Gheorghe & Mirga, 1997: 2).

Gheorghe was a Romanian sociologist, deputy president of the International Romani Union (1990/99) and head of the OSCE–ODIHR Roma contact point (1999/2006). During his mandate at the OSCE, he took a major role as a mediator in the negotiations that led to unifying the two biggest international Roma organizations of those times, IRU and NRC, into one umbrella organization under the patronage of the Council of Europe: the Secretariat of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF, Strasbourg 2005). In 2009, ERTF published its "Charter on the Rights of Roma", stating in article 6:

> We Roma have the right to self-determination, in accordance with international law including: the right to cultivate one's cultural autonomy, the right to freely promote our economic, social and cultural development and to select our partners, projects and programs on our own (ERTF, 2009: 6).

Gheorghe defended that "ERTF should have a parliamentary structure under the supervision of the Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly, to prepare the way for an elected European Roma Parliament" (Gheorghe, 2013: 76). Besides the lack of political will at the highest intergovernmental instances, three factual conditions blocked the possibility to enable a legitimate democratic process that could lead to a transnational Roma parliament: **1.** in countries where the Roma people is recognized as a national or ethnic minority, there is no reliable data to construct a rigorous ethnic census (RIO, 2010; Carrera, Guild, Vosyliute & Bard, 2017). **2.** There are major European countries which do not recognize the Roma people either as an ethnic or as a national minority (see table 1 above). **3.** In Germany and Sweden, where the Sinti and Roma are officially recognized as a national minority, it is forbidden to collect and use ethnic data for any political purpose.

Thus, the basic *conditio sine qua non* to build a recognized and legitimate democratic representation, *i.e.* to count on an official electoral census, was then (and still is) missing. Eventually, in 2015, the Council of Europe stopped funding ERTF. Since then, its political leverage has decreased in a significant manner. What can we learn from this experience? And what are the alternatives for Roma political representation?

A PATHWAY TOWARDS COMMON CITIZENSHIP

From my view point, we can take two main lessons from the experience of ERTF: 1. The limits of ethnopolitics in Europe. 2. The nature of European liberal democracy on the basis of common citizenship.

1. The limits of ethnopolitics in the EU

If we look at the EU legislative framework, there is no viable liberal-democratic form of multiculturalism in there (Kymlicka, 2007; Malloy, 2013). The EU is based on a liberal (ethnicity blind) conception of citizenship, articulated through the Charter of Fundamental Rights (Nice, 2000) and the different treaties (Maastricht, 1992; Amsterdam, 1997; Nice, 2001; Lisbon, 2007).

Aiming to prevent dynamics of *ethno politics/ethno policies*, the EU put at the core of its values the general principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin. In this sense, the Lisbon Treaty built on the definition of EU citizenship, asserting a claim of equality for all EU citizens and defining exactly who those citizens would be:

> Article 8: In all its activities, the Union shall observe the principle of the equality of its citizens, who shall receive equal attention from its institutions, bodies, offices and agencies. Every national of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union. Citizenship of the Union shall be additional to national citizenship and shall not replace it (European Union, 2007).

The "EU Roma framework" represents an exceptional case, in which a single ethnic group is the target of an EU policy. This situation has been problematized by different scholars, starting from one of its main intellectual architects: Martin Kovats. He contributed to the development of the "EU's 10 common basic principles on Roma inclusion" (EC, 2010). Moreover, from 2010–2013, he was the special advisor on Roma issues to the former EU Commissioner of Employment and Social Affairs, László Andor. Kovats takes a stand for (ethnicity blind) universal principles of justice, when he affirms:

> regardless of what distinct cultural characteristics Roma people may share to a greater or lesser extent (or not at all), Roma are also citizens with the same rights and subject to the same economic, legal and political systems, part of the same national societies and cultures as their non-Roma compatriots. Integration, inclusion, equality of opportunity are concepts that must be meaningfully applied to real people in accordance with their actual circumstances (Kovats, 2012: 3).

This creates a paradoxical situation, in which a transnational ethnic minority that is not recognized as such by many EU member states and experts (including Kovats himself), it is at the very same time the target of an EU policy framework. So, one may ask: on which basis are Roma targeted if there is no ethnic ground for such a policy decision? According to Kovats and Surdu, the category "Roma" is "an expert-political construction" (Kovats & Surdu, 2015; Surdu, 2016). They literally argue that

> Roma is a dynamic political identity constructed mainly from above and from out-side by political and expert communities and thereafter applied or adopted by people subjected to public labelling and policy interventions (Kovats & Surdu, 2015: 7).

This definition reproduces the paradox of the Roma people being subject of policy interventions, while being denied of its own real subjectivity outside expert and policy frames. So, who define the Roma if not Roma themselves? And, who speaks for the Roma if not Roma themselves?

As we have seen already, special mechanisms for minority representation are blocked by design in major EU countries. And the European Parliament (EP) has not developed any mechanism to facilitate political representation of ethnic minorities. Thus, Roma politics is operating *de facto* through NGO-networks. This political scenario has forced the Roma to play in such an asymmetrical power game that it has generated what Iulius Rostas called, "a tokenistic relationship". This is a form of political manipulation that consists of placing NGO-leaders on advisory governmental / intergovernmental bodies or *ad hoc* committees, to get legitimacy from them; while their opinions are not substantially taken into account in agenda setting processes, budgetary decisions or policy framing design (Rostas, 2012).

To reflect on this matter, I want to highlight the words of the current director of the Roma Initiatives Office at the Open Society Foundations (RIO-OSF), Zeljko Jovanovic:

> Unlike other minorities that built their political organization on the model of political parties, we [Roma] have built our model on the NGO structure. This means a higher dependency on external sources, public or private donors. And on some occasions, they have capitalized on our human resources against us. I believe that more and more people are realizing about it. Now, we need to build new power structures, to develop our own emancipatory strategy (Cortés & Jovanovic, 2017).

How could this power-unbalance be reverted to enable a fair political negotiation among Roma citizens and power-holders?

2. The nature of EU liberal democracy on the basis of common citizenship

McGarry and Agarin brought a very relevant political question to the Roma case: how to make effective participation for minorities? They talk about three dimensions of participation: *i)* politics of presence; *ii)* politics of voice; *iii)* politics of influence (McGarry & Agarin, 2014). I would add one more: politics of representation. This fourth dimension constitutes a challenge both for the Romani movement(s) and for mainstream political parties.

So far, the public presence of hundreds of Roma activists in institutional settings has been promoted by NGO-networks, through different periodical events such as the EU Roma summits, the EU Roma platform, the EU Roma week and other similar meetings. The voices of some Roma activists can be heard in these meetings. In a much more selected way, a few NGO-leaders have access to bilateral meetings with high

representatives from the EP, the EC, the OSCE and the CoE, in order to influence the opinion of decision makers. Therefore, we can say that the three dimensions of participation mentioned by McGarry and Agarin are already taking place within the current model of NGOization of Roma politics. However, the fourth dimension, *i.e.* politics of representation, remains far off on the horizon.

As Vermeersch recognizes: "Roma remain underrepresented in local and national assemblies... [and] the presence of minorities and vulnerable groups in representatives' structures is a requirement in any society committed to democratic equality" (Vermeersch, 2017: 209). One may ask: what are the feasible venues to participate in democratic representative structures? My answer is mainstream political parties. This requires critical efforts from both sides: *a)* from the side of Roma activists, this means acquiring new political knowledge and commitment to mainstream social problems, *b)* From the side of political parties, this implies mainstreaming Roma issues in all policy discussions, and furthermore, to challenge the racist perceptions of their electorates, *c)* From both sides, it requires the will to cooperate and to build a common ground to mobilize the grassroots.

By principle, cultural and political identities should not coincide, for the sake of open democratic societies. The equation cultural identity equal to political identity is the core axiom of fascism. On the contrary, according to EU liberal axiology, intercultural dialogue broadens the horizon of freedom, by opening the possibility to develop a multiple and fluid identity, in what Bauman and Mauro call the "XXI century Babel" (Bauman & Mauro, 2016). As an active agent of building social solidarity, civic initiatives play a central role. This work is crucial at these very precise times when the "Social Europe" is in severe crisis (Kovats & Law, 2018; Taba & Ryder, 2018).

To illustrate the strategy of representation that I stand for, I would like to highlight the case of the Romani candidate for the Senate in France, Anina Ciuciu, in 2017. To run for her candidacy with Europe Ecologie – les Verts (EELV), she coordinated efforts to find a common denominator among the Roma activism and other activist movements. As she described herself:

> We chose to build „Our Future" [campaign slogan] not on identity basis, but on the concrete struggles for social and environmental justice, the equality of rights, the abolition of sexist and racist relations of domination, as well as on the values of resistance, justice and dignity, and in order to rebuild popular sovereignty from the multiplicity that we constitute (Ciuciu, 2018: 118).

Even though she didn't gain a seat in the Senate, through her candidacy she put into play: 1. A strategy of politics of presence in many institutional settings and CSOs meetings, by showing that her Romani identity is not isolated from the rest of society. 2. A strategy of politics of voice in public debates, national and international media, and academic events. 3. A strategy of politics of influence within her own party and other parties close to her ideology.

As we can see, the strategy of politics of representation includes the three other dimensions of political participation: presence, influence and voice. Moreover, through

her candidacy, Anina went over the political blockade imposed on minorities in Europe (and especially in France). This innovative political strategy, initiated by a young French Romani woman (with Romanian origins), escapes from the labyrinth of minority politics; and it opened a new door for what she calls "a trans-minority multiplicity." In her new power-position, as a candidate for the Senate within a mainstream political party, she didn't have to fit into the box that governmental/intergovernmental institutions made for her as a young Romani woman. On the contrary, she defended her own vision for the whole country, as a potential representative of the French people.

CONCLUSIONS

The article underlines how the strategies for economic inclusion have failed, in a great degree, because of the lack of political involvement of the Roma communities at national and local level. This form of exclusion continues to be the core element of a subtle and persistent antigypsyism.

In this rationale, the article shows how representation of minorities, in general, and of Roma, in particular, is blocked by institutional design in the EU: the format of liberal democracy is a system made by majorities for the sake of majorities. So, in this logic, minorities remain either in the margins of politics or totally aside. To overcome this situation, big claims for recognition and representation at international bodies didn't solve the question (in realistic terms). Thus, the article proposes a way to build solidarity with other groups on the ground of common citizenship.

Through the case study, the article reflects about the nature of citizenship and the process of constitution of a complex political subjectivity: not on identity basis, but on a multiplicity of social groups fighting for equality from the margins of the system. From this approach, political identities are not ready made structures culturally bounded; but fluid and adaptive structures that respond to contingent critical junctures. This is a way to re-articulate instituted regimes of rights, from the perspective of coordinated acts of citizenship.

In this framework, civil society groups such as NGOs, religious institutions, community service organizations or trade unions, are all power-structures that can give voice and provide influence to specific groups. However, beyond the strategies of voicing and influencing, to achieve an impactful strategy of representation, different groups have the need to figure out tactics of coalition building and solidarity. Such a coalition would be united by the political party and decentralized by multiple civic constituencies. In this sense, unification of heterogeneous social demands into one political platform does not mean homogeneization/uniformization of diverse social or cultural identities.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ISMAEL CORTÉS GÓMEZ – currently holds a postdoctoral position at Central European University – Romani Studies Program, he is a cultural theorist and philosopher. He studied literature, anthropology and philosophy at the University of Granada where he obtained an MA. He continued his studies at the UNESCO Chair of Philosophy for Peace, Universitat Jaume I, where he gained his PhD on conflict and development studies with an international award. His research interest focuses on the relation between law, culture and politics, by analyzing how ideologies constitute norms and action programs. During his academic career, Ismael has been a visiting researcher at the School of Critical Theory, University of Nottingham, and the Institute for the Study of Peace and Conflicts in the International University of Andalusia and the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology at CEU. He has worked as a policy analyst for OSF from 2016 to 2018 both with RIO and OSEPI. He collaborates with different media at national and European level with publications in *HuffPost*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Euractive* or *El País* among others. As a Roma activist his main work has focused on political participation and knowledge production.