Challenging Anti-gypsyism in Academia: The Role of Romani Scholars

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Abstract

As a social phenomenon and an ideology, anti-gypsyism is sustained on essentialized narratives, which reify ethnic borders (between those considered as Roma and non-Roma) and assumes internal homogeneity of all members of the Romani group based on vaguely-defined and generalized notions of "culture" or "ethnicity". These narratives tend to exclude plural and diverse representation of social realities and intersecting Romani identities, which can challenge the dominant and stigmatizing discourse. In this paper, I analyse how academic discourse contributes to sustaining essentialist representations of Roma and assess how more nuanced, plural, and context-sensitive interpretations of ethnic identity can contribute to challenging anti-gypsyism. By reviewing the scholarship of Brubaker (2002, 2004), Hall (1996) and Vertovec (2007), I discuss the potential of definitions in deconstructing homogenized and essentialized discourses on Roma in knowledge production and beyond. Furthermore, I discuss how the emergence and dynamic development of Romani scholarship has been gradually challenging the legacy of Romani Studies and providing an entry into new avenues of research, conducted primarily from the standpoint of Romani scholars. I argue that their engagement in knowledge-production is essential for promoting diversified, balanced and context-sensitive discourses. In this article, rather than prescribing a specific, normative framework for Romani Studies and elaborating a fixed research agenda, I point to possible directions and promising theoretical avenues which may provide a refreshing counter-balance to an otherwise homogenizing scholarship. In doing so, I assess possible implications for adapting diverse notions of ethnicity as a tool for de-essentializing academic discourses on Roma – including advantages and existing risks. Such an approach enables the mapping out of issues and challenges relevant for the process of elaborating a Critical Romani Studies research agenda.

Introduction

In September 2016, the Board of Directors of the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS), arguably the most important institution of Romani Studies founded in 1888, passed a motion regretting some of its past misdeeds. The 2016 motion came after the adoption of a similar apology was rejected in 2012 by the GLS, despite the recurrent claims, even from among its own members, of a legacy of scientific racism propagated by GLS in the past (Acton, 2015). The language of the 2016 GLS apology was "soft" and defensive; and although the word "racism" did not appear, the Board of Directors of the GLS did acknowledge "Statements and attitudes that may be interpreted as overtly patronising, disenfranchising, or otherwise biased...".[1] The adoption of the motion came at the time when evidence of scientific racism in Romani Studies as well as a dynamic development of critical perspectives on this legacy had begun to emerge in spaces of academic discussion.

This is not the first time that the GLS has attempted to deal with its somewhat troublesome past. In 1999, its flagship publication was renamed from *The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* to *Romani Studies* in an attempt "to signal that our interest was in populations that had agency and their own image of themselves" (Matras 2017: 115); this decision was approved with only a very narrow majority of votes among the GLS Board (ibid.). The move to replace the term "Gypsy" with "Roma" with regards to the Journal has not led to a similar change within this institution itself. According to information posted on the European Academic Network on Romani Studies (EANRS), the motion to replace the name "Gypsy Lore Society" with "Society for Romani Studies" was rejected in 2017 "after vigorous opposition from some board members".[2]

What is the significance of these changes (or lack thereof) within the Gypsy Lore Society and in Romani Studies as an academic discipline? And more broadly: what is the role of scholarship in sustaining and/or disrupting biased narratives on Roma? In this article, I will explore the relationship between notions of anti-gypsyism and scholarly practice. More specifically, I will discuss the extent to which the conceptualizations – or definitions – of identities, especially ethnic identities, contribute to sustaining essentialized discourses on Roma. I will briefly review the scholarly practice with regards to Roma and discuss alternative definitions of ethnicity which may provide tools for establishing more plural academic narratives on Roma. I will then turn towards the emergence of Romani scholarship, pointing to the importance of academic knowledge produced from within the Romani subjectivity.

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1. Interestingly, the text of the motion is nowhere to be found on the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS) website. The quotes originate from personal correspondence with one of the members of the Board of the GLS. Available upon request.

2. E-mail sent by Yaron Matras on November 28th, 2017 through the EANRS mailing list.

1. Anti-gypsyism and the Notion of Ethnicity

Anti-gypsyism is a deeply-rooted, historically stable and multi-dimensional specific type of racism towards Roma, Sinti, Travellers and those who are labelled as "Gypsies" (Alliance Against Anti-gypsyism, 2016: 3). Although scholars, civil society and public institutions are yet to reach a consensus on the explicit definition of anti-gypsyism, it is generally agreed that it is a form of "racism and an ideology based on hatred and fear, originating in stereotypes or prejudices towards Roma" (Carrera, Rostas, and Vosyliūtė, 2017: 71). Importantly, anti-gypsyism does not only incorporate elements of biological racism but it is also considered a type of so-called "differentialist" racism, which centres around "cultural" differences between "us" and "them" (Nicolae, 2006).

One of its key attributes, typical of any ideology grounded in stereotypes, is the "homogenizing and essentializing perception and description of these groups" (Alliance Against Anti-gypsyism, 2016: 5). Anti-gypsyism assumes sameness of all members of the group, to whom a number of deviant, benevolent or malevolent stereotypical characteristics are attributed. On the one hand, the attributes associated with "Gypsy-ness" tend to frame this group as a threat to public order. In political, public, media and in some cases even scholarly discourse, Roma are treated as "abnormal citizens", unable to fit into mainstream society, prone to crime and misconduct and with a tendency to disobey social and legal norms. This is often illustrated by problematizing and racializing such social phenomenon as migration, begging, vagrancy or unemployment, which are commonly treated as traditional and inherent to "a Romani culture".[3] Such framing of the Roma leads to the emergence of what Huub van Baar (2014) calls "reasonable anti-Gypsyism": "The argument goes that you are rightfully entitled to act against them and treat them differently, because they cause inconvenience, indulge in criminal activity and can generally be expected to cause trouble" (29). As a consequence, anti-gypsyism becomes a legitimized, justifiable and socially accepted attitude, instead of recognizing that anti-gypsyism is, in fact, a form of racism. It is for this reason that Aidan McGarry calls anti-gypsysim "the last acceptable form of racism" (McGarry, 2017).

On the other hand, anti-gypsysim can also be manifested through attributing cultural traits and behaviours which can be regarded as "positive": romantic, exotified clichés of free-spirited, mysterious people and eternal nomads. Such "positive" framing can be equally detrimental as it relies on the conviction that the Roma are essentially and irreconcilably different from the non-Roma.

> As the 'positive' cliché can have equally harmful outcomes, awareness-raising about anti-gypsyist stereotypes should not only target negative perceptions of Roma and other groups, but should address the pernicious effects of considering groups and individuals (and their needs, preferences and potential) through the lens of preconceived group characteristics, including the exoticizing and romanticizing ones (Alliance Against Anti-gypsyism, 2016: 11).

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3. Background report "The situation of Roma and Travellers in the context of rising racism and xenophobia," Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe (2016), available at: https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com. instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=2947279&SecMode=1&DocId=2385346&Usage=2. Accessed 1-02-2018.

As a social phenomenon and an ideology anti-gypysism is, thus, sustained on powerful essentialized narratives, which, on the one hand, reify ethnic borders (between those considered as Roma and non-Roma) and, on the other, assume internal homogeneity of all members of the Romani group based on vaguely-defined and generalized notions of "culture" or "ethnicity". Indeed, "anti-Gypsyism has a collective, not individual, character, targeting all those perceived by society as 'Gypsies' or portrayed as such by the majority" (Carrera, Rostas, and Vosyliūtė, 2017: 10). Such dominant, generalizing and superficial narratives of Roma are produced, maintained and replicated by media, political and public discourses, policies and institutions, among others. Part of the efforts aiming at dismantling notions of anti-gypsysim must therefore focus on disrupting and challenging essentialized discourses by providing plural narratives of diverse and intersecting identities, which more accurately reflect the social reality of Romani lives.

2. The Role of Academia in Sustaining Essentialized Discourses on Roma

The world of the Academia has its role in maintaining and stabilizing the dominant essentialized representations of Roma.

Firstly, the very foundation of Romani Studies has inherited an anti-gypsyist worldviews in its scholarly canon. Some scholars argue that scientific racism is at the root of contemporary Romani Studies scholarship (Fraser, 1995; Acton, 2015; Acton, 1998; Acton, 1974; Hancock, 2010; Kóczé, 2015; Matache, 2016b; Lee, 2000). For example, Thomas Acton convincingly demonstrates that, "although scientific racism lost legitimacy in academia after 1951, it continued to influence both popular culture, and academic discourse about Roma/ Gypsy/ Travellers" (Acton, 2016: 1). Acton argues that the Gypsy Lore Society, the oldest scholarly association of Romani Studies, was profoundly racist since its creation in 1888 until after WWII and although it slowly attempted to move the scholarly discourse away from notions of scientific racism after 1945, the legacy of past decades of scholarship continues to shape knowledge-production on Roma even today.[4] Indeed, even a separate term "Gypsylorism" was coined to refer to knowledge-production which is most clearly influenced by the early Romani Studies scholarship and where traces of racism can easily be identified.[5] Elsewhere Acton argues that an "earlier discourse of European states and scholars about the 'true Gypsy' which formed a variant of European 'scientific racism'[…] has been called 'Gypsylorism' after its flagship publication, the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society" (Acton, 1998: 7). To Ken Lee, writing at the turn of the century, "Gypsylorism" is a form of Orientalism, wherein "the hegemony of Gypsylorism, that extended period of discursive domination and subject-constitution of 'The Gypsies' that began with establishment of the GLS and

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4. It is worth mentioning that Acton's paper was written as a response to the rejection of the motion to issue an apology for historic and scientific racism by the Board of the Gypsy Lore Society in 2012.

5. Nonetheless, not everyone would agree. Yaron Matras, for example, argues that, "it is not quite clear what this term means (it is not a technical designation for 'members of the Gypsy Lore Society'). It is, however, noticeable that the term is used with considerable emotional zeal by writers whose primary concern is to 'de-construct' the works of other scholars studying Roma/ Gypsies and to expose their allegedly misguided thoughts and conclusions" (Matras, 2005).

JGLS in 1888, has not been subjected to the same level of critical scrutiny and deconstructive exposure as Orientalism" (Lee, 2000: 147).

Secondly, it is important to recognize that the world of academia is inherently hierarchical and imposes scientific knowledge as authoritative and superior to other ways and spaces of knowledge-production. In this sense, as argued by Ken Lee for example, "the members of the GLS and JGLS claimed a privileged epistemological position, asserting that they were the only internationally recognised source of scholarly information about 'The Gypsies'" (Lee, 2000: 133); arguably this trend is evident at the present time too. In the context of Romani Studies, knowledge produced outside of academic circles has often been depreciated or de-legitimized as "biased", not evidence-based or labelled as "NGO science" (Marushiakova and Popov, 2011; Matache, 2016a). The deep fissure between notions of scientism, that is, of "objective" and "neutral" scholarship, and critical research is evident (Ryder, 2015; Bogdán et al., 2015; Ryder, 2017). Furthermore, there is an obvious lack of Romani voices in the academia and limited practices of meaningful involvement of Roma in knowledge-production (Tremlett and Mcgarry, 2013; Acton and Ryder, 2013). In recent years, the increasing number of scholars of Romani background have challenged the scholarship produced on Roma which has previously excluded voices of those who are the subject of scientific inquiry. These debates between Roma and non-Roma scholars have, however, become deeply polarized and politicized (Matache, 2016a; Vajda, 2015; Kóczé, 2015; Ryder, 2017). The marginality of Romani voices in scholarship on Roma can be considered among the biggest weaknesses of Romani studies as a scientific discipline (Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2015); and consequently, this results in upholding potentially generalizing and simplified academic narratives by leaving them detached and un-contrasted with points of view from the Roma themselves. This trend of idealized status of scientific knowledge as "objective" and "neutral" and its assumed superiority over other fora of knowledge-production has important implications which go beyond the world of academia and not uncommonly, work to maintain Romani self-narratives in a marginalized position. For example, recently in Spain, Romani federations and activists have made public complaints in reaction to the announced creation of the Chair of Romani Studies (*Catedra de Estudios Gitanos*) at the University of Alicante:[6] local Roma organizations claimed that while the idea was welcome and reflected years of their own advocacy efforts, the Romani stakeholders were completely excluded from participating in the process of establishing this department and from negotiations between the academic institutions and public bodies financing its creation. In a powerful statement, the Federation of Roma Associations in Valencia (FAGA) stated that: "we would like to communicate to the whole society that the times of this despotism of 'everything for Roma without Roma' needs to end, and that for many years, we the Roma have wanted to be protagonists of our present and our future".[7] In policy-processes, too, some scholars have argued that Romani expertise continues to be secondary to the influence of non-Roma academic experts (Acton and Ryder, 2013; Ryder, 2015).

Thirdly, Romani Studies scholarship tends to operate with generalized and, not uncommonly, essentialized concepts of "Roma", even when its declared objective is quite the opposite. Indeed, there are instances when scholarship works towards supporting rather essentializing and homogenizing views of Romani

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6. http://www.unionromani.org/notis/2017/noti2017-09-20.htm; http://www.fagic.org/2017/09/25/una-catedra-de-estudios-gitanos-sin-gitanos. Accessed 1-02-2018.

7. http://www.unionromani.org/notis/2017/noti2017-09-20.htm. Accessed 1-02-2018.

ethnicity. Some of these represent romanticized and exotified narratives which construct the notion of a "true Gypsy" which is perceived as inherently different from the non-Roma population. As early as 1974, Acton denounced this scholarly practice; in his 1998 Inaugural lecture at the University of Greenwich he argued that:

> The Gypsylorists who sat at their campfires, and bribed them with tobacco and sixpences to tell them Romani words, were immensely flattered that they had met with the 'true Gypsies', or even, if they were very lucky, the king of the Gypsies, and wrote books, dressed up in the anthropological jargon of scientific racism, explaining how only a few of their personal friends were 'true Gypsies' - and all the rest were disreputable half-breeds or imitations. This then constituted the academic literature on Gypsies down to the 1960s; there was a twenty-year lag between the discrediting of scientific racism in mainstream academia and its being abandoned in Romani Studies (Acton, 1998: 10).

Ken Lee also denounced this approach by arguing that "The 'true Romany' is essentially a discourse that privileges a particular constellation of attributes as constituting an 'authentic' Romani identity (…). These exonymic classificatory schemes used to categorise Romanies are both implicitly racialised and racist" (Lee, 2000: 138). He further argues that the more the reality of Romani lives distances itself from this imagined and mythical notion of "Gypsiness", "the more they are shifted from ahistorical Romanticised exotics to real, dangerously inauthentic, social problems" (ibid.).

It should be underlined, however, that such scholarly practice, which Acton and Lee regard as manifestations of scientific racism, is often, and ironically, guided by the will to de-construct negative and stereotypical imagery associated with Romani people. Thus, as scholars attempt to challenge popular and/or scientific racists notions, they may find it difficult to avoid making generalizations about "a people". Annabel Tremlett (2009, 2014) quite skilfully demonstrates this paradox. She writes that while "Romani Studies (…) sees itself as a space for anti-racist type intervention – a means of revealing a realistic picture of a heterogeneous minority" (Tremlett, 2009: 148), scholars often tend to fall into the trap of homogenisation. By analysing the discussion between Michael Stewart and sociologists Janos Ladanyi and Ivan Szelenyi who emphasize the importance of heterogeneity, Tremlett convincingly argues that both parties "can still slip into talk about "the Gypsies" or "the Roma" as "a" different group of people" (Tremlett, 2009: 147). Indeed, the above-mentioned scholars, although representing drastically different views with regards to the nature of "Gypsy-hood", make references to vaguely-defined notions of "traditional Gypsy culture", "the Gypsy work" or "the Gypsy way"; inevitably contributing to sustaining essentialized and homogenizing perspective on Romani identity.

3. Challenging Essentialized Discourses Through Definitions

Ultimately, in the vast majority of cases, essentialized representations of Romani people in scholarship are not a result of ill-willed academics but rather have to do with how identities, especially ethnic identities, are perceived and described, and what definitions and theoretical paradigms we employ.

In 1996, Stuart Hall argued that there is a lack of consistency and clarity in the conceptual delineation and application of the concept of "identity" (Hall, 1996). In 2000, Brubaker and Cooper proposed an inventory of theoretical approaches to the concept of "identity" and concluded that it bears a

> multivalent, even contradictory theoretical burden. (…) Critical discussions of 'identity' has thus sought not to jettison but to save the term by reformulating it so as to make it immune from certain objections, especially from the dreaded charge of 'essentialism' (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000:8).

Likewise, modern scholarship on ethnicity has begun to move away from seeing ethnic identity as something given, fixed and static (Jenkins, 2000; Brubaker, 2009; Wimmer, 2008). Rather, ethnic identities, as all identities, are understood as dynamic, multi-faceted, ever-changing and complex constructs which cannot be described through tangible and stable properties but which have to be defined in a relational and processual manner. The seminal work of Frederik Barth's "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries" (1969) was fundamental in shaping the contemporary theoretical approaches to ethnicity, challenging the notion of static objectivism by famously rejecting the focus on "the cultural stuff", that is, on shared, observable and tangible culture. Instead, Barth argued that it is the ethnic boundary that defines the group, shifting towards a more dynamic and processual understanding of ethnicity.

Barth's notion of "ethnic boundaries" continues to shape contemporary scholarship and is especially popular in Romani Studies. In the case of Roma, it is extremely difficult to draw a convincing categorisation based on objective, commonly shared and tangible cultural traits. It is for this reason that the notion of the "ethnic boundary" is one of the main conceptual tools employed by scholars to define Romani ethnic identity. Indeed, the Romani world-view is shaped by an ontological dichotomy between the Roma and the *Gadjo* (non-Roma) (Mirga and Mróz, 1994; Mirga, 1987). However, Brubaker rightfully notes that,

> Barth equates the drawing of ascriptive distinctions, and the channelling of certain actions in line with such distinctions, with the existence of bounded ethnic groups and thereby contributes, against his own intentions, to the reifications of groups (Brubaker, 2009: 29).

Scholarship on Roma, significantly developed by non-Roma scholars, tends to reify these ethnic boundaries between "us" and "them", inevitably slipping into essentializing interpretations, without acknowledging the more complex and intersecting realities of the Roma. While such a tendency can be considered relatively benign, at times it can take quite outrageous forms and be largely harmful,

conveying openly biased opinions through the very research questions posed by scholars. For example, in 2016 a pair of Turkish scholars published a paper in the peer-reviewed journal *Border Crossing* on "Crime and socialisation dynamics in sub-cultures: Case of Gypsies in Karaman". According to the abstract, the researchers conclude that, "It can be said that during the unique socialization process of Gypsy subculture, Gypsy individuals' attitudes to crime is shaped in the context of its unique dynamics through their families, relatives and friends. Unlike other social groups, the Gypsy subculture allows forming a habitus conducive to be involved in crime."[8] Needless to say, the article not only conveys openly racist assumptions on the inherent relationship between Roma culture and crime but also claims to support this thesis scientifically.

It should be noted, however, that the vast body of literature on ethnicity, developed by social scientists and anthropologists, provides conceptual tools which enable a more nuanced, plural, complex and context-sensitive interpretations of ethnic identity. Some of these alternative conceptualizations may pave the way to more heterogeneous understandings of Romani ethnic identity, and thus work towards deconstructing existing homogenizing academic narratives. Their use, nonetheless, still remains largely marginal to the contemporary scholarship on Romani Studies although increasing use of critical approaches, including theories of intersectionality, postcolonialism, critical feminist thought, critical race theory, among others, especially by scholars of Roma background, can be noted (Bogdán et al., 2015; Kóczé, 2009; Jovanović, Kóczé, and Balogh, 2015; Junghaus, 2014).[9]

In the subsequent section, I will discuss the major currents of scholarship on ethnicity which have been influential in conceptually shaping this field of research but which have only been applied to the field of Romani Studies to a limited extent. In order to challenge the essentialist notions in Romani Studies, the increasing application of such theoretical approaches may contribute to a more critical understanding of Romani ethnic identity and result in production of more plural and accurate academic narratives. Drawing on more recent scholarship I also help to place Romani Studies as a scientific discipline closer to contemporary and mainstream academic debates thereby diminishing the "splendid isolation" (Willems, 1997) of the field of Romani Studies.

Rather than analytically applying specific theoretical frameworks to concrete examples, I will succinctly describe the contributions of Brubaker, Hall and Vertovec, while briefly pointing out those elements which I believe have the potential of conceptually opening-up of the notion of Romani ethnicity towards a more nuanced and context-sensitive perspective.

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8. From the original abstract in English. The paper, in Turkish, is available here: http://www.tplondon.com/journal/index.php/bc/article/viewFile/623/469. Accessed 1-02-2018.

9. Increasing use of critical approaches in Romani Studies can also be witnessed by academic events organized over the past few years, especially "Nothing about us without us? Roma Participation in Policy Making and Knowledge Production" (October 11-13, 2014, Budapest): https://romaempowerment.wordpress.com/ and "Critical Approaches to Romani Studies" Conference (May 25-26, 2017, Budapest): https://rap.ceu.edu/article/2017-03-17/conference-critical-approaches-romani-studies-call-papers. Accessed 1-02-2018.

3.1 Brubaker and the Notion of "Groupness"

Contributions made by sociologist Rogers Brubaker have shaped the contemporary understanding of ethnic identities and provide a well-grounded apparatus to better understand the complexity of Romani identity(s). Brubaker reminds us that "ethnicity, race and nation should be conceptualized not as substances or things or entities or organisms or collective individuals—as the imagery of discrete, concrete, tangible, bounded and enduring 'groups' encourages us to do—but rather in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful and disaggregated terms" (Brubaker, 2002: 167). He proposes that we critically "rethink ethnicity" beyond the reification of boundaries or essentializing and inevitably homogenizing perspectives on ethnicity. Brubaker challenges the concept of ethnicity altogether, which he refers to as "groupism" and leads to the perception of ethnic groups as internally homogeneous and externally bounded entities. He rather shifts the perspective towards "groupness", paying attention to identifications (rather than identities), categorisations (rather than "shared culture") and the process of making and re-making groups. He concludes that ethnicity (like race and nations) are not "things in the world" but ways of seeing, interpreting and representing the social world (Brubaker, 2002; Brubaker, 2004; Brubaker, 2009). Brubaker refers to this as "The Cognitive Turn" (2009) in which systems of classification, categorization and identification, formal and informal, play a significant role. Such an approach allows us to take into account the political, social, cultural and psychological contexts as well as various types of agencies which affect this process – especially, the agency of members of the group as well as the role (and impact) of institutions in the processes of categorization and classification.

The popularity of Brubaker's approach has also made its way into the field of Romani studies (for example: Marsh and Strand, 2006; Vermeersch, 2006; McGarry, 2017). Brubaker's writing is relevant for his emphasis on how groups and labels of groups are made, and also for taking into account political factors, the role of institutions and the groups' own agency. However, what has been common in Romani Studies is that Brubaker's contributions are employed to over-emphasize the role of institutions as well as experts in shaping public discourses on Roma, oftentimes concluding that Romani ethnicity is not a concept which refers to objectively existing people but an artificial institutional construction (Surdu, 2016). Despite the importance of identifications and the agency of groups themselves, which dominate Brubaker's writing, in the case of Roma, the criticism is oftentimes directed most gravely towards Romani activists and organizations. This is especially the case with regards to the self-narratives of a trans-national Romani identity which has been variously framed as "the most amazing nonsense" and "a project of the elites" (Kovats, 2003), as an "expert-political construct" (Surdu and Kovats, 2015) and opposed to a supposed identity-framing of the Romani grassroots (Trehan and Sigona, 2010; Trehan 2001). Such understandings of Romani ethnicity fail to consider an evident reflection – that Romani identities which are performed and articulated differently do not necessarily prove the *existence of irreconcilably different groups* but rather show dynamism and contextuality of Romani identity-formations.

3.2 Stuart Hall and "New Ethnicities"

Stuart Hall's writings have also been essential in reconceptualising ethnic identities under an anti-essentialist theoretical approach. Hall, one of the founders of British Cultural Studies, was influential in

promoting a new understanding of ethnicity and race, and shaping ideas now associated with postcolonial scholarship and theories of intersectionality. Writing about the status of "blacks" in "New Ethnicities" (1989), Hall proposes an anti-essentialist perspective on ethnicity, understood not as a fixed category rooted in Nature but as a politically and cultural constructed category. He argued that, "the term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual" (in Morley and Chen, 1996: 447); he further stated that all individuals are "ethnically located". In the early 1990s, Hall announced the erosion and decline of what he regards as "old ethnicities":

> I mean here the great collective social identities which we thought of as large-scale, all-encompassing, homogenous, as unified collective identities, which could be spoken about almost as if they were singular actors in their own right but which, indeed, placed, positioned, stabilized, and allowed us to understand and read, almost as a code, the imperatives of the individual self: the great collective social identities of class, of race, of nation, of gender, and of the West (Hall, 1997: 44).

Instead, "new ethnicities" arise. These "new identities", individual and collective, are never finished; they are in a process of constant formation. They are also deeply subjective, hybrid and made up of multiple elements or, in fact, multiple identities.[10] Such understanding of ethnicity opens up multiple possibilities of self-identification and/or representation, both collective and individual. Ethnicity is thus not constrained by and aligned with fixed biological or cultural categories but is constructed and transformed continuously, and is made up of multi-faceted and inter-changing, and even contradictory, elements. For Hall, identity is "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (Hall, 1990: 225).

Research on Roma would benefit from engaging critically with the ideas of "new identities": this approach gives way to understanding ethnic identities at the intersection with other variables, which transform and hybridize constantly under a number of factors. Such a perspective challenges the notion of "authenticity" – or the existence of a "true Gypsy" – and allows us instead to open up our conceptual understanding of ethnicity and to become inclusive of other elements and dimensions. Hall's writing contributed to shaping ideas of intersectionality, which are increasingly being introduced into scholarship on Roma, especially by emerging Romani scholars (Kóczé, 2009; Bogdán et al., 2015; Jovanović, Kóczé, and Balogh, 2015).

Beyond Hall's notion of "new ethnicities", which provides a powerful conceptual apparatus for understanding fluid and dynamic Romani identities, Hall's writing also grants compelling insights into the concept of representation through his model of the "circuit of culture" and the connections between representation, identity, regulation, production and consumption, and the politics of representation (Hall, 1997b).

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10. Hall writes: "We have the notion of identity as contradictory, as composed of more than one discourse, as composed always across the silences of the other, as written in and through ambivalence and desire. These are extremely important ways of trying to think an identity which is not a sealed or closed totality" (Hall, 1997:49).

3.3 Vertovec and "Super-Diversity"

Drawing on the research of Hall and his colleagues, such as Paul Gilroy, the concept of "new ethnicities" as well as the development of theories of intersectionality gave way to the ideas of so-called "super-diversity". "Super-diversity" is a term coined by Steven Vertovec (2007) which meant to respond to the increasing diversity of the British society related to the great inflow of migrants and the consequences this has had on individual and collective identity formation within the country. Vertovec argues that, "In the last decade the proliferation and mutually conditioning effects of additional variables shows that it is not enough to see diversity only in terms of ethnicity, as is regularly the case both in social science and the wider public sphere" (Vertovec, 2007:1025). The "super-diverse lens" aims to respond to the increasing hybridization and existing human diversity which goes beyond binary oppositions such as 'native vs. migrant', 'national vs. minority cultures', 'local vs. global' (Arnaut and Spotti, 2014). Annabel Tremlett (2014) was the first one to introduce the potential of "super-diversity" discourse as a new avenue of research in Romani Studies. Nonetheless, the use of this approach to ethnicity has not yet gained traction in scholarship on Roma despite its increasing popularity in the social sciences (Vertovec, 2014).

"Super-diversity", like the influential concepts of "hybridity" and "in-betweenness", popularized by Homi Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994), can be useful for understanding the increasingly plural and complex reality of Romani lives. Currently, we can observe such increasing hybridization of the Romani collective and individual identities in which ethnic identity status intersects with citizenship status (immigrant, refugee, asylum-seeker), as well as other factors. Some Western European countries in particular can be considered sites of such hybridization. In Germany (Matras, 2013; Margalit and Matras, 2007), for example, there are diverse Romani groups present ("national" Sinto communities, as well as various Romani sub-groups coming from different countries); their formal status as migrants (for example, European citizens from Romania vs. asylum-seekers from Kosovo) toppled with other variables (religion, sexual identity, class, etc.) produces increasingly more complex social realities. Furthermore, Romani individuals from diverse backgrounds and sub-groups are increasingly forming families together, resulting in complex personal identity formations and collective identity alignments.

3.4 Possibilities and Limits of De-essentializing Romani Studies

What are the possibilities for proposing a new normative framework for researching Romani ethnicity in Romani Studies? What are the risks and limits of conceptualizing the Roma through anti-essentialist ideas of "new ethnicities", "hybrid identities" or "super-diversity"?

Arguably this discussion is not new as there is a long tradition of approaching the *problematique* of Romani ethnicity from a constructivist and structuralist perspectives. However, oftentimes scholars, as demonstrated by Tremlett (2009, 2014) fall into a trap of contradiction – while speaking of "the Gypsy way", they emphasize internal heterogeneity, cultural and social distance across diverse Romani sub-groups and distinctiveness. In conceptualizing the viability of ethnic groups and the Roma especially, there is an obsession with sameness and a parallel stigmatization of in-group heterogeneity, as if it were

the proofs of the impossibility of existence of the Roma as a people, across linguistic, geographic, social and cultural borders. Likewise, as scholars aim to denounce exoticism and orientalism with regards to Roma (not only in scholarship but also in public discourses and policies), the very existence of "the Roma" as a single and viable ethnic group is called into question (Marushiakova and Popov, 2016).

I argue, in contrast, that the denomination of internally-diverse groups with a single term does not necessarily and unequivocally mean sameness or represent a violent attempt at overriding diversity – after all, classifications such as "Indigenous peoples", "Aboriginal people" or even national identities (especially in the context of multicultural and multilingual nation-states) also assumes and embraces diversity. In the context of Roma, heterogeneity is an assumed, acknowledged and lived reality and the tendency to increasingly refer to Romani cultures and identities in the plural, is yet another evidence of "multiculturality [as](…) the basic reality of the Roma people" (Gheorghe and Acton, 2001: 55).

Furthermore, and taking these considerations as a point of departure, I argue that the alternative conceptualizations of ethnicity discussed above present a significant potential for the development of Romani Studies as an academic discipline; they may also contribute to the process of deconstructing homogenized and essentialized discourses on Roma in knowledge-production. Going beyond reified and fixed delineations of ethnic groups forces scholars to investigate multiple, plural and increasingly hybrid components which interplay within the contained concept of "Romani identity", whether individual or collective. This allows us to study not only "traditional Romani communities" but also "halfies" (Brooks, 2015) or assimilated Romani individuals, families and communities, embracing multiple and constantly changing identity mutations or novel collective and individual identity framings. Inevitably, acknowledging the dynamism and complexity of Romani ethnicity will result in more plural narratives on Roma. And this, in turn, may contribute to disrupting essentialized and homogenizing notions of Roma in academic discourse, and beyond, and potentially help to dismantle fundamental notions of anti-gypsyism.

There are, however, potential risks which need to be acknowledged. On the one hand, the focus on individualistic and temporary aspects of identity formation (limited to the specific moment and context in which identity is being described) may result in excessive relativism, in which all potential collective boundaries and categories of distinction (both in terms of self-identification as well as categorization/ labelling) are blurred. This is especially problematic in the context of public policies which target Roma as a group – under such diffuse understanding of ethnicity, establishing a functional and adequate policy categorization is a serious challenge. On the other hand, as Tremlett rightfully suggests, "if we think 'beyond' ethnicity (as Vertovec suggests), we may lose sight of ethnicity" (Tremlett, 2014: 15), leading to a dissolution of ethnicity altogether. Indeed, in the era of transracialism and trans-ethnicity (Brubaker, 2016a; Brubaker, 2016b; Tuvel, 2017), and post-ethnicity (Hollinger, 2006), it is increasingly important to adopt approaches which allow for nuanced representations of complex social realities while being able to delineate *de facto* existing distinct social/ ethnic groups.

This tendency also has an impact in the field of Romani Studies. The focus on the internal heterogeneity of Roma as a group may call into question the very existence of a collectively-shared ethnicity of Romani people. Indeed, some scholars, albeit for different reasons, have called into question the very existence of

"Roma" altogether. Among others, Okely (1983), Willems (1998) and Lucassen (1998) have long argued that the term Roma was developed historically by authorities and scholars to refer to marginalized and itinerant groups, and does not, therefore, refer to a viable ethnic group.

Such academic narratives can be sustained because there is a certain conceptual void with regards to defining Roma as a group. The tendency to further focus on Romani heterogeneity and plurality often provides evidence of internal atomization and fragmentation, not uncommonly leading to the conclusion that there is no "Romani ethnicity" (Jakoubek, 2004). At the same time, however, these conceptual and not uncommonly abstract academic discussions fail to provide a convincing description of an ethnic group which remains very much real and which undoubtedly exists. The salience of Romani voices in Romani Studies and the appearance of scholarship developed from a Romani standpoint may help to overcome this conceptual impasse, the topic of my final section.

4. The Role of Romani Scholars and the Importance of Self-identification

The emergence and dynamic development of Romani scholars, and their increasing use of critical approaches and theories, such as Postcolonial Studies or Critical Race Theory, gradually challenges the legacy of Romani Studies and provides an entryway into new avenues of research, in particular as conducted by Romani scholars themselves.

The added value of Romani scholars resides in their status as "outsiders within" (Collins, 1986; Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2015). The combination of lived experience, academic training and commitment to scientific rigour and quality that many Romani scholars possess offers the much-needed plurality of perspectives and voices otherwise currently missing from Romani Studies. The ascendance of authoritative Romani voices in scientific debates will help to unravel internal tensions, gaps and incongruences within Romani Studies by contrasting the body of knowledge on Roma with the lived experiences of community-members. In this sense, Romani scholars can approximate first-hand knowledge which can otherwise be inaccessible or difficult to attain by non-Romani scholars. How would it otherwise be possible to provide insight into the "authenticity tests" which a Romani scholar goes through when entering the field of research among a Roma group different than their own? How can a non-Roma researcher explain the intricate and complex relationship of belonging and distinctiveness when building relationships with Roma from another country or sub-group? Or, in what way can a non-Roma scholar describe why and how Romani identity is performed, described and felt differently, depending on the context; how might they understand the processes of "passing" and "invisibility", as something that is contextual, temporary and fluid? These questions can best be answered from within Romani subjectivity, bearing in mind internal codes of conduct and performances of daily rituals, which require a level of intimacy, proximity and insiders' knowledge.

The ethnicity of a scholar bears relevance but should not signify superiority or exclusivity. A heterogeneity of voices in scholarship should instead result in a dialogue based on equality and complementarity of knowledge, approaches and methodologies. In this sense, Romani scholars cannot claim greater

legitimacy over the knowledge they produce research on Roma, but neither can their non-Romani colleagues make these claims. It is also significant that despite its added value, the emergence of Romani scholarship does not automatically mean that researchers of Romani background are inherently immune to methodological shortcomings, theoretical pitfalls and indeed, even internalized racism. Neither does it mean that Romani scholars will by default produce plural narratives or challenge homogenizing and essentializing scholarship. Nonetheless, over the last few years an increasing number of Romani scholars have relied on critical scholarship; it becomes clear that their engagement in knowledge-production is essential for promoting diversified, balanced and context-sensitive discourse.

However, as heterogeneity and plurality become an indispensable element of such narratives, there is a risk of diluting Romani group identities and a sense of collective belonging. For this reason it becomes increasingly clear that Romani intellectuals and scholars need to produce convincing, empirically-grounded and authoritative definitions of "Roma-hood", in order to respond to the ever-present question of "Who is Roma?".

Indeed, scholars have long struggled to convincingly answer the question of "Who are the Roma?" and to provide a concrete but also comprehensive definition of this population. An example of these intense debates is the discussion on the European Academic Network on Romani Studies (EANRS) entitled: "Roma: A Misnomer?" which sparked fierce exchanges among scholars of Romani Studies (Friedman and Friedman, 2015). Today, these debates are yet to reach a consensus and they have fuelled a polarization between Roma and non-Roma scholars. These contentious discussions have also provided an overview of the diverse approaches, understandings and conceptualizations of the Romani people, and reflect not only the very complexity of defining the Roma, but also reveal the tensions surrounding who can legitimately shape these definitions. Discussions regarding ownership – "who is in charge of definitions?" – and the role of Roma and non-Roma scholars are important themes which commonly reappear in such academic exchanges.

Much of these discussions tend to focus on stable and tangible properties associated with ethnicity, which allow the researcher to determine whether the person is a Roma or not (for example, see: Ivanov, Kling, and Kagin, 2012); at the same time much criticism has centred on the Romani identity as a political project (Kovats, 2003; Rövid, 2011; McGarry, 2010; Vermeersch, 2006; Trehan and Sigona, 2010). Surprisingly, the question of self-definition and self-identification, as well as contributions to the academic discourse developed by Romani scholars and their power to produce definitions rooted not only in self-ascription but which also employ scientifically-sound methods, remain marginal at best. Some non-Roma scholars even claim that Roma are unable to provide significant contributions to the definition of "Romani ethnicity". For example, non-Roma scholars Marushiakova and Popov argue that,

> Roma cannot comprehend how it is possible at all to define a real community which exists for centuries as a social construction. They know that their ancestors centuries ago were Roma and their children and grandchildren will be Roma too and there is no need to have somebody to construct their identity. That is why it should not surprise us that the ethnic essence of Roma is taken as unconditionally granted by authors who are from Roma origin (Gheorghe 1991; 1997; Mirga and Gheorghe 1997; Hancock 2002 and others.) (Marushiakova and Popov, 2016: 16).

Appearing are a growing number of Romani voices denouncing the epistemic authority resting with the non-Roma scholars. For example, Angela Kóczé (2015) writes that, "Concerning the validation of Roma-related studies, there is a tacit consensus that non-Roma are in a better position to provide a more reliable and objective account of the situation of Roma. This assumption is based on the premise of 'objectivity' (…)" (Kóczé, 2015: 84). She further explains "how epistemic authority has been claimed and manifested as an exclusive power of non-Roma scholars, to maintain hegemony over Roma-related knowledge production" (ibid.).

Indeed, the field of Romani Studies, and most powerfully with regards to the questions of defining Roma, remains the main stage of power struggles between Roma and non-Roma scholars. It is in this field that Roma scholars need to produce assertive and authoritative contributions in response to the hegemonically charged notion of "scientific truth". In describing "the essence" of being a Roma, the principles of self-definition and self-identification need to be at the heart of academic discussions. Ethel Brooks provides insight into the epistemic privilege (as understood by Angela Kóczé, 2015) of a scholarship produced from a Romani standpoint. In a response to the above-mentioned discussion on EANRS, she wrote that,

> (…) It is really a question of self-ascription, but this is combined with the ascription that others give; hence the confusion, often, as to who is Roma. In many ways, the outside ascription has won here, where Roma becomes a stand-in for Gypsies in the older (dare I say gypsylorist?) sense. (…) It is important for us to engage these questions, but in the end, it is the complexity that I, as a Romani and as an academic, will hold onto. Growing up, I 'knew' what our relationship was to Roma and what our relationship was to Irish or Scottish Travellers. It was very clear and did not need debate. Again, the question is one of self-ascription. (…) In the eyes of outsiders, of course, we were (are) all Gypsies. Personally, I would rather not lose the complexity of self-ascription in the name of neatness. (Cited in Friedman and Friedman, 2015: 214-215).

In the face of the evident struggle over definitions and especially taking into consideration the polarization of these debates between Roma and non-Roma scholars, it is clear that, as a scientific field of inquiry, Romani Studies is at a crossroads. Overcoming this critical juncture will depend on the capacity of accommodating Romani voices rooted in a Romani subjectivity which, quite justifiably, assertively claim their authority as legitimate. A Romani standpoint or the "outsiders within" status of Romani scholars (Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2015) is thus necessary to navigate the contradictions and paradoxes of the heterogeneous, multi-faceted and eclectic range of Romani identity(s). As anti-essentialist approaches towards ethnicity are increasingly used and become increasingly rooted in Romani scholarship, relativism and the assumption of irreconcilable in-group heterogeneity might lead to diffusion of the concept of ethnicity altogether. Defending the existence of a Romani ethnicity as plural, hybrid, complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional will remain at the top of the academic and indeed, political agendas of Romani intellectuals. Thus, the answer may not lie in defining *the Romani ethnicity* but rather, in unravelling existing multiple Romani identities, that is, exploring the ways in which they are performed, lived, articulated and represented, and how these identities are linked and interact with each other.

Finally, academic knowledge produced by Romani scholars from within a Romani subjectivity and rooted in diverse Romani experiences, may help to forcefully challenge the notion of ethnic "authenticity" – of "the true Gypsy" – that is based on a concrete and "objective" set of fixed criteria. For

example, with regards to Indigenous communities, some scholars argue that "indigenous authenticity has deep roots within colonial racism (…) [and] regimes of biological and cultural authenticity continue to shape state policies and practices that regulate the everyday lives of Indigenous people around the world" (Harris, Carlson, and Poata-Smith, 2013: 1). Likewise, Jackson Jr., the African-American scholar, writing about the contemporary Black experience, denounces "authenticity's hegemony" (Jackson, 2005: 175). Similarly, the struggle to define "the authentic Roma" can be seen as a form of tyranny over the individual, in which exogenous and imposed "objective" criteria rule over the complexities of dynamic and subjective Romani experiences. The discourse of "authenticity", as Jackson Jr. suggests, can be opposed by the notion of "sincerity" (2005), and provides insight into a genuine experience of being and belonging. Potentially, the concept of "sincerity" opens up academic narratives on Romani identity to more plural, nuanced and contextual interpretations, which are more in-tune with the complex social realities of being a Roma in the contemporary world. The increasing salience of academic Romani voices might enable such shift from generalizing academic narratives on Roma towards ones rooted in subjectivity.

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