IN SEARCH OF A CONTEMPORARY ROMA IDENTITY: IN MEMORIAM - NICOLAE GHEORGHE

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Table of Contents

Introduction

DEZIDERIU GERGELY[1]

Nicolae Gheorghe was a very dear person, not only to me, but also to thousands of Romani people, Romani leaders and activists, diplomats and politicians. Sadly, he departed in 2013, but he left behind a strong, spiritual heritage of Roma activism.

Nicolae Gheorghe was an outstanding intellectual, diplomat, human rights defender and activist for so many of us in the Roma movement. He was an inspiration for me, among many others, while I was a lawyer at Romani CRISS, and acted as a mentor to many other Roma and non-Roma. He was an outstanding, driving force in the Roma movement, a strong personality and a fighter. I learned so much from being around him. Many of us were influenced and sometimes challenged by his passionate stance in the fight for human rights and Roma.

His legacy is seen in the following generations of Roma activists who continue to fight on, inspired by his example. Nicolae Gheorghe was a role model - he dedicated his entire life to fighting for the Roma cause and particularly for unity. He taught us that differences must unite us.

In 1993, he founded Romani CRISS, which became one of the leading Roma rights NGOs in Romania, as well as in Europe. In 1998 - 1999, he played a crucial role in establishing the Working Group of Roma Associations, bringing together Romani organisations from Romania to be equal partners with the Romanian government in creating the national strategy for Roma.

Nicolae Gheorghe continued his dedicated work for Roma rights as head of the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues in the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. From his terms in office, we learned how to make diplomacy on Roma issues work.

Nicolae Gheorghe was one of the most outstanding Romani leaders in Europe and a key figure in Roma political activism, not just for me, but for many of us. In 2013 we said goodbye with regret in our hearts - but also with the knowledge that the important work he started will continue.

Through its Roma Rights Journal the European Roma Rights Centre wishes to acknowledge the extensive contribution to the Roma cause achieved by Nicolae Gheorghe and to commemorate him as a dear person, an outstanding professional and a fighter for the Roma across Europe.

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1   Dezideriu Gergely is former Executive Director of the European Roma Rights Centre.

From Clienthood to Critique - The role of Nicolae Gheorghe as Mediator and Catalyst in the Roma Awakening

EDITED BY THOMAS ACTON AND ANDREW RYDER

A Report of a Seminar

In May 2014 an extended workshop took place celebrating and critically examining the intellectual, academic and political legacy of Nicolae Gheorghe. The event was organised under the auspices of the established and respected Romani activist Nicoleta Bitu who has been closely associated with the work of Romani CRISS, an NGO which Nicolae Gheorghe founded.[1] The workshop was convened in Budapest by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and the Pakiv European Fund[2] and included a number of critical and key thinkers in the struggle for Romani Emancipation.[3]

The debate was at times opaque, with the speakers obviously moved by the reverence for Nicolae and the emotion of the occasion, and thus keen to avoid unnecessary conflict. Almost all spoke within a paradigm that seemed to assume the right answers are out there somewhere, and the contributions of the different speakers can indeed, when fused, present a comprehensive intellectual position which could be the basis for united political action, and for securing effective policies from European institutions and national governments.

Nonetheless it is possible to observe from the transcripts tensions between two different critical methodologies and two different philosophical approaches. One methodology concentrates on asking who is at fault – who is to blame – for the failure of Romani politics to meet the heady aspirations that arose after 1989, while the other sees the alleged failures as learning experiences, part of an incremental progress in the development of an informed Romani civil society. One philosophy is grounded in the classical statist European tradition within which the state is the prime political actor, and influencing the state by wise and informed advice is the only effective political action. So, many of the speakers concentrated on forming the right advice to state and international organisations to "empower" and "facilitate the community action of" Roma, and on advising Roma how to act so as to gain the greatest benefit from the beneficent actions of the state. During the seminar, however, it was possible to observe a growing critique of this paradigm, suggesting that the actions of the state are fairly predictable, and hard to change, being determined by whatever coalition of interest groups forms the government; and therefore creating self-help organisations, which try to position themselves within winning political coalitions which can take power, is a better long-term strategy.

These positions are not, however, starkly opposed to one another. They are embedded in layers of compromise with other participants, and often oblique references to past debates in which Nicolae Gheorghe was a leading figure. Critical reflection on the progress of Roma civil society has been prompted by the memories of the development of international Romani civil society since the first World Romani Congress in 1971, first in the late Cold War era, when Romani political action under Soviet socialism had to masquerade as mainly cultural, folkloric activity (the economic projects of the early Soviet period having largely fallen away), and then in the burst of freedom which followed the collapse of the Soviet Union after 1991, when the Romani intelligentsias formed under communism thought that their time had come, and that they could bring the relatively uneducated and often still nomadic communities in Western Europe along with them.

1   The Romani CRISS organisation (the Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies) is an NGO which defends and promotes the rights of Roma in Romania and was founded in 1993. More information is available at: **http://www.romanicriss.org/en/**.

2   The Pakiv European Roma Fund was a civic organisation operating in four countries that promoted the development of Roma civil society and intercultural understanding in the context of democratic, social, and economic rights. (Pakiv means trust, respect, and confidence in the Romani language). More information is available at: **http://www.freudenbergstiftung.de/en/activities-a-z/integration-society/pakiv-budapest.html**.

3   Participants included Iulius Rostas, Visiting Lecturer at the Corvinus University Budapest, Zeljko Jovanovic, Director of Roma Initiatives Office at the Open Society Foundations (OSF), Dezideriu Gergely, OSCE/ODIHR Consultant and former Executive Director of the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), Costel Bercus, CMC Consultant and former Chair of the Roma Education Fund (REF), Ágnes Daróczi, Roma activist and Vice-President of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF), Nadir Redzepi, Making the Most of EU Funds (OSF), Dan Doghi, REF, Gábor Daróczi, Director of Romaversitas, András Bíró formerly of the Autonómia Foundation and the NEKI, Andrzej Mirga formerly with OSCE/ODIHR Senior Advisor on Roma and Sinti Issues, Rudko Kawczynski, President of the ERTF, and Stephan Müller and Marek Szilvasi, ERRC.

Nicolae Gheorghe was active in both of these eras. When many of the intellectuals formed in the communist era fell by the wayside he and a number of others, including the older generation at this seminar, adapted to the new situation and were lionised for the independence of mind they had shown under communism by the new younger elites sponsored by western foundations like the Project on Ethnic Relations and the Carnegie Foundation and Soros's Open Society Foundations, dominated by émigré Eastern Europeans. Nicolae Gheorghe, who had studied under the great European anthropologist Henri H. Stahl, had a broad and eclectic education which put him at ease in the whole spectrum of European intellectual discourses, and in a position to draw on them at will in influencing Romani civil society.

To understand why Nicolae had such vision, it is worth explaining the stature of Henri H. Stahl. Unlike the racist Western "social anthropologists" who weaved ahistorical ideological myths about kinship and "witchcraft" to serve the purposes of their imperialist sponsors, Stahl[4] matched detailed fieldwork in villages with real Hoskins-style archives-and-a-pair-of-stout-boots local history and the theory derived from Marx, Weber and Durkheim to show the legacies of indirect Ottoman rule, neo-feudalism, serfdom and slavery through the prism of the surviving institutions of the few mountain villages which had not been reduced to serfdom by the boyars.[5] Where Gypsylorists have theorised Vlach Roma societies as an Indian "race" in conflict with Western "civilisation", Stahl shows us real people living, working, interacting and surviving over several hundred years. To try to understand the roots of the *kris* without reading Stahl on village assemblies is to risk substituting prejudice for knowledge about both Roma and Romanians. From Stahl, Nicolae gained a broad understanding of European social scientific traditions. He was astonishingly well-read, often of texts not readily available in Ceausescu's Romania. His understanding of Marxist methods of socio-economic analysis was not vitiated by the degraded economistic Marxism of Leninism and Stalinism; Marxism for him was not an identity, but a tool to be used alongside other structural and functional theories of agency.

Behind the positions put forward in this seminar there lie swathes of intellectual history. To explain the transcripts fully to the new generation of Romani youth who have gone through mainstream education would take pages of footnotes to show the genealogy of ideas the veterans deploy in fencing with each other. The arguments are often partial, *ad hominem*, and strategic within this small group who share so many unstated experiences and histories of past debates and conflicts. In places, this report quotes *verbatim* major set-piece interventions by some participants; in other places it necessarily presents a critical summary of the main lines of the debate as they emerge from the transcripts.

There was a sense at the seminar that this is a time in which the baton is passing to a new generation. The tectonic plates of the established order seem to be shifting and it is apt that Nicolae should somehow play the role of both mediator and catalyst in a process which could be termed a Roma Awakening, a time of critical and profound questioning but also challenge and opposition, creating a flux out of which a new Romani Movement for the 21st century might be born.[6] The great hope and optimism as to the gains that could be made through the mobilisation of a Romani Movement have to some extent evaporated and given way to a sense of apprehension in some quarters. The question of evaluating gains made and whether there is a need for reorientation was a central topic of inquiry for Nicolae Gheorghe in his reflective final years. These stirrings and reflections seem to have energised new challenges to centres of power, political institutions and decision-makers, Roma civil society and academia. The publication of *From Victimhood to Citizenship* was timely for it gave a platform to Nicolae to express these challenges which chime with the wider mood referred to above.[7] Of course as with other moments of social change, repression, "sell outs" and superficial compromises may subvert revolutionary ire, but in this journey Nicolae may be a useful guide and inspiration on the path to emancipation.

Dezideriu Gergely opened the seminar by declaring that the aim was to reflect on Nicolae's ideas and his contribution to the Romani Movement, underlining the breadth of his

4   H. H. Stahl, *Traditional Romanian Village Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

5   *Ibid.*

6   In a paper which helped shape the discussion workshop the term Roma awakening was used to describe a growing critical consciousness. Others have even used the term Roma Spring to describe a new assertiveness amongst Roma activists and researchers to challenge forms of paternalism, misrecognition and exclusion which serve to disempower.

7   Will Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship: The Path of Roma Integration* (Budapest: Kossuth Publishing Corporation, 2013).

intellectual approach. He recollected *"[…] what I remember while I was working at Romani CRISS with him, calling us at 2 am or 3 am in the morning, sometimes even 5 am, to change the agenda of the conferences because he had other ideas and he wanted us to do something else or more. […] We were sometimes mad with him. He was giving us ten ideas per second and I think he was absolutely unbelievable in terms of his thinking and in terms of what he managed to do".* Nicolae's propensity to stimulate and provoke ideas is needed now more than ever by the Romani Movement. András Biró echoed the portrait of Nicolae as a catalyst: *"The commitment to serve the 'wretched of the earth' was part of his extraordinary strength and inner energy which characterised his activism in the Roma movement as well. Gramsci's concept of the 'organic intellectual' is perfectly suiting him.[8] He was not only endowed with a solid sociological knowledge but had a special gift for communicating his thoughts, as a sort of an idea wizard. So many ideas were streaming out of his brain that this overflow was often difficult to be domesticated. The last months of life denoted an admirable courage combined with a frenetic activism across frontiers. You may excuse my exaggeration, but I am convinced that there was undoubtedly a touch of genius in Nicolae with his volcanic energy and refined sensibilities".*

But though Nicolae may be seen as in some sense an organic Romani intellectual, he also saw himself as somewhat in the role of what the renowned community educator and philosopher Paolo Freire termed a critical outsider; in other words, a catalyst or external educator who helps the oppressed on a journey of critical consciousness to identify the cause of their oppression and form strategies that can deliver transformative change.[9] In this role of the critical educator Nicolae was able to draw not only on his background within a middle-class Romanian Roma family, but a vast range of experience. Nonetheless he had mused: "Maybe I am not a 'true' Rom because I have been assimilated through my education and occupational trajectory

because I did not live in keeping with Roma values and I also had a non-Roma wife. I grew up as part of a group in which Romani was not spoken as a first language, my relatives did not live in extended families and my parents did not follow traditional occupations. Previous generations of my family were already deeply integrated into the social life and economy of their villages."[10]

What also made Nicolae an extraordinary catalyst was that he more than many other Roma leaders knew the corridors of power through his career highpoint roles at ODIHR/OSCE,[11] but was able to combine this with grounded experience of Roma grassroots communities through his work with Romani CRISS in Romania. In these diverging roles, whether as a diplomat or community activist, he often played the role of mediator trying to forge bridges and understanding between the Roma and non-Roma, and between the officials (bureaucrats, politicians) and activists (Romani leaders and human and minority rights and social inclusion NGOs). The need for dialogue and deliberation remains a much-needed component of Romani emancipation. Nicolae's range of insights and experiences coupled with the fact that he was a leading voice and shaper of the Romani Movement in Europe again equips and qualifies him as a key voice in the ongoing period of reflection, but more importantly, reorientation.

In one of his last pieces of writing before his death Nicolae wrote "The time has come to suggest some serious changes in civil society". In this quest he noted there was a need to go beyond political correctness and challenge assumptions of liberal human rights discourse which in part should touch upon "risky" or "touchy" issues.[12] Nicolae did not disappoint - in the extended chapter in the book *From Victimhood to Citizenship* he pondered on topics such as why Roma civil society had not

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8   Traditional intellectuals were characterised by Karl Mannheim as "free-floating", disinterested and motivated only by reason and truth rather than class or sectarian interests. In contrast Gramsci presented organic intellectuals as formed by, and therefore advocates of the interests of their class. Gramsci asserted traditional intellectuals were in fact just the organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie, unable to see past the hegemony of bourgeois ideology, unlike the organic intellectuals of the insurrectionary class. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

9   Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin UK, 1972).

10 Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship*, 49.

11 The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) activities cover a wide range of security issues from conflict prevention to fostering economic development, ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources and promoting the full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

    The ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights), located within the OSCE provides support, assistance and expertise to participating States and civil society to promote democracy, rule of law, human rights and tolerance and non-discrimination. More information is available at: **http://www.osce.org/odihr**.

12 Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship*, 41.

achieved its objectives, criminality amongst Roma communities and the oppression that comes with narrow interpretations of tradition. Some of the views Nicolae propounded did not meet with universal support but we cannot deny the fact that even at the very end of his life and in death Nicolae still has the power to prompt debate and reflection. Despite the opposition his views might arouse and the danger of being misinterpreted and/or even inadvertently giving succour to the enemies of the Roma, Nicolae demonstrated a sense of courage and bravery that was the hallmark of his life. Much of the discussion at the two-day ERRC seminar reflected upon and dissected the points Nicolae raised in his pivotal book chapter but also extended those thoughts. At the start of the seminar Zeljko Jovanovic rationalised the need not only to reflect but to look ahead: *"I would like to deploy not only reflection, but also imagination. How our imagination works for the future, not just to analyse the last twenty years, but to imagine the next twenty years…I think he would appreciate also disagreement, not only worship".*

At the start of the seminar Andrzej Mirga also reflected on the life of Nicolae and mapped out potential themes and parameters of discussion. He noted: *"Nicolae challenged me with one thing, whether we need to forge a new language and discourse on Roma or are we somehow in retreat. Nicolae seemed to be saying the way to do it is to tackle controversial issues like migration and crime, marginality, begging, early marriages and for this to be part of the price paid by responsible leaders…The other is the need to discuss the common aim for the Roma movement or Roma mobilisation or even a need for re-mobilisation and whether we can be like, for example the Black movement, in its fight for civil rights and human rights. For me, it is more about modernising the Roma community itself, instead of just fighting against discrimination. Because having this as a sole objective means, we are falling into a trap that Nicolae described as the victimisation complex. We need to go beyond the perspective of victimhood and discrimination and tackle real, practical and organic issues of how to modernise the community because we are still trapped with the issue of marginalised communities, excluded communities where nothing functions, nothing is organised and we are trapped in this."* These themes and questions feature prominently in the edited discussion.

Identity and Marginalisation

Ágnes Daróczi commented on the centrality of Roma culture in any Romani politics of identity: *"We are always being used as tools. We are only tools to get more power and to own the political power. […] It is the same with political parties and also many times with academics. What do we have? […] If you search for this fundamental question, we have identity."* Ágnes went on to discuss Roma culture and identity as a resource which can help lead Roma out of their marginalised existence, providing strategies, solidarity and support. Various participants referred to Nicolae's engagement with these sentiments, the idea that culture and identity could provide the foundations for new collective coping mechanisms. This conceptualisation was evident in Nicolae's work in the 1990s with Pakiv, Autonómia Foundation[13] and Romani CRISS which sought to develop an organisational culture combining modern democratic principles with traditional cultural patterns of Roma communities. Through the promotion of microcredit and bottom-up grassroots approaches, Nicolae hoped to base such inclusive conceptions of community development on Roma traditions such as *phralipe* (brotherhood) which can be equated with solidarity. As Nicolae noted "In fact our goal was not to conserve these pre-modern features but to work with them as assets, on the one hand for building confidence in relation to mainstream society".[14]

Nicolae realised that inclusive community development does not adopt a "deficit model" of the excluded or deem cultural difference to be a weakness, but instead sees it as an asset upon which new survival strategies can be built to enable communities to be autonomous.[15] It is a conception which is in tune with the principles of asset-based community development.[16] In supporting forms of inclusive community development in the 1990s Nicolae revealed his belief that culture and identity should not be static and rigid but, on the contrary, dynamic phenomena nurturing innovation. The visionary power of Nicolae was also evident in the promotion of such inclusive community projects, which have been utilised with great effect to counter poverty in India and Brazil.[17]

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13   Autonómia Foundation is a development and grant-giving organisation established in Hungary 1990, which mainly focused on microcredit and labour market integration schemes for Roma. More information is available at: **http://autonomia.hu/en**.

14   Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship,* 96.

15   G. Craig, M. Mayo, K. Popple et al., *The Community Development Reader: History, Themes and Issues* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2011).

16   Asset-based approaches to community development appreciate and mobilise individual and community talents, skills and assets which can include social and cultural assets. Tara O'Leary, *Asset Based Approaches To Rural Community Development: Literature review and resources* (Carnegie UK Trust, 2005). It is also community-led development rather than driven by external agencies – see Peter Henderson and Ilona Verscseg, *Community Development and Civil Society* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2010)..

17   M. Ledwith, and J. Springett, *Participatory Practice: Community Based Action for Transformative Change* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2010).

However, here Nicolae seemed to express an element of regret with regards to his legacy, for many of the young trainees involved in the capacity-building work of Pakiv failed to return to their communities and use their newly-acquired skills to rejuvenate local communities. Instead many opted for well-paid positions in the emerging transnational pro-Roma civil society.[18] In the seminar concern was expressed that the idealism that Nicolae tried to impress on the youth of the Roma elite was evaporating. Dezideriu Gergely noted *"I would make a comparison with the young Roma generation and at least in my experience I do not necessarily see the voluntary-driven motives for doing something in return for the community […] I remember when we were working at Romani CRISS in 2000, we worked for a few dollars and we worked night and day, we protested on the streets and we didn't have salaries for days. We were young but we had a belief. Today, I think that many Roma graduating from universities and schools are immediately looking for jobs as a sole purpose. It is normal to look for a job but then they really disconnect from the communities if they do not do anything for them because they say: 'Now I have graduated from university, I have to work for Roma civil society' so they are more oriented to career development than community development or the fight for Roma rights"*. Marek Szilvasi echoed these concerns about disconnection by recounting how a number of young international Roma graduates organised a Roma Nation Day event in a fancy downtown venue in Budapest *"I went to the Roma quarter of the city and people did not even know that something like this was happening. I went there with leaflets saying this is your Roma Nation Day; they did not even know that there is such a day"*. The grounded and inclusive form of community development Nicolae advocated would no doubt have led to him countenancing the organisation of a party in the Roma quarter itself rather than a fancy hotel and would have mobilised community interest and awareness not just in a celebration of culture but also in fusion with a discussion of the concerns and worries of those at the margins.

Nicolae also feared that some at the margins were using conservative forms of identity as a tool to reverse exclusion but in a way which promoted oppressive behaviours. Nicolae noted *"in this new situation, we cling to traditional survival techniques; this can undermine and harm our relationship with others. If we do this, the cost is remaining socially excluded even though there are now few opportunities for us to be accepted. […] Traditional survival techniques continue in reinvented forms in migration and welfare-dependency."*[19] He continued: *"The clan structure can help in finding accommodation but these forms of social capital can also be exploited in the informal labour markets through human trafficking, begging and other semi or illegal activities. These developments, even if unintended reinforce stereotypes about the high crime rates of Roma."*[20]

András Biró echoed this concern by quoting Lenin saying: *"misery doesn't revolutionise"*, and added that *"neither does it democratise, thus I completely agree with the dismal social state of the Roma mentioned, and consider it a big obstacle to their mobilisation. I find that the extreme poverty – particularly in the villages where the bulk of the Roma live – is the main reason of the spreading of the slum culture. Slums are everywhere connected to violence, drugs, mafia, killings etc. There is no more rule of law and in the slums the role model, the hero, is the one who holds a gun"*.

Nicolae was sometimes scathing of Roma human rights activists for not adequately acknowledging or confronting such oppressive behaviour. His critics retorted that he was echoing middle-class moralising criticisms, a "moral underclass discourse," by stressing an agenda of *responsibilisation*.[21] However, we should not forget that he did accept that poverty and structural inequalities accentuated by the global financial crisis were major dynamics in the maintenance of traditional coping strategies. He also acknowledged that some have been successful in maintaining traditional practices and finding new economic niches: "Understanding how Roma utilise social and cultural capital is crucial if we intend to reorient their use for integration into mainstream society. Otherwise Roma might remain trapped in the informal economy which in some cases could mean criminal activities."[22] Working out a coherent narrative on how the present financial order connects to Roma exclusion and how culture and tradition can be reoriented to act as instruments to provide protection and redress remain important, yet unresolved, topics of concerns for the Roma Movement. Nicolae's mutualist and grounded vision of inclusive community and asset based development may remain a potent alternative to social and cultural injustice.

18   Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship*, 97.

19   *Ibid.*, 61.

20   *Ibid.*, 85.

21   *Ibid.*, 48.

22   *Ibid.*, 62.

Participants drew attention to how Nicolae's political apprenticeship in the communist state of Romania imbued him with a strong sense of cosmopolitanism and how, after the changes of 1989, he embraced the internationalism of the Roma diaspora.[23] Nicolae often presented the Romani diaspora as a kind of nation which is not homogeneous but resembles a mosaic of varied colours. However he opposed building a 19th or 20th century ethno-nationalism for Roma; for him such nation-building, based on separatism, could lead to territorial claims and be divisive. The conception of Roma identity, in particular at a European level has been an important source of debate within the Romani Movement. András Biró expressed some scepticism: *"My fundamental question is: is there anything called Roma consciousness, which we can generalise as an overall concept? A movement without a clearly defined identity and goals — undoubtedly a complex task in the case of the Roma — should be, as I see it, the fundamental topic of debate and reflection which could then answer the question of a continent-wide strategy. Of course I have neither the capacity nor the legitimacy to try to formulate such an answer, but Nicolae's thoughts in this respect deserve to be taken seriously"*. The thoughts Nicolae held on identity, consciousness and mobilisation were discussed more fully by participants in a debate over how the Romani Movement should best organise. In that discussion a vision of cosmopolitanism expressed through a Roma sense of solidarity but built upon the politics of grassroots activism is strongly evident.

Organisation at the Grassroots and the Pedagogy of Hope

Participants showed awareness that Nicolae was often critical of the continuing power of the domineering king or traditional big boss, the *bulibasa* or *vajda*, who in some cases he perceived as being corrupt and lacking democratic transparency.[24] But he also suggested that the fact some NGOs did not manage to establish the trust of the grassroots was leading to the reinvention of the authority of these traditional leaders.[25] Iulius Rostas commented on the rigidity and oppressive behaviour that can be found at the margins of society and referred to discussions he had with Nicolae: *"Nicolae and I discussed the following challenge: how to democratise a community that is deeply undemocratic, where there is*

no equality of any kind inside the community, by using democratic means and tools. Sometimes even we, as Roma activists, use the same power language, trying to impose our will by declaring: 'We should respect this! You should respect that! You should respect women because of gender balance! You should not do that because this is against human rights!' Moreover, some of us are coming up with sophisticated arguments based on human rights, but somehow we are losing the meanings and the language of democracy. In a community that is not only deeply 'undemocratic' we use the wrong assumptions. We assume that our language and means are better than that of the community but we have to consider the opinions from the other side. If I were a traditional Roma leader and some Roma activist would come to me and tell me what to do, that I have to change everything from tomorrow, that I should change my traditions because they are not in line with the modern times, I would say, 'People, you are coming to me with nonsense!' We have some traditions and customs that ensured our survival in a hostile environment for hundreds of years, these means we used were very successful, why should I change something that is successful? What guarantees can you offer me that the changes you propose will lead to a better life for my community?' We, as Roma activists, do not have an answer to these questions."*

For Nicolae the answer to that question had been strong and transparent local community organisations (NGOs). Costel Bercus describes this crusade to mobilise: *"He was the man that was always questioning the leadership of whomever; he was always challenging them through his ideas. I remember, once he was a little bit, I would not say drunk, but he was drinking a couple of bottles of wine, with his friend, an important traditional leader, and the leader asked him: 'Nicolae, you make me crazy, you have to tell me, what do you want?', because the man did not understand and he was confused. Nicolae said: 'You know what I want. To see that in each Roma family there would be an NGO'. The civil society that we have today in many countries is also part of his legacy, he was contributing in one way or another, making people act. When he saw mediators, he said 'What about establishing an NGO so then we can work together, I cannot work with you as an individual but once you have an NGO I can'. He himself contributed to this 'undemocratic' civil society."*

Dezideriu Gergely also referred to the boom in interest in NGOs which Nicolae triggered by reflecting on Nicolae's commonly voiced aspiration: "I want one thousand NGOs, for each family, to have an NGO, a mushroom strategy". According to Gergely, *"this comes to his idea of partnerships and*

23 *Ibid.,* 50.

24 *Ibid.,* 84.

25 *Ibid.,* 86.

I think that the point which Nicolae had was not only about the process and the structure, but was exactly about the institutionalised process of participation, and I think that his thinking was more about forming the Roma self-consciousness about the need that, as an individual, as a community, without an institutional approach or entering into partnership with someone you cannot act, you cannot overcome, you cannot go beyond your situation". However, Gergely also reflected on the seeds of the failure of the NGO boom rooted in proceduralism and disconnection - in other words excessive bureaucracy and being out of touch with the grassroots: *"This NGO boom, if I can call it this, lots of Roma took a rather formalistic approach to it. Because there were such high hopes, Roma were thinking: 'if I have an NGO, I am somehow in the game or if I have an NGO, money will somehow come.' This thinking is still out there in some cases. […] I think what Nicolae meant was not the formality but the process, a self-participatory process where you establish yourself and you have a constituency and you participate but through a meaningful process."* Nadir Redzepi echoed this sentiment about disconnection: *"The Roma elite are still trying to behave as the Gadje elite towards their constituencies. This is wrong because borrowed models from Gadje do not work in our reality. We have to be much more original on how we are going to legitimise our role as an elite because without a constituency the next generations of the Roma elite will not be able to produce any radical change."*

These discussions recalled Nicolae's own reflections on the failure of civil society: "[i]n my role as lobbyist and consultant, I saw how Roma civic associations gradually lost their moral autonomy and organisational capacity and became dependent clients or protected customers of their paymasters".[26] He further added that "[b]ureaucratised NGOs resemble dinosaurs with heavy armour plating, so even if trying to act radically they can only move slowly, unlike smaller, more agile actors. The leadership of such organisations have to discard opportunism, focus on their constituencies and become accountable."[27] To this end Nicolae hoped Roma NGOs would become self-help groups which were not reliant on donors, returning to grassroots community development.[28] In their discussion of the effect on their own learning that Nicolae had, participants' words bring to mind the words of Paolo Freire about the pedagogy of hope: "[w]ithout a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle but without the struggle, hope, as an ontological need, dissipates, loses its bearing and turns into hopelessness. And hopelessness can become tragic despair. Hence the need for a kind of education of hope […] One of the tasks of the progressive educator, through a serious correct political analysis, is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be."[29]

Nicolae had also suggested that faith leaders do not depend on NGO projects or agendas for a constituency even where they give support to them: "I almost envy these leaders and also feel challenged, since they are amongst the few whose followers are real rather than fictive."[30] Costel Bercus commented on the inquisitiveness that Nicolae had as to how faith leaders could mobilise and connect at the grassroots: *"Religion does play a critical role in what we call community mobilising, religious leaders are much more effective in community organising than community organisers coming from the rights movement. I remember Nicolae was, I wouldn't say jealous, but he was always trying to find answers, to find the ingredient. How it works and why they are much more successful? […] So, from my side as far as I remember the discussions and talks we had over time with Nicolae, religion plays a critical role. Roma, generally, are strong believers. So they are not people without belief. The problem is, we, the leaders of civil society, as those who are disconnected in many ways, failing to 'get out our message' and reaching the heart of our people… we haven't learnt the lessons. I was once in northern Transylvania going to a church gathering and the priest there acknowledged our presence and he invited us to speak. Now how to deliver our message? That was a challenge, how to tell the people about discrimination, violation of rights and so on? How to translate what we have been through? I know Nicolae was searching for the answer for so many years. I was amazed sometimes, late in the evening talking with him about religion. […] He was searching for the answer".*

Andrzej Mirga recalled being invited to Roma churches and how he was astounded by the rapid growth in the organised Roma church across the world, but he had hesitations: *"My impression was that one of the characteristics of all of these communities and churches is that they are very conservative and the church helps them to remain conservative. And if you go to Western European countries you hardly find educated Roma among these communities, and this is a kind of challenge which worries me."*

26   *Ibid.,* 79.

27   *Ibid.,* 80.

28   *Ibid.,* 60, 99.

29   Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope. Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York: Continuum, 1995).

Other participants at the workshop expressed some apprehension about the influence of religion. Nadir Redzepi stated "*I am Roma and a Muslim…For me it is clear that in many periods stigma (about the Roma) was formed by the church but is also coming from the Islamic religion. Even now if you go to Muslim countries you will witness the acute marginalisation of Roma/Domari communities*". In addition Marek Szilvasi commented "*[t]he church has at times persuaded the poor and those at the bottom of society to accept their situation as fate, nurturing acceptance, passivity and an inclination not to fight and accept things the way they are. That is another reason why some of these churches are not so helpful to Roma communities.*"

Helping to conclude a thread of discussion in the workshop which was centred on religion Andrzej Mirga noted "*[a]ll the religions we are talking about, whether it is Muslim, Protestant, Catholic or the growing Roma churches, they are still different from the black churches in the United States. They were contributing, not only to organising their community but also to building an agenda for the human rights movement. Several times I visited churches in black communities. In order to get educated future leaders they were collecting money as a church, to send one person to university who would after that become a lawyer who fights for their rights. We are not in such a mood or stage, where Roma churches perform this kind of function. Why is this a challenging point? Because Roma are ready to give money to the church, but there is no idea or notion to use this money to build up a Roma intelligentsia who will fight for the Roma community.*" On the other hand, some would make reference to the work of faith leaders like Pastor Lars Demetri in Sweden and Pastor Stevo Athanasiou of the London Gypsy Church in England and their advocacy of grounded and community action programmes centred around religion. It is evident though that as with civil society there is much scope for faith groups to reassess and re-evaluate their work with Roma communities.[31]

In his search for a pedagogy of hope Nicolae longed for a greater sense of fraternity, *phralipe* amongst the different sections of the Romani Movement. He argued "[a] main challenge facing Roma activists today is moving beyond their cluster-like mentalities and practices, which can hinder further development of the movement as a whole. In order to become more effective and influential, the Roma movement needs to become more like a church, or churches, instead of a group of dogmatic sects, which although intolerant of their rivals are nevertheless very similar to them."[32] Andrzej Mirga agreed with this point: "*First of all, before we start to look for building some bridges and look for some partners for the Roma movement, which also means the outside world - we have to see how we work among ourselves and whether we are able to form solidarity among ourselves for a common cause. Sometimes I think, this is our weak point, in that we are not able to, as Nicolae said we are not that church which incorporates differences, different positions sometimes antagonistic - but nevertheless, we are a church. We are together and we have some common objective and aim to go further. So we are still a sect and leaders of the sect, so the question is how to construct solidarity first among us, and then see who the partners are for us from outside.*"

Ágnes Daróczi assessed the value of Roma civil society and how a sense of fraternity needed to be revived "*Phralipe*[33] *was well-organised, with respected Roma who were getting their respect because they represented not only their own interest, but those of the community. They were strong personalities. As the next paradigm of civil society came, they became sheep, they cared about their own survival and not community interests. So, this is a very dangerous way - always using other techniques and methods. We have to analyse our own. See the situation now, as the Roma are using those organisations for survival and they are thinking of their own families' survival and they don't open their eyes more. They are not able to learn that their own survival depends on unity, common demonstrations and culture.*"

Although acknowledging the value of organisations, Iulius Rostas was concerned about the notion of one or two strong Roma voices or structures; instead he recognised the value of plurality. For Rostas plurality "*does not mean that when it comes to important issues of human rights, which affect our community, we cannot get together. But this call for unity is something that I cannot get: we are very diverse as a community but we want to speak with one voice!*" In a reference to Nicolae's work in promoting small localised NGOs and accusations of fragmenting the Romani Movement, Rostas commented "*Nicolae was conscious of the consequences of having just one organisation: no pluralism in ideas for policies and no internal democracy. Nicolae had his own experience with the communist party, he had the knowledge of how these structures work, and he knew what to expect from*

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30   Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship,* 84

31   Lars Demetri is an established Roma activist and pastor in Sweden who currently sits on the management board of the European Roma and Travellers Forum.

32   Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship,* 79.

33   Here she is referring to a particular Hungarian Romani organisation of the 1980s, not a generalised sense of fraternity.

such structures. Setting up multiple organisations meant for him having pluralism and some democracy inside this community. Although many Roma leaders blamed Nicolae for dividing the Roma minority, in the end Nicolae was right because, among other things, democracy is more than speaking with one voice."

Acknowledging the need to resist the temptation to formalise the Romani struggle into a codified narrative or set of simplified goals, Nadir Redzepi called for the diversity and complexity of social movements to be recognised: "On the movement, I think the global or common goal is to make (build) it still. We have shifted several development stages in 40 years which clearly indicates that we should not have one single goal. If we look at the history of different movements, they started with different interests and needs. You cannot define your final goal because many complex forces and uncertainties shape the forms and actions within the movement. So, it is something that is evolving, dynamic in its life, and, I hope that we are heading in a good direction, and that the next generations will take much more responsibility than us." For Redzepi this process of reflection and reorientation would entail identifying where and how Roma marginalisation connects with wider global trends such as the ongoing financial crisis.

Although not an advocate of monopolisation or organisational rigidity Nicole did countenance forms of alliance and federation-building, at the local, national and European level. At the European level Nicolae seemed to express mounting frustrations with narrow nation-building agendas within the Romani Movement and the growing disconnection between a narrow political elite and those they professed to represent: "[a]s a former club member I now appear a heretic for challenging prevailing orthodoxy by suggesting a more genuine, credible and legitimate type of Roma representation. This is the form my activism takes nowadays."[34] Elsewhere he added: "Today I am more sceptical about encouraging talented Roma to seek international posts instead of working at national and particularly at local level. This is because I believe the next stage, in the development of the Roma movement and for those involved, is to reconnect with the people we represent. […] Instead of acting as a Roma ambassador in Strasbourg or elsewhere and

duplicating previous successes, the ERTF[35] must become an umbrella organisation supporting local groups."[36]

Despite his criticisms of civil society Nicolae was not despondent, for he rationalised that the Roma civic movement was still in its formative stage and lacked a code of conduct for alliances and partnerships between different actors.[37] Costel Bercus also felt that the discussion needed to be placed in a wider context: "Maybe we are too critical with ourselves from this point of view because we have higher expectations and we need to meet all standards which are met in mainstream society. We have a very young democracy in Central Eastern Europe in the way our institutions and governmental institutions are not acting democratically as they should do, in the way our political class is not so democratic. […] So what do we expect from ourselves?"

Power, Politics and Empowerment

Ágnes Daróczi graphically detailed the nature of Roma exclusion: "In speaking about organisations and foundations, we must not forget that we are used by the state for implementation, so they are never thinking about democracy [or expecting us] to be part of it from the very beginning, from the planning to the implementation, and control phase." For Ágnes there was a need for Roma to draw lessons and demonstrate agency and empowerment in the policies that impact upon their lives. András Biró was also dispirited as to how meaningful the gains had been from the democratic process: "After a quarter of a century of the democratic setup in Central Eastern Europe the situation of Roma has worsened in practically all aspects. Their votes are often sold for peanuts. Why is it that among thousands of villages in our countries it is only in a few where Roma mayors have been elected even when Roma constituencies were often numerically superior to the majority? Why is it that Roma MPs in the respective parliaments have not managed to influence effective government policies vis-à-vis Roma exclusion?" In this respect Gábor Daróczi raised a provocative series of questions: "Do we have a Roma movement either political or non-political? I am not really sure. Secondly, did we do anything in order to have a clear Roma political movement? My answer is no. The reason is that all of us were too shy to do this. We talk about a Roma NGO movement, Roma self-organisation, Roma everything, but there is not any explicit targeting towards the political."

34 Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship,* 77.

35 Nicolae played an active role in negotiating with the International Romani Union (IRU) and the Roma National Congress (RNC) to forge a reconciliation, an outcome of which was the ERTF. However, Nicolae became concerned about the failure to establish a more democratic spirit within the forum.

36 Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship,* 78.

37 *Ibid.,* 61.

For Nicolae an important component of grassroots mobilisation was political engagement and participation. As he noted: "Present-day states, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, Romania included, are states where real political power is held by a dominant ethnic majority: the Hungarians in Hungary, the ethnic Romanians in Romania, the Serbians in Serbia, etc. That is why the promotion of Roma interests can only be done by taking part in the competition for the distribution of political power."[38] In relation to this aspiration Dan Doghi reflected on Nicolae's project 'Roma use your ballot wisely!': *"Nicolae always recognised the value and the importance of politics in pushing the agenda and setting the basis to accomplish more. Although he was more on the other side - working initially for civil society as a human rights activist, denouncing racism, discrimination and injustice and being a strong advocate for the human rights and rights of Roma as citizens - he always recognised how important politics is, and he tried many times and with many initiatives to stimulate the interest of Roma and their awareness, down to the very local level, of the importance of politics, and how being involved in politics may allow Roma to exercise and benefit more of their rights. The 'Roma use your ballot wisely' project expanded for several years, it was mostly implemented in South Eastern Europe with the Balkan countries, and it involved awareness-raising, information campaigns, voter education campaigns, involving small Roma NGOs getting together, to mobilise, to build coalitions, to train domestic election observers, to go out and vote, to educate Roma how to (technically) vote correctly; we organised dozens of OSCE side events on this topic."* Doghi concluded by contemplating whether the ethnic Roma vote is as powerful as some envisage and whether it could be the Roma's trump card and the way to succeed. In turn this raises the question of whether Roma should participate in mainstream or separate ethnic identity political parties. These are questions which the following section of the report deals with.

Zeljko Jovanovic reflected on his belief that some of the rhetoric of activism as utilised by Nicolae was becoming redundant: *"In my view, one of the major disagreements I have had and I still have with Nicolae is language; he was also saying let's change the language, but he was not changing his of framing activists, he was extensively using the language of activists. Those who were his followers were mostly using the language of activists and activism, I think, that term is worn out, it tends to mean a person who wanders around, is very passionate, not professional and not always best articulated. Secondly, it is about individuals, activism as such does not highlight the value of collective power, and it doesn't bring much to the field because everybody claims to be an activist these days, so that term is overused because* it is loaded with many different terms. If we talk about leadership, we usually speak about leaders, we don't speak about leadership as a relationship between people who take responsibility for initiatives and the community itself, and 'activism' or 'activist' doesn't help, it doesn't speak about the community and the relationship between the activist and the community. So, I would start with speaking about that kind of relationship, between an individual who takes up a public role, who takes also public space and who asserts himself or herself in a public domain for the public good. So, leadership, in that sense, as a collective power and individuals being catalysts of collective action, is to me an interesting point for discussion. Analysing activism and activists and continuing with them might remove, I think, our sight and our view on the main prize. In my view, the main prize is political organisation and organising. I am not talking about mobilisation because it is usually euphoric, one off and so on. I am speaking about political organising, in which there are rules, in which organisations are places where people come, and organisations are where people strategize, where people feel politically and intellectually independent."*

In offering a vision as to how the language and meaning of political engagement could be re-orientated Jovanovic though, in fact, did not differ too greatly from Nicolae in the sense that he saw civil society as playing a foundational role in political mobilisation: Zeljko Jovanovic further commented: *"I would rather follow the model of NGOs like the African National Congress. They were constituted as a political party but they were formally speaking an NGO, and they were involving masses in the internal democratic process. [...] So to me, when we speak about NGOs we shouldn't be bound by what NGOs are today but how they ought to be in the future, in order to use the formality of that structure. Because that is not the only or the major structure in which we can practice democracy, accountability, human resources management, anything, we don't have a state in which we can practice that. If we fail to practice it in civil society, then we fail in partnership-building and everything else."* Although Jovanovic supported the creation of one or two structures and Nicolae talked about thousands of NGOs, Nicolae supported federal structures which could create a sense of unity and common platforms and stressed the importance of democratic dynamics in the Romani Movement, principles which Jovanovic aspired to in the ANC-type structures he envisaged.

In some countries Roma have followed divergent strategies either trying to work through mainstream parties or forming separate ethnic-based parties. Nadir Redzepi noted: *"Currently we have eight Roma parties in Macedonia,*

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38 "Roma or Țigan: The Romani Identity – Between Victimisation and Emancipation - Nicolae Gheorghe in dialogue with Iulius Rostaș", which is reprinted in this issue.

which makes the competition for votes tougher, but more concerning is the de-concentration of the political power of both the electorate and Roma political parties. In the last six years, the government coalition has been led by a right-wing party; all Roma parties are part (of the government) as individual parties, meaning that there is no coalition among the Roma political parties as a political platform." Redzepi also noted that the Roma parties in Macedonia do not have a clear programme, ideologically *"they are somehow lost […] some of the leaders have lost legitimacy and credibility, […] each single party negotiates with the prime minister with the deal 'We can give you this number of votes and in return we want this and that'. It is almost impossible to bring them to one table as a coalition to negotiate with the Prime Minister, which is also very bad because in this way they are more exposed to political manipulations from the side of mainstream parties. The new generation of Roma political activists are trying to enter into a dialogue with the mainstream parties and surprisingly the right-wing party is currently giving much more than the left-wing party, which shows that political parties are not behaving according to claimed ideologies. We had a very good cooperation with left-wing parties during the 90s, but they never delivered what they promised, behaved with us autocratically and were always pushing us out of important positions."*

According to Costel Bercus, there was no particular right or wrong approach on the matter of working with the mainstream or forming ethnic parties but the favoured strategy should be dependent on the local context. With reference to Romania, Bercus stated that *"if you compete locally on the list of a mainstream party, you become part of them, you have to behave and you have to obey all decisions and policies that are decided by a single man, the mayor in most cases."* In reality, Costel thought that political leaders may need to resort to combined complex strategies of mobilising Roma on ethnic lines and being able to demonstrate the electoral power of a Roma constituency, but also working within the mainstream so as not to be side-lined or marginalised.

András Biró mapped out a vision of an ethnically determined political body or a movement, which holds its legitimacy from an active constituency of the voting community it represents: *"[t]he Black human rights movement, the NAACP (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), in the USA achieved this goal after a long period of activism without forming a political party in the bipartisan structure of the USA. Thus it is not the naming which is important, but the way to* obtain political power for a discriminated community. […] Money and knowledge are less important than movement and mobilisation. You need money and knowledge of course, but the essence is not there. The essence is in provocation and conscious promotion of ethnic pride. I, from the outside, can't see any other way. If the critical mass is lacking there is the lack of a critical amount of positive ethnic consciousness. An idealistic stance, you would say. But if there is a goal for the Roma movement, if there is a Roma movement nationally and Europe-wide, you can't skip the phase of developing ethnic consciousness among Roma individuals, groups from whom then emerge bottom-up the legitimate leaders, the mayors, the MPS, etc."*

In response, Gábor Daróczi felt the most immediate concern of many Roma was to break out of the cycle of poverty: *"I know very well from the countryside based on talks with poor Roma people that nowadays the level of poverty is so extremely high. On the other hand, they have no vision to break out of this vicious circle. […] for Roma people the first and the most important question is that we should give them something which helps them to break out from poverty and the second question is what to do with their ethnic background. I am very sad about this, but if we don't see this perspective, then we will make the same mistakes again. We cannot build any political movement, any consciousness-development project if we don't see the biggest challenge which is purely poverty."* In positing such a question Daróczi raises a question of fundamental importance, namely how should the Romani Movement relate its narrative of struggle to the financial crisis of 2008 and the onward march of neoliberalism, factors which have impoverished Roma communities and accentuated scapegoating? One could best describe Nicolae's approach and response to this question as an intersectional one, for while recognising the need to combat poverty he also recognised the importance of challenging racist discourses and oppressive forms of behaviour centred on tradition or gender, internal or external to Roma communities. Increasingly the narrative which enshrined this approach was one of citizenship. Nicolae comments: "how to participate in the building of Roma as a *political people*; that is, as people with a civic identity, an ethno-political one inside the space of the human rights of citizenship, with rights and obligations established through laws and through the institutions of political democracy, both in national politics and within the EU, etc. This is the beginning of the manifesto that I would propose".[39] It is a vision mapped out more extensively in the next section.

39   *Ibid.*

Citizenship and the State

Participants continually referred to Nicolae's chapter in *From Victimhood to Citizenship* where he opposed two paradigms: a statist civic one where government bears the main responsibility for Roma as citizens – here activists and NGOs should support and monitor the State's progress – as opposed to the autonomous, often ethnic nationalist model which proposes minority rights and legal protection for cultural patterns.[40] Nicolae sought to weave a way between these two paradigms for Roma to achieve localised forms of empowerment and autonomy, subject to their national governments who would work within EU-devised frameworks, but many of his texts can be interpreted as leaning more to one side or another. In consequence, in the discourse of this seminar participants were competing to lay claim to this middle ground, rather than clearly defining their positions against one another. They tended to accept that the construction of European policy towards Roma should be directed towards fulfilling the rights of all Europeans as both national and European citizens.[41]

Iulius Rostas was hesitant about the mainstreaming implications of citizenship: *"I am not for citizenship, I think we are a little bit different from the rest… It makes me special, I want to be a bit special. For me something that applies to all Roma is the concept of politically insular minorities, developed by the U.S. Constitutional Court in the '30s.[42] It is an extremely interesting case; how we justify special protection for Roma, because Roma in whatever country you pick are a minority whatever they do, they cannot constitute a political majority. Taking into consideration the level of anti-gypsyism and their unpopularity, the need for special protection comes naturally. Once defined as a politically insular minority the system has to apply strict scrutiny, whenever there are measures targeting this ethnic group, to make sure that they do not affect negatively the rights of this minority."*

However, it should be noted that despite his avowed support for citizenship Nicolae also championed affirmative action.[43] There are interpretations of citizenship, such as in

the French tradition, which preclude affirmative action and thus may even encompass paternalist or nationalist agendas. However, perhaps the notion of citizenship which best defines Nicolae's aspirations can be defined as inclusive citizenship. Inclusive citizenship recognises that certain groups within society are accorded the status of lesser citizens or non-citizens. Participants suggested a notion of inclusive citizenship, based on the aspirations of those at the margins and engaged in a struggle for justice, recognition, self-determination and solidarity. Such a bold conception of citizenship would certainly accommodate forms of targeted and affirmative action, which have been a feature of liberal citizenship social policy aimed at achieving social justice, but would be temporary until a sense of societal balance has been achieved. András Biró noted though that another reason that Nicolae was attracted to a citizenship agenda was that it implied agency. Biró commented that: *"The task to open a debate on the role of citizenship, an active citizenship, carries automatically the precondition to get rid of the victim syndrome. Considering oneself a victim takes off the personal responsibility for one's life and gives a pseudo-rational explication for one's weaknesses or failures to succeed. In the '50s Franz Fanon, a psychiatrist of partly African-Caribbean descent,[44] analysed in depth the psychological set up of the colonised and found that victimhood was the main obstacle for the liberation processes individually and collectively."* Such a vision of citizenship might capture something of the pedagogy of hope but many participants emphasised that a precondition for this sense of agency to be achieved and satisfied is to have the legal, social and institutional framework that can protect and guarantee equality and fairness.

Experts, Knowledge Production and Debate

Participants underlined that Nicolae was clearly one of the most influential Romani thinkers, as well as a key expert and advisor for centres of power. In the 1990s he worked actively to support the goal of securing greater Roma participation in politics and decision-making, often through

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40 Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship,* 81 and 83.

41 *Ibid.,* 98.

42 In a 1938 ruling (*United States v. Carolene Products Company*) by the US Supreme Court Justice Stone suggested there were reasons to apply a more exacting standard of judicial review in other types of cases. Legislation aimed at "discrete and insular minorities", who lack the normal protections of the political process, should be an exception to the presumption of constitutionality, and a heightened standard of judicial review should be applied. This idea has greatly influenced equal protection jurisprudence, judicial review and notions of affirmative action. See: **http://www.law. cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/304/144**.

43 Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship,* 49.

44 Fanon was actually born in Martinique of mixed European, Indian and African descent.

the recruitment of more Roma professionals, experts, and so on. Despite his relatively small output in terms of academic writing his works were deeply influential as was his Socratic style of nurturing younger Roma activists and sharing his time with them in debate and discourse. He loved debate and to challenge and provoke, but did so with a civility and dignity which rarely alienated. A common lament in the seminar was the lack of debate amongst Roma activists. András Biró echoed this concern and took it further: *"Remembering Nicolae let me say a word about one of his concerns. He missed within the Roma elite the culture of debate, exchange of arguments. Even worse, we often witness the dominance of extreme personal attacks."* Gábor Daróczi echoed this concern: *"We don't practice debate at all not only among us, the so-called Roma elite. Debate nowadays is just something what we don't consider to be a good thing. It is just wasting time […] I am here only for one reason. Debate is one of the most important elements of democracy in my point of view, to talk and to share information."*

Ágnes Daróczi reflected on the uniqueness of the assembled gathering to remember Nicolae: *"[t]his is a rare meeting where we can really discuss the fundamental questions about the Roma. […] As in many other cases, we are subjected and used as tools because the owners of thinking about Roma know this or that group or leaders who we can ask to come and to speak to us and so on. They are planning what to say about us, they are driving the directions and so on. The points where we are really collecting our ideas and probably making decisions collectively somehow or analysing are so rare. I am always asking myself and trying to make analyses, why? One answer is because we don't have institutions, and the other one is that we are not the owners of the discourse and because we don't think of ourselves as potential partners to each other. Everybody has their own empire and it is very lucky if some donors or supporters are found and we are always in competition and also there is no transparency between us. Transparency to talk about visions, analyses, to ask about each other's vision and probably to see whether we fight together? If we could do this, we would be much stronger. If you say conflicts between us, generational conflict, this is not an issue which was created by us, it is an issue that was created by the donors."*

Responding to the charge that scientism and outsider academics had monopolised knowledge production and that the Romani Rights Movement and communities were being side-lined, Iulius Rostas exclaimed: *"The distinction between activists and academics is used by some to maintain the monopoly over resources and publications. They affirm the superiority of academics over activists as the true knowledge they say rests in academia. […] We should go to universities and challenge people that*

think they know everything about Roma. I think this distinction is very artificial and was constructed within Romani studies from the nineteenth century by the Gypsy Lore Society. The idea was that academics study Roma and do not interact with them, they just observe them like in a laboratory and extract conclusions. And they assume this kind of knowledge is superior because it is objective. On the contrary, they argue objectivity is not a characteristic of the knowledge produced by activists as they interact with their subjects and get too close to their problems. And if you are a Roma, in their opinion you cannot be an academic because you are too close to the subject, in fact you are the subject! A paternalistic attitude that leads to racism as in this syllogism that Roma cannot be academics. To me this distinction is nonsense as there is no real objectivity in social sciences. One cannot define objectively for example who is and who is not Roma. They are using this distinction to maintain their positions in universities, to be able to attract funds for research and to be able to publish articles and books. However, they do not have the monopoly over the knowledge on Roma as sometimes knowledge produced by researchers associated with NGOs and think tanks proved more reliable and influential in policy-making than that produced by academics. And I also have a question to their claimed superiority over the activists: if they produced useful knowledge on Roma why is the situation of Roma so bad today? […] The discourse on Roma that later on informs policy-making was developed in academic circles by non-Roma academics. Unfortunately, Roma never focused on penetrating academia."

Since Nicolae did not take a PhD, there was a fear that some might look down on his writings as activist propaganda dressed up as academic discourse. The seminar discussions reflected the prominence of many of Nicolae's younger adherents in the recent tussles and disputes within Romani Studies which participants thought centred on the relationship between research and activism and relationships of academic investigators with those being researched. It remains to be seen whether forms of scientism or more collaborative approaches to research attain the greatest influence amongst the new generation of researchers, a growing number of whom are from the Roma community and who appear to be rejecting the tenets of scientism, and for whom Nicolae is a role model and inspiration.

Conclusion

The diversity of roles, volume of outputs and impacts attained by Nicolae meant that he was a prolific thinker and activist, whose life and ideas will no doubt continue to be discussed for some time to come. As András Biró

noted *"Nicolae did not formulate a goal which you can touch with your hands. He offered a path toward its achievement - not a small achievement."* Nicolae's actions, agitations and many of the broad themes he tried to promote and arouse debate upon, can be compared to the pre-tremor of an earthquake. But participants were far from sure that the earthquake will arrive. It remains to be seen whether influential Romani activists and NGO-crats and intellectuals heed the calls of Nicolae to reconnect with Roma communities, articulating and practising bridging and open and inclusive forms of identity. It also remains to be seen whether state and international institutions, influenced by concepts of equality, institute the forms of intervention and redistribution which Nicolae advocated. Andrzej Mirga embodied this call for action in his support for greater dialogue between the young and old: *"I would say that we should pay more attention to the young, maybe the next step should be that the older generation should meet regularly with the young, to make (build) some bridges and to see what are the views of the young, because I disagree that they are disconnected and just looking for careers. I met many of them who are very engaged and are proud and they want to show a different face of Roma at the national and international level."*

Perhaps this can be seen as the spirit embodied in a workshop held in Budapest in October 2014 entitled *Nothing About Us Without Us?*. This brought together a range of both veteran and young and emerging Roma activists.[45] For some at the *Nothing About Us Without Us?* workshop who had also been at the May 2014 ERRC seminar it was satisfying to see support for many of the concepts raised by Nicolae to be strongly in evidence at that event, most notably in a session led by young Roma LGBT and feminist activists, who demonstrated that the courage and innovation Nicolae championed was still alive and well in the Romani Movement. There may be no detailed roadmap as to the way ahead; as participants repeatedly pointed out, Nicolae resisted the temptation to formulate prescriptive formulae which can so easily become dated or, through detail, divide and alienate. Nicolae was central, however to the ongoing formation of a dynamic social movement shaped and energised by broad and deep ideals, attitudes and principles.

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45   A forthcoming issue of the Roma Rights Journal will outline the debate and discussions held at that workshop.

He Came with a Broom in His Hand

THOMAS HAMMARBERG[1]

I had invited Nicolae Gheorghe to a meeting of European Human Rights Defenders in Sarajevo. As Commissioner for Human Rights in the Council of Europe, I had taken the liberty to convene meetings of activists who could give good advice and set the tone for our common struggle for human rights on the continent. Nicolae was an obvious invitee, and not only because of his straight and often humoristic interventions – he had a message.

At that time he was no longer with the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in Warsaw. He had moved back to his native Romania and joined civil society as an activist again. Now, entering the Sarajevo conference room, he waved the broom in the air and explained that he and his colleagues had concluded that their patience had run out. The time had come to sweep the corrupt decision-takers out of power once and for all. The broom was the symbol of this determination.

Nicolae shared with many other activists a very deep commitment to the human rights cause. This was combined with other characteristics which made him unique: intellectual rigor, a scrutinising honesty and an openness to change his opinion on the basis of experience. He became the sharpest critic of hypocrisy among both Roma and *gadje*. He told the truth even when it was inconvenient.

He exposed the symbiotic relationship developing between *gadje* Roma "experts" and Roma leaders which tended to perpetuate an atmosphere of Roma victimhood. "The role of Roma opinion-makers", he wrote, "is to suggest new approaches, focusing on integration rather than being victims".[2]

He stressed that misbehaviour by Romani individuals should not be excused with a reference to a long history of repression. Criticism against someone's criminal activities must be taken seriously and not just be dismissed as anti-Gypsyism.

Such statements – including Nicolae's writings about "cunning" (*shmekeria*) and early marriages - could hardly have been made by any *gadjo* without causing misunderstandings. Indeed, the approach taken by myself and many of my *gadje* colleagues is that raising such "taboo" issues must be left to insiders. We decided not to give the anti-Roma propaganda any further ammunition. We have also felt that these social issues were indeed to a large extent the consequence of enforced misery and marginalisation.

Knowing that Nicolae did take up these issues was a relief and of course the best answer to those who used these negative social phenomena in their racist hate speech. While defining and pointing out such problems, Nicolae also gave positive inspiration to the Roma rights cause. Many of his messages could be summarised with the slogan "Yes, we can". Real change must come from us ourselves, he repeated.

Of course, he was deeply aware of the divisions among the Roma people but he believed it would be possible to unite the various groups into one cultural nation. "The common aim of the Roma movement", he once wrote, "should be the organization, mobilization and eventual remobilization of Roma, based on pursuing the struggle against racism and discrimination."[3]

Nicolae was in a sense a bridge between Roma communities and the broader international community, underpinned by his impressive academic and language skills. He was one of the initiators behind the International Roma Contact Group, a short-lived but important organisation in the very first years of this millennium. Its main achievement was to initiate – with the support of the government of Finland – the creation of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) under the auspices of the Council of Europe.

The Forum has now existed for more than a decade and Nicolae followed its developments even after having resigned from it. In his late writings he felt that it was still too early

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1   Chairman of the Swedish Commission to Combat Anti-Ziganism, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights 2006-2012.

2   Nicolae Gheorghe, "Choices to be made and prices to be paid: potential roles and consequences in Roma activism and policy-making" in *From Victimhood to Citizenship - The Path of Roma Integration*, ed. Will Guy *(Budapest: Kossuth Publishing Corporation, 2013)*, 60.

3   *Ibid.*, 43.

to evaluate its merits but that it would be wise to continue to maintain friendly relations in supporting the organisation "while retaining our critical faculties."[4] He wrote that the ERTF should move beyond its cluster mentality and do more to set standards and create precedents for national Roma organisations so as to strengthen its position as a role model. It should seek answers to such crucial questions as assimilation, integration and cultural separation.

In conclusion, he wrote:

> "As a former club member I now appear a heretic for challenging prevailing orthodoxy by suggesting a more

genuine, credible and legitimate type of Roma representation. This is the form my activism takes nowadays – by reinventing myself and working at national level in Romania but drawing on my familiarity with European structures and developments over the past years in the belief that the ERTF can be a key factor in the development of Roma culture at a European level."[5]

It was a great loss that this man was not given more time to pursue the work for his vision of a European Roma cultural nation of united communities, integrated into the broader societies and having their rights and culture recognised and respected.

4   *Ibid.*, 76.

5   *Ibid.*, 77.

US Senate: Remembering Nicolae Gheorghe

HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN OF MARYLAND

Wednesday, September 11, 2013[1]

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, on August 8, Nicolae Gheorghe, one of the leading figures of the Romani civil rights movement, passed away. He was devoted to improving the situation of Roma, ultimately playing a pivotal role on the international stage and especially within the OSCE. Gheorghe lived an extraordinary life and will be long remembered for his singular contribution to the advancement of human rights.

Nicolae Gheorghe was born in 1946 in Romania during the aftermath of the fascist regime led by Marshall Ion Antonescu. His mother had narrowly escaped the mass deportations of 25,000 Roma planned and implemented by the Antonescu regime.

Members of the Helsinki Commission first met Nicolae Gheorghe when Senator Dennis DeConcini and Representative *Steny Hoyer*, then-Chairman and Cochairman, led a delegation to Romania in April 1990. At that time, Gheorghe was emerging as one of the clearest and most compelling voices sounding the alarm about the deplorable situation of Roma. Although the fall of communism in Central Europe ushered in an era of democratization, it also gave free rein to old bigotry against Roma. In fact, only a few months after that visit, police efforts to remove demonstrators from Bucharest degenerated into brutal attacks on the offices of opposition papers, opposition leaders' homes, and members of the Romani minority.

At almost the same time, the OSCE participating States were meeting in Copenhagen negotiating what would become one of the most ambitious agreements of the Helsinki process: the seminal 1990 Copenhagen Document. I was part of a delegation Representative *Hoyer* led to that historic meeting where we raised our concerns about religious and ethnic minorities directly with the delegation from Romania.

It was also in Copenhagen where Nicolae Gheorghe pressed - successfully - for the adoption of the first reference in any international human rights agreement to the specific problems faced by Roma. The U.S. delegation to that meeting, headed by the late Ambassador Max Kamplemen, helped secure the inclusion of that text in the final document.

But in the context of post-Communist economic and political transition, Roma became targets of ethnically motivated attacks. In Romania, dozens of pogroms against Roma were carried out between 1990 and 1997, prompting Gheorghe and others to found Romani CRISS in 1993. The name is a Romanian acronym for Center for Social Intervention and Studies but also a play on the Romani word "kris," which is a kind of council of elders. In the 1990s, he worked with the New Jersey-based Project on Ethnic Relations and served on the board of the European Roma Rights Center.

He also brought his concerns to the United States. In 1994, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Security, International Organizations, and Human Rights, chaired by Representative Tom Lantos, convened the first hearing before Congress on the situation of Roma. Gheorghe, joined by Romani activists Ian Hancock, Andrzej Mirga, and Klara Orgovanova, testified, along with Livia Plaks of the Project on Ethnic Relations.

Gheorghe argued that anti-Roma attitudes and behaviors could serve as a barometer to gauge the success of countries building democratic institutions, the rule of law, and "the consolidation of civil movements and associations and societies and states deeply distorted by the decades of pro-fascist, authoritarian and communist totalitarian regimes."

He presciently surveyed the scope and implications of anti-Roma manifestations including in Bosnia, Germany, the Czech and Slovak Republics, and Romania. "[T]he most important assistance which can be brought to or sent to

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1   This speech is taken from the Proceedings and Debates of the 113th Congress of the United States, 1st Session. It was reprinted in full on the site of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (U.S. Helsinki Commission), and is available at: **http://www.csce.gov/index. cfm?FuseAction=ContentRecords.ViewDetail&ContentRecord_id=457&Region_id=0&Issue_id=0&ContentType=S&CFID=2617228 &CFTOKEN=31d14a83379d351f-11F48D68-997B-E409-5594404C4AD4C62B**.

our region is the rule of law, the breeding of democratic institutions, and careful implementation of individual human rights." Gheorghe testified at Helsinki Commission briefings and hearings in 2002 and 2006.

Nicolae Gheorghe also became a fixture at OSCE human rights meetings - first in his capacity as an NGO, then as the first senior adviser on Romani issues for the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. In whatever capacity he worked, he was a relentless advocate for the human rights of Romani people.

His appointment coincided with the deterioration of the situation in Kosovo, the NATO air campaign against Milosevic's Serbia, and the subsequent deployment of a large OSCE mission to Kosovo. As a consequence of developments in the Balkans, he became immediately engaged on issues relating to the displacement of Kosovo Roma to Macedonia and elsewhere. Throughout his tenure with the OSCE, which lasted through 2006, his work was driven by the need for crisis management stemming from acts of violence and other extreme manifestations of prejudice against Roma - not only in the Balkans but elsewhere in the OSCE region as well.

In his 2006 testimony before the Helsinki Commission, he observed that international organizations had largely focused on the situation of Roma in Central Europe, neglecting Western countries such as Greece, France, Spain, and Italy. "I don't think that Europe for the time being realizes the depth of the racism and racist attitudes in its structures, [in] Europe as a whole." The mass fingerprinting of Roma in Italy in 2008 and the expulsions of Roma from France in 2010 would illustrate that Gheorghe had spoken with typical insight.

I wish that I could say Nicolae Gheorghe's work to advance the human rights of Roma was complete. Clearly, it is not. Each day, it must be carried on by the many people he encouraged and a new generation of activists. Toward that end, our load is lighter because of the burdens he carried, our goals are nearer because of the distance he traveled, and we are inspired by his legacy.

Nicolae Gheorghe, An Exceptional Destiny[1]

JEAN-PIERRE LIÉGEOIS[2]

I would be unable, in a few short lines, to retrace the life of Nicolae Gheorghe, who passed away in 2013 and was for me a colleague, but above all else a friend from the early 1980s onwards. I would simply like to attempt, in the form of an introduction to the text that you will read (which was one of his last texts) to highlight the steadfastness of Gheorghe's approach and the importance of his role from 1980.

At that time, we should recall, the Internet did not exist and the dictatorship was well and alive in Romania. To even speak of the Roma was considered subversive, and hence prohibited. Nicolae, a researcher at the Institute of Sociology at the Romanian Academy, was not authorised to work in this field, nor even receive documents related to the Roma. Communication took the form of the diplomatic bag and was therefore subject to a certain degree of hazard. This is also the reason why Nicolae's first texts, published in France in 1982 in *Le Matin et L'Alternative*, necessarily came out under a pseudonym.

In September 1982 and March 1983, a small Parisian magazine called *Iztok,* which was produced in an artisanal fashion, published an interview with a certain Alexandru Danciu titled "Introduction to the Gypsy problem in the East". In the introduction to the interview, we read that "the following words constitute, in our opinion, an excellent introduction, both lucid and realistic, to the Gypsy problem [...] They are also lent interest by Danciu's original position [...] While combating anti-Gypsy racism and militating for the specific rights of his brothers and sisters, Danciu is nonetheless wary of reformist solutions (a few institutional concessions granted by the State to a minority)". The interview with Danciu is thus both original and nuanced in its approach to a complex situation. The text published in these pages of *Les Temps Modernes ("Modern Times")* is, thirty-two years later, a confirmation of this.

A few years later, Alexandru Danciu and Nicolae Gheorghe were able to appear in the light of day. From 1990, as a member of the important Romanian delegation to the World Roma Congress near Warsaw, Nicolae's role proved essential, and it was here that he would forge the profile that would distinguish him for years to come. It is a role that is in fact rather difficult to define, composed as it is of multiple facets, which in others might appear discordant, but which, in the case of Nicolae Gheorghe, found a coherent and complementary expression, a marriage of opposites, if you will. All I can do is mention these characteristics, as to avoid stripping them of their richness, displayed as they were in both the personal and public arenas. Perhaps the articles published here will give you some sense.

As a Romanian sociologist, Nicolae Gheorghe was an intellectual educated in the fundaments of classical sociology. Thanks to his linguistic skills, notably in English and in French, he was able to go beyond the few readings authorised under communism and the Romanian dictatorship and to forge an original philosophy. As a Rom, part of traditional Roma social networks, Gheorghe remained conscious of the criteria of respectability incumbent upon a Rom throughout his life. Thanks to extensive travels and contact with numerous sectors of Roma society, he also developed a certain capacity to relativise the weight of tradition, to criticise some of these traditions, but also defend those groups who, having effectively lost their traditions under the brunt of history, had nonetheless never lost their Roma identity. He was a man of the people and as close as possible to Roma families and their difficulties; thanks to his charisma, empathy and capacity for their language and idiomatic expressions, he was able to challenge, discuss and translate their concerns and visions, and extract key elements of their discourse so as to render it more dynamic for the world. Gheorghe was moreover a man of politics, serving for six years as a senior adviser at the Organization

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[1] This article appeared in the January - March 2014 issue of the quarterly Journal *Les Temps Modernes* (created by Jean-Paul Sartre), as an introduction to a text written by Nicolae Gheorghe. It is reproduced here with the kind permission of *Les Temps Modernes* and the author.

[2] Jean-Pierre Liégeois founded the *Roma Research Centre* at the University of Sorbonne in 1979, and was its director until 2003. Since 1982, he has worked in close co-operation with the Council of Europe and the European Commission. His published works since 1967 have given groundbreaking insights into Roma communities.

for Security and Co-operation in Europe and who spent twenty years meeting with various ministers and heads of state and other heads of international organisations with whom he was able, thanks to his extensive knowledge of politics and diplomacy, to develop an exceptional capacity for debate, challenging statements with which he did not agree and analyses he believed to be unfounded, or counterproductive. He was a man of an independent spirit, who refused numerous nominations or distinctions proposed to him, for example, election to a national-level political post, or international Roma organisations with the possibility for having a pivotal influence on political developments, these posts having been offered him due to his singular distinction within the history of the national and international Roma movement. Gheorghe was a universalist, humanist and materialist and was opposed, throughout his life, to any form of essentialist or racial definition of the Roma identity, summarising his political philosophy with the following statement, which indeed finds echo throughout *Les Temps Modernes*: "One is not born Roma, one becomes Roma".

These multiple capacities and traits, among many others, found in Nicolae Gheorghe a singular expression of multiple universes, or apparent contradictions: Roma/non-Roma, intellectual/man of action, theory/practice, tradition/modernity… He embodied the role of bridge, interpreter, facilitator and mediator. It should moreover be stressed that Gheorghe himself served as an active interface, rendering each of his numerous human exchanges dynamic and enriching. Indeed, he surpassed mere reciprocal understanding in favour of the greater value of the actual content exchanged, valuing the specific potential of individuals and circumstances, calling each and all to assume responsibility for their discourse and actions.

Certainly we can perceive the difficulty of such a position – everyone who had the opportunity to meet Nicolae Gheorghe met a man that was febrile and overflowing with passion for his ideas, politics, projects, regrets, and with some text or other always in a state of construction; there were always paths to discover, and activities and engagements threatening to explode his ever bursting calendar. Gheorghe was a man tormented by his devotion to improving each and every situation in which he found himself engaged, expecting and exacting as much from himself as from others. He was a man who played a singular role in the construction of Roma politics, the improvement of which was his true and unequalled passion. Indeed, he made this commitment his life, acting, speaking, and writing, and, finally, dictating his thoughts, until his very last breath.

J.-P. L.

Nicolae Gheorghe as a Sociologist

THOMAS ACTON[1]

Nicolae Gheorghe was the person who made me a proud defender of sociology. Before I met him in 1990 at the 4th World Romani Congress in Serock, I considered myself a refugee philosopher-historian, accepting the label of the parvenu discipline of sociology only because it licensed me to work with Roma, Gypsies and Travellers. He made me realise that this was not just an accidental legitimation, but that only the innovations, the new questions about change and social order asked by the great classical sociologists of the 19th century had created the possibility to carry out our vocation as sociologists, and that we needed to defend that against the sneers of the neoliberals about social science. And, to my amazement, I found out he had been a pupil of one of the greatest of the third generation of European social scientists, the Romanian anthropologist Henri Stahl.

To understand why Nicolae had such vision, it is worth explaining the stature of one of the giants on whose shoulders he stood. Unlike the racist Western "social anthropologists" who weaved ahistorical ideological myths about kinship and "witchcraft" to serve the purposes of their imperialist sponsors, Stahl matched detailed fieldwork in villages with real Hoskins-style archives-and-a-pair-of-stout-boots local history and the theory derived from Marx, Weber and Durkheim to show the legacies of indirect Ottoman rule, neo-feudalism, serfdom and slavery through the prism of the surviving institutions of the few mountain villages which had not been reduced to serfdom by the boyars.[2] Where Gypsylorists have theorised Vlach Roma societies as an Indian "race" in conflict with Western "civilisation", Stahl shows us real people living, working, interacting and surviving over several hundred years. To try to understand the roots of the *kris* without reading Stahl on village assemblies is to risk substituting prejudice for knowledge about both Roma and Romanians.

From Stahl, Nicolae gained a broad understanding of European social scientific traditions. He was astonishingly well-read, often of texts not readily available in Ceausescu's Romania. His understanding of Marxist methods of socio-economic analysis was not vitiated by the degraded economistic Marxism of Leninism and Stalinism; Marxism for him was not an identity, but a tool to be used alongside other structural and functional theories of agency.

Our earliest collaborations came from a mutual interest in understanding what a legitimate ethnic interest politics would look like.[3] The genesis of our papers together came from discussions to prepare a Roma delegation to meet the Pontifical Commission on Migration and Tourism in 1991. Success in those negotiations would determine whether Pope John Paul II would give an audience to the Roma and *gadje* scholars who had been summoned to a conference on Romani politics by Fr Bruno Niccolini, chaplain of the diocese of Rome to Roma. Nicolae worked long, long hours to prepare for these negotiations.

The conference was held in a teachers' hostel in Ostia, near Rome. The hostel had two buildings, both of which were firmly locked at night. One night there was a showing of Romani films in one of the buildings which only finished after the doors had been locked. I and two Roma intellectuals, Jorge Bernal from Argentina, and Trajko Petrovski from Macedonia, left one building after the film finished, and found ourselves locked out of our own building. The doors were locked, the windows were dark, and no one responded to ringing, shouting or banging on the door. Disconsolately, we wandered round to the back of the building where we spotted a faint light in a window slightly open half-way up the building. We yelled again, but there was no response. Then Jorge spotted a broken chair which had been thrown out. There was a garage directly underneath the window, so Jorge, who was then young and agile, balanced on the rickety chair, and boosted me up onto the roof. Trajko passed the chair up, even as he urged caution on us, and Jorge balanced on it again, and hoisted me so I

1   Bucks New University, Corvinus University, University of Greenwich.

2   H.H. Stahl, *Traditional Romanian Village Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

3   Nicolae Gheorghe and Thomas Acton, "Minority, Ethnic, National and Human Rights," in *A Call for a New Community: racism and ethnic conflicts in the countries around the Baltic states,* ed. M. Reidy and S. Udodesku (World Council of Churches: Geneva, 1993), 29-36.

could pull myself through the window. I pitched headfirst into someone's bath, the window slammed behind me, and the glass broke and showered all over me.

When I gingerly pulled myself up and put my head round the bathroom door, I saw it was Nicolae's room. He had fallen asleep working. He was lying on his side, fully clothed, on the bed, curled up like a baby, with one thumb in his mouth and the other hand gently resting on the keyboard of the first laptop computer I had ever seen (which he had borrowed from Mirella Karpati, the editor of *Lacio Drom*). The laptop was softly humming, and I could not forbear to glance at the screen. It was the briefing document the group had been working on earlier. The paragraph started "*The paradigmatically transnational nature of Romani politics …*". I will never forget that scene of the scholar exhausted by his labours.

Nicolae started awake suddenly. I said "It's me, Thomas…" and he just said "Oh, it's only you…" and went straight back to sleep as I left the room and went down to let the others in.

The briefing of the cardinals of the Pontifical Commission on Migration was successful, and two days later a bus took 60 delegates to meet the Pope.[4] The Pope made a speech which was the most ringing endorsement of the International Romani Union that he could have given,[5] and discussed it in depth with delegates afterwards. But what will stick in my mind for ever is the Pope referring, during his speech in Italian, to the "*paradigmatically transnational nature of Romani politics.*"

Nicolae could get sociological concepts across to anyone, pope or peasant. He was a kind of sociological gun-runner, giving Romani organisations the weapons that could fracture the citadels of *gadjo* prejudice and misunderstanding. We continued to develop our ideas on multicultural politics for different audiences.[6] Though by now increasingly in demand

in European circles, Nicolae came to a 1993-4 seminar that I ran for the Economic and Social Research Council at the University of Greenwich, and again, despite having only had two hours sleep, delivered an astonishing oration without notes, on the socially constructed – and therefore socially reformable – nature of identity politics. Fortunately we took a good audio-recording of this speech. When I came to transcribe it, it needed almost no editing. The structure was clear, the paragraphing obvious. Drawing on the concept of *homo ludens*, the paper[7] showed how we all "play with our identity", drawing on different parts of our experience to present ourselves differently in different contexts, and then went through the roles that Romani community leaders and activists were being called upon to play, pointing out that it is not only the "Gypsy Kings and Emperors" who are engaged in continuous re-invention. Although he makes no reference to the then-recent emergence of the theory of intersectionality,[8] he anticipated many of the ideas with which feminists were to transform the study of stratification over the next decade, and made his strongest, and indeed prophetic, criticism yet of Romani nationalism:

> "My intellectual motivation here is that we need to criticise nationalist ideology as such. Within our criticism of the nation-state is implicit a criticism of what might be a Roma nationalism fashioned in the tradition of east European cultural nationalism. We need to look empirically to see how in politics some Roma groups/leaders try to participate within the dynamic of nation-states and their nationalist discourse and politics - to which maybe they will pay a new tribute of suffering in years to come."[9]

The examples hit home to all the audience, leading to a vivid debate (also happily recorded as an appendix)[10] between the academics – Sir Angus Fraser, Judith Okely, Donald

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4   Thomas Acton, "Mediterranean religions and Romani people", *Journal of Mediterranean Studies,* Volume 7 Number 1 (1997): 37-51.

5   Karol Woityla (Pope John Paul II), "Di fronte alle minoranze etniche so consolodi una cultura dell'accoglienza e della solidarieta", *L'Osservatore Romano* CXXI (223) (27 September 1992).

6   Nicolae Gheorghe and Thomas Acton, "Dealing with Multiculturality: Minority, Ethnic and Human Rights", *Bulletin of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE)* Spring, Volume 3 Number 2 (1995): 28-40; Nicolae Gheorghe and Thomas Acton, "A multikuturalás problémai: kisebbséggi, etnikai, nemzetiségi és emberi jogok", *REPLIKA - TARSÁLOMTUDOMÁNYI FOLYÓIRAT (Journal of Social Science),* Number 23-24 (1996): 207-218.

7   Nicolae Gheorghe, "The Social Construction of Romani identity", in *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity*, ed. Thomas Acton (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1997), 153-171.

8   Kimberlé W Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum Volume 1989*: *Feminism in the Law: Theory, Practice and Criticism* (Chicago, 1989): 139–167.

9   Nicolae Gheorghe, "The Social Construction of Romani identity", in *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity*, 160.

10   *Ibid*, 164 – 171.

Kenrick, Sinead ni Shuinear and others, and the community activists present, like Charles Smith, Peter Mercer and Sylvia Dunn, who all sought to clarify the purposes of their leadership. These debates still resonate.

As we moved into the 21st century, and an era in which Roma have indeed had to pay a "new tribute of suffering" even as their intelligentsia has multiplied itself around all corners of the Internet, Nicolae became more and more preoccupied with practical politics, to which he gave all he could, despite personal suffering and illness, writing less and compromising more. Although we reprised the ideas about multicultural politics in time for the Fifth World Romani Congress,[11] I came to clash with him about several things: I disagreed with him about elites; I disagreed with him about human trafficking; I disagreed with him about the ontology and roots of the new Romani Visual Art. But I never ceased to marvel at the breadth and luminous intelligence of his scholarship, and the playful imagination with which he used it to tease an audience out of their set ideas. If I became, and have remained, a defender of the value of academic sociology, it is mainly because of Nicolae Gheorghe.

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11   Nicolae Gheorghe and Thomas Acton, "Citizens of the World and Nowhere: Minority, Ethnic and Human Rights for Roma", in *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe,* ed. Will Guy, (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001).

Nicolae Gheorghe and His Legacy of Trust

BY ROB KUSHEN[1]

I first met Nicolae Gheorghe in 1991, in Moscow. In that year, Western Europe and the United States had agreed to recognise the changes wrought by Mikhail Gorbachev's and Eduard Shevardnadze's *perestroika* by allowing the Soviet Union to host a Human Dimension meeting of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. For a country that had been a human rights pariah, the chance to host such a meeting was a diplomatic coup. Nicolae, no stranger to the Helsinki process, decided to come and tell the world (or at least, the delegates gathered in Moscow) what was happening to Roma in the Communist bloc.

I was working as a researcher at Helsinki Watch at the time, with a mandate to cover the Soviet Union. For Helsinki Watch and other human rights organisations, reporting on Roma was an occasional thing at best; domestic organisations like Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia did a little better, but not much. Nicolae was one of the first Roma to reach an international audience with a message of human rights: of deprivations visited upon Roma for centuries, and of the desire for a voice.

In October 1991, Nicolae came to Moscow with that message. I had rented a flat there that would serve as our base for two weeks of lobbying Commission delegates with news about the human rights violations *du jour* (later, that flat became Human Rights Watch's first Moscow office). I had never met Nicolae, but I heard he needed a place to stay, and so I took him in. He slept on the sofa. I made him chicken soup, after spending lavishly at the farmers' market on Tsvetnoi Bulvar (the state stores at that time still had nothing to offer and I wanted to be a good host).

I don't remember exactly what Helsinki Watch presented at the Human Dimension meeting during the NGO sessions; at that time we were focusing on the role of the Soviet Army in suppressing anti-government demonstrations in various parts of the empire in the past year - *perestroika* seemed to have its limits. Whatever we presented, it was quickly overtaken by events: three months after the end of the meeting, the Soviet Union ceased to exist, and the excesses of the Soviet Army seemed to be relegated to history (this last judgment turned out to be premature).

Unfortunately, violations of the rights of Roma did not disappear like the Soviet Union. Fortunately for all of us, Nicolae was engaged. The previous year, Nicolae succeeded in inserting into the Document of the Copenhagen meeting of the CSCE the first-ever reference to human rights abuses against the Roma minority. The reference itself was brief: states "recognize the particular problems of Roma (gypsies)". The context, however, was important: in this section of the document, States pledged to "provide protection against any acts that constitute incitement to violence against persons or groups based on national, racial, ethnic […] discrimination, hostility or hatred […] to protect persons or groups who may be subject to threats or acts of discrimination" and to ensure effective remedies against such acts. The language today may seem anodyne, but at the end of the Cold War it was vitally important, and the reference to Roma was revolutionary. This was Nicolae's work. Thanks to him, the Moscow document also included a reference to Roma. The only other reference to a specific group in either of the Documents was to anti-Semitism, which was a subject of concern since the beginning of the CSCE process. In the intervening years, we have grown cynical about the promises of diplomats, but at the time any attention at all to Roma in an international forum was a major accomplishment.

Nicolae was conscious of his position in the system and the position of Roma as outsiders in the same system. While acknowledging the legitimacy of Roma distrust of the majority socio-economic and political culture, Nicolae nonetheless chose to work within these cultures, first under Communism and then under something new that bore the label of "democracy". By starting Romani CRISS, Nicolae decided to see what the new system had to offer. Democracy promised that protection of human rights would be more than just empty rhetoric, and Romani CRISS was

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1   Chair of the Board, European Roma Rights Centre.

created to test that proposition. Evidence in the years that followed shows a mixed picture: while rights have been theoretically vindicated in numerous court decisions (many unfortunately coming from the European Court of Human Rights rather than Romanian courts), this has been insufficient by itself to result in tangible improvements in the lives of most Roma.

As a human rights activist, Nicolae understood the importance of documenting violations, but also understood that the narrative of human rights can play unhelpfully into a narrative of victimhood. To protect against this, he tried to create a narrative of responsibility, which included responsibility of Roma themselves, for their successes and failures, for their triumphs as well as their transgressions.

He did not shy away from transgressions or from speaking out against them. He would criticise Roma engaged in trafficking of persons, in begging or in sex work, the inequality in Romani society between women and men, the practice of early marriage and other topics that made Romani activists (and especially non-Roma working for the Roma cause) squirm. He warned of being trapped in a politically correct discourse that ignored the real problem of Roma committing crimes against Roma.[2] As Nicolae explained it, this was not a particular feature of "Roma culture", but a problem that all communities face to one degree or another, particularly communities in economic distress and social exclusion, regardless of ethnicity.

Nicolae's approach was to confront these problems head on. At the first Roma Summit meeting in Brussels in 2008, he engaged in a far-reaching critique of Roma communities, touching on some of these sensitive issues and ending with a call to wealthy Roma to become more active in providing financial support to Romani civil society.

Nicolae's support for integration stemmed from a mix of idealism and pragmatism. Perhaps his most often-repeated quote captured the idealism: "I don't want to die a *cigan*. I want to die a human being." On the pragmatic side, Nicolae recognised that real integration offered Roma opportunities that separation could never match. "For the first time in history Roma have prospects of reflecting and playing an active part in bringing about social change."[3] However to participate in this change required a reorientation, abandoning certain survival strategies in order to participate effectively as change agents. Politics was an important field where he recognised Roma had to play a much more significant role, and not just the politics of ethnic identity. "There is not that much debate among us about political ideologies: Who is a social democrat, who is liberal, who is a Christian democrat, etc. This is a mistake, in my opinion: Roma are pushed all the time onto an ethnic ticket, rather than into a wider debate about political philosophies and where we stand".[4]

To choose the path of integration, to try to influence the majority society and fulfil the promise of democracy for Roma required trust and a certain leap of faith. "Either we cheat others while remaining loyal only to our own people, or we take the opportunity to trust others and their institutions."[5] Nicolae made that leap of faith and made a conscious decision to trust. This is a legacy that all of us can honour by proving that his trust was not misplaced.

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2   Nicolae Gheorghe in collaboration with Gergő Pulay, *Choices to be made and prices to be paid: Potential roles and consequences in Roma activism and policy-making*, Unpublished paper (2011), available at: **www.sivola.net**.

3   Nicolae Gheorghe, "Choices to be made and prices to be paid: potential roles and consequences in Roma activism and policy-making", in *From Victimhood to Citizenship - The Path of Roma Integration,* ed. Will Guy, (Budapest: CEU Press, 2013), 60.

4   European Roma Rights Centre, "In search of a new deal for Roma: ERRC interview with Nicolae Gheorghe". 7 November 2001, available at: **http://www.errc.org/popup-article-view.php?article_id=1284**. The interview is reprinted in this journal.

5   Gheorghe, "Choices to be made and prices to be paid", in ed. Guy, *From Victimhood to Citizenship*, 61.

The Re-emergence of Informal and Traditional Leaders (*Bulibasha, Vajda*) and the role of *Romanipen*

ANNA MIRGA

Romani Leadership: past challenges and new demands

Ethnic mobilisation is a process in which "groups organize around some features of ethnic identity in pursuit of collective ends".[1] In this process, as in the case of social movements, leadership is a key ingredient determining the potential success or failure of a collective struggle for change. After all, it is the leaders who define the problems around which to mobilise, who imagine achievable goals and propose strategies to pursue them. Groups striving for social change need credible leaders who represent the collective claims of their people and often act as indispensable intermediaries between their community and those in positions of power. For social movements to flourish it is necessary to recruit, develop, train and nurture leadership at all levels,[2] leadership that seeks legitimacy from the community and is able to mobilise its resources for common action.[3]

For Roma the first signs of ethnic mobilisation can be traced back to the 1920s, and since then Romani ethno-nationalism has progressed, passing through various stages of development.[4] Today, Roma communities across Europe voice their claims to equality and non-discrimination, and their leaders demand a partnership role in all spheres so as to become active agents of change. Awareness of the ethno-political dimension of Roma identity has translated into a variety of diverse mobilising structures – hundreds of Roma organisations and NGOs, Roma political parties, media and civic initiatives can be found virtually everywhere that Roma live. Roma leaders and activists are making attempts to enter mainstream power structures in larger numbers as politicians, public officials and administrative staff. The direct involvement of Roma in the policy design and policy-making targeting their communities has been consecrated as a principle[5] and is part of common practice throughout Europe, even if such involvement translates into non-binding consultations or 'rituals of participation'.

The ascendance of the Romani issue to the highest levels of the political agenda, both internationally and nationally, and the shifting of the political discourse from a general human rights and minority protection framework to a specific, Roma-targeted, *sui generis* category in the policy-making of the current National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) among the EU Member States can be seen as achievements of Romani ethnic mobilisation.[6] In this process, Romani leaders, men and women from across Europe who have undertaken the role of representing their communities' interests in the public sphere have played an essential role. They bear responsibility not only for the achievements already attained, but also for the failures and, as Nicolae Gheorghe points out, the 'price' of Roma ethnic mobilisation that leaders should be ready to pay.

Romani Ethnic Mobilisation: time frame and the state of the art

It is always instructive to analyse current developments from a chronological perspective to see where we used to be and where we stand today. Looking back at the situation over a decade ago through policy papers and reports such as

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1   Susan Olzak, "Contemporary Ethnic Mobilisation", *Annual Review of Sociology* Volume 9 (1983): 355-274.

2   Marshal Ganz, "Leading change: Leadership, Organization and Social Movements", in *Handbook of Leadership and Practice*, eds. Nithin Nohria and Rakesh Khurana, (Danvers: Harvard Business School Press, 2010), 509-550.

3   *Ibid,*. 510.

4   Nicolae Gheorghe and Jean-Pierre Liégeois, *Roma/Gypsies: A European Minority* (Minority Rights Group International, 1995), 25.

5   See for example the general principle "For Roma, with Roma" of the OSCE's *Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area* or the *10 Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion* of the European Union.

6   Romani mobilisation has been supported by non-Romani individuals and organisations such as foundations and civil rights groups and this support should be acknowledged.

those produced by the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER)[7] and other sources, one might develop a more informed outlook on how to assess the current state of affairs of Romani ethnic mobilisation. Nicolae Gheorghe was then, as he was in the last years of his life, accurate and bold in giving a diagnosis. In all of his efforts to analyse Romani ethnic mobilisation in Europe and formulate some prognoses for the future, the question of Romani leadership has been at the heart of the problem. In the well-known policy paper *The Roma in the Twenty-First Century*,[8] Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrzej Mirga point to the limitations of and future challenges for Romani ethnic mobilisation: the fragmentation and dispersion not only of Roma communities, but also of their leadership, the challenge of building formal structures of representation and participation, the Romani leadership's difficult search for legitimacy, its lack of unity and increasing internal competition, the challenge of choosing a collective framework for constructing Romani cultural and political identity (notably, the competing narratives of nationhood vs. the human rights and citizenship approach).[9] At that time, over a decade ago, they identified the key issues hindering Romani ethnic mobilisation, such as the lack of unified leadership and more transparent representation, the issue of their broad recognition and legitimacy, the internal disputes and frequent disconnections between the Romani leadership and its communities, or the sometimes distracting competition between traditional leaderships and the newly-emerging Romani elite.

From this perspective, taking this assessment as a baseline, it is paramount to ask: How much progress has been made?

When we talk about leadership, what has changed since then, both in the larger context in which Roma are now acting and, in particular, inside Romani ethnic mobilisation?

When speaking about Romani ethnic mobilisation (or the so-called Roma Movement) and its existing leadership patterns, typically the language of dichotomies is applied both in academic literature and colloquially. Under this logic, traditional leadership is opposed to the Romani intelligentsia or elites,[10] elected representatives are contrasted with appointed or self-appointed leaders,[11] and political leaders are juxtaposed with activists from the third sector.[12] Romani leaders are divided into subcategories such as modern or traditional,[13] educated or uneducated, senior or youth leaders.

It may be that in the past such clear-cut roles and divisions were so evident as to enable a fixed categorisation of Romani leadership. However, currently these dichotomies do not always apply. Today Romani leaderships are much more complex, pluralistic, fluid and intertwined with one another.

First of all, Romani leadership has diversified greatly and new patterns of community leadership have emerged outside of the political and NGO spectrum. One evident novelty, which is often treated marginally by scholars and Romani activists alike, is the emergence of religious leadership. Across Europe, the Evangelical movement has conquered the hearts and minds of numerous Romani communities,[14] altering traditional patterns of Romani social organisation and leadership.[15] Not only in the case of the Evangelical movement, but also among a variety

7   Project on Ethnic Relations material is available at: **http://www.per-usa.org/**.

8   Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrzej Mirga, *The Roma in the Twenty-first Century: A Policy*, (Project on Ethnic Relations, Princeton: 1997). Available at: **http://www.per-usa.org/1997-2007/21st_c.htm**.

9   *Ibid.*

10   Zoltan Barany, "Ethnic mobilization and the state: the Roma in Eastern Europe", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Volume 21: 2 (1998): 308-327.

11   "Roma and the EU accession: elected and appointed Romani representatives in an enlarged Europe", (Project on Ethnic Relations, Princeton: 2004).

12   Eva Sobotka "Political representation of Roma: Roma in Politics in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland", *JEMIE (Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe)* Winter 2001/2002; Peter Vermeersch, *The Romani Movement: Minority Politics and Ethnic Mobilization in Contemporary Central Europe* (Berghahn Books, 2006).

13   Lech Mroz, "Poland: the clash of tradition and modernity", in *Between past and future. The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Will Guy, (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001).

14   Most notably in the Philadelphia Evangelical Church, but also Jehovah's Witnesses and others.

15   Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov, "The relations of ethnic and confessional consciousness of Gypsies in Bulgaria", *Facta Universitatis*, Series: Philosophy and Sociology Volume 2, Number 6 (1999): 81-89; Carmen Mendez Lopez, "Del movimiento socioreeligioso católico al movimiento asociativo Gitano", in *Por el camino de la participación. Una aproximación contrastada a los procesos de integración social y política de los gitanos y las gitanas*, (PhD Thesis, 2005); Tatiana Podolina and Tomas Hrustic, *Religion as a path to change? The possibilities of social inclusion of the Roma in Slovakia*, (Bratislava: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2011).

of religious constellations ranging from Muslim to different Catholic affiliations, Romani individuals are ascending to positions of religious power. Often Romani religious leaders reach beyond their spiritual competencies to engage in social action, community initiatives and self-help programmes, combining their roles as religious and community/civic leaders.

Secondly, Romani leadership patterns are complex and often include a combination of different social roles and positions. Consider the example of the recently deceased Florin Cioabă – this traditional Kalderash Roma has been known more broadly as the 'King of the Roma', but apart from his post of traditional leadership he was also a Pentecostal pastor, a politician and the president of the International Romani Union (IRU). Despite his declared conservatism with respect to Romani traditions, he also managed to send his son to university, to promote the value of education among the Roma and to alter some rules of *Romanipen*.[16] In Spain, where the Evangelical church is especially well-rooted in the Romani community, Romani pastors often form civic associations, combining multiple roles – not just as spiritual leaders, but also as activists collaborating closely with the public administration.[17] Furthermore, as Aidan McGarry argues, Romani NGOs have a clearly political character,[18] and the frontiers separating political, civic and traditional leadership are porous and fluid. Analysing the life trajectories of individual, prominent leaders often presents us with a picture of their complex and miscellaneous activities, in which their leadership 'type' is constantly changing and transitory.

In his final article,[19] Nicolae Gheorghe again gives a frank, accurate diagnosis of the current state of affairs of the 'Roma Movement'. The question of Romani leaders as the main agents shaping the agenda, and ultimately having the greatest potential to bring about the desired change, is pivotal in the

text. In his analysis, the 'Roma Movement' still struggles with fragmentation, and he uses the brilliant metaphor of 'sects' instead of 'churches'; lacking accountable, reliable leadership and failing to generate mass support or maintain links with the grassroots. In summation, many of the problems identified by Gheorghe and others over a decade ago continue to operate, and weaken the movement. They are not new issues; they were debated earlier, but in his latest writing, Gheorghe points to some of them now taking on a rather perverse shape.

Re-emergence of 'traditional' leaders vs. emerging youth leaders

Gheorghe speaks of the re-emergence of Romani 'traditional' leaders who claim to fill the gap between a 'distant' Romani elite and the communities, and of the reasons why this trend is potentially dangerous. We may ask: to what extent is this trend new? Is it applicable to all Romani communities across Europe? After all, in many places we can trace the continuity of a traditional Romani leadership and their direct involvement in policy-making. In Spain, for example, the National Roma Advisory Council[20] is formed mainly by senior *Gitano* leaders, many of whom enjoy respect in their corresponding local communities. In Catalonia, too, the traditional Council of Elders[21] (a *Romani Kriss* of *Gitano* communities) has been institutionalised as a local NGO, performing a traditional role as mediators and judges of internal conflicts while also participating in consultation meetings and other policy-related processes.

However, following Gheorghe's logic, if we are, in fact, observing such a re-emergence, why is it happening? Is it due to the failures of the 'non-traditional' leadership?[22] Or is it due to the disconnectedness of the Romani elite from communities?[23] Or is it because of a lack of unity and internal

16   Specifically, he forbade the marriage of Roma under the age of 16, formerly a common practice.

17   In Catalonia, for example, there is the Federation of Roma Cultural Christian Associations (*Federación de Asociaciones Culturales Cristianas de Cataluña, FACCA*). Similar federations can be found in other autonomous regions throughout Spain.

18   Aidan McGarry, *Who speaks for the Roma? Political representation of a transnational minority community* (London: Continuum, 2011), 94.

19   Will Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship: The Path of Roma Integration* (Budapest: Kossuth Publishing Corporation, 2013).

20   *Consejo Estatal del Pueblo Gitano* – (National Roma Advisory Council). Available at: **http://www.msssi.gob.es/ssi/familiasInfancia/inclusion-Social/poblacionGitana/consejoEstGitano.htm**.

21   The *Consejo de Ancianos* (Council of Elders) is federated under the Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia (FAGIC) as the *Associació per a la Convivència i Civisme del Poble Gitano* and is also a separate sub-body of FAGIC.

22   "Leadership, representation and the status of Roma", (Project on Ethnic Relations. Princeton: 2001).

23   Vermeersch, *The Romani Movement;* Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship*.

rivalries within the movement?[24] Or is it perhaps a result of the process of the 'essentialisation'[25] of Romani culture? Or is it driven by the opportunism caused by the so-called NGO-isation of human rights and the Romani movement and the increased opportunities for accessing resources and gaining an income through the movement, often called the evolving 'Gypsy industry'?[26]

Lastly, might this not be a reaction to the emerging Romani youth leadership? After all, Gheorghe and Mirga argue that "new elites [have] challenged the legitimacy of the traditional leadership."[27]

Gheorghe, while speaking about the recent phenomenon of the re-emerging Romani traditional leadership, dedicates little attention to a parallel trend observed in the past decade which for some time has taken on an ever-quickening pace. In recent years, Romani youth have increasingly demanded their place within the structures of Romani ethnic mobilisation and at the policy table, with considerable results. Today, as never before, we are observing a plethora of youth-oriented initiatives from such institutions as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the Open Society Foundations. Roma youth have not only become a specific policy category in and of themselves, but have also increasingly undergone the transformation from a passive target group to active agents of change.

The emergence of Romani youth leadership is due to various factors. On the one hand there is the obvious generational transition – time passes, senior leaders get older and younger ones mature, eager to contribute. In a way, these young leaders are the fruits of senior leadership efforts, projects such as *Pakiv*, as well as many others across Europe,

aimed at recruiting and training a new cadre of Romani leadership. The time has come for these initiatives to bear fruit.

On the other hand, there is generational change as understood more in terms of the Bourdieuian concept of *habitus*.[28] Although the situation is far from being perfect and the quality of Romani people's schooling can be questioned, there is a generational change involving the fact that the vast majority of the Romani population is now attending school. As a consequence, Romani youth today tend to be better educated than the previous generation were and an increasing number are entering university. They often know policy-maker jargon and have the necessary know-how to walk the corridors of power. This is a qualitative change in the human resources available for Romani ethnic mobilisation.

These dynamics, however, do not necessarily apply to the entire Romani youth population, but rather to those privileged youth who have emerged due to their enlightened parents and favourable conditions, or who have conquered leadership spaces on their own. Those youngsters who broke through the glass ceiling of higher education are directly ascending to the ranks of the Romani elite.

What is this trend like at the community level? Is a generational transition affecting the leadership patterns there, or do traditional leaders continue to play a dominant role?[29] In the constant dilemma of whether to obey or to rebel against the traditional structures of community power, youth who have ambitions of joining the ranks of the Romani ethnic mobilisation may choose to escape the older traditional leadership and forge their own spaces for participation and action.[30]

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24 McGarry, *Who Speaks for the Roma?*.

25 Essentialism is a concept which views the characteristics of a group as fixed, given traits, irrespective of the variety and evident heterogeneity of the members of the group. With the establishment of the "Roma issue" as a policy category, the Roma are perceived in a generalised, over-simplified way and Romani culture is often essentialised.

26 Nidhi Trehan, "In the name of the Roma? The role of private foundations and NGOs", in *Between Past and future. The Roma of Central and Easter Europe*, ed., Will Guy (University of Hertforshire Press, 2001); Nidhi Trehan, "The Romani Subaltern within Neoliberal European Civil Society: the NGOization of Human Rights and Silent Voices", in *Romani Politics in Contemporary Europe. Poverty, Ethnic Mobilization and the Neoliberal Order*, eds. Nidhi Trehan and Nando Sigona (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

27 Guy, *From Victimhood to Citizenship,* 4.

28 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

29 Further research is necessary in this regard, but some evidence demonstrates that youth who have ambitions to join the ranks of the Romani ethnic mobilisation are often "escaping traditional leadership". More in: Anna Mirga, "Youth engagement in the Gitano Associative movement in Catalonia: Emerging 'youthscapes'", in: *Global Perspectives on Youth Work*, ed. Brian Belton (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2014).

30 *Ibid.*

The emergence of youth leaders also introduces risks and potential dangers. Some youth leaders may be motivated to join 'the Gypsy industry' for purely opportunistic reasons. Others may lack links to the grassroots and are often disconnected from Romani communities. Due to their 'youth condition' they find it difficult to raise an authoritative voice, one which would have the power to influence and mobilise others. Finally, are they not repeating the same mistakes of the previous elite leadership? To whom are these young leaders accountable? What do they represent? What Romani constituency is counting on them? These questions are critical if Romani youth are to move Romani ethnic mobilisation towards a process of sustainable growth and maturity.

Conclusions

Ethnic movements pass through different stages.[31] After all, the 'Romani movement' is quite young; as Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrzej Mirga argue, "Roma are among the last groups in Europe to discover the potential and power of ethno-nationalism to struggle for a political space of their own".[32] In order to learn from previous mistakes, it is important to have a dose of self-criticism and self-reflection. A voice of conscience is needed. That is why Gheorghe's work is important – he is honest and direct in his criticism and insightful in his analysis.

What Gheorghe does not discuss, however, is the hidden potential that might lie in these two phenomena of a re-emerging Romani traditional leadership and emerging youth. The re-emerging traditional leadership can draw from the cultural practices that apply to varying degrees in different communities, using them as a resource to generate support and build constituencies and electoral power. Traditional leaders could aim to reconnect Romani leaders with their communities, which could ultimately lead to the building of a people-driven movement. All movements need different levels of leadership;[33] at grassroots level local traditional leaders may be most efficient and could help to re-establish trust in Romani NGOs through direct, community-based action. On the other hand, there is an immense potential in Romani youth leadership. Young leaders are a source of cultural pride and often become role models. Their capacity and professionalism, their new ideas and methods, and their often good links with the majority societies are evident assets.

However, the potential of the re-emerging Romani traditional leaders and emerging youth leaders will go unused unless, in Gheorghe's words, serious changes take place in Roma civil society.[34] The key lies in building leadership both downwards – towards the community – and sideways, across movements. Democratic principles are the elements *sine qua non* here - leaders must be made accountable to their people and communities should have a sense of ownership. Leaders bear collective responsibility for their actions, and for this reason, different mechanisms of control, evaluation and accountability should be put into place. It is also paramount to set aside these dichotomies of leadership and begin to see them as complementary approaches. Efforts should concentrate on building synergies, combining the experience and wisdom of the senior and often traditional leaders with the knowledge and energy of the self-appointed, often younger activists. What should connect them is their common cause, their collective interest and a sense of Gheorghe´s understanding of *Pakiv* as transparency and trustworthiness.

It is difficult to see whether these changes will appear soon. In a way (and paradoxically) the achievements of the Romani movement are also the roots of its limitations: as long as Roma are not independent but are fulfilling someone else's agenda, with their leaders co-opted and competing for resources, concentrating on providing services rather than generating self-help, it is doubtful that serious change will take place. The funding and income opportunities associated with the 'Roma issue' make the 'Roma Movement' attractive because of its potential for pursuing a career and taking advantage of opportunity, which makes self-interest one of the main incentives for joining it. However, Romani ethnic mobilisation, like that of all social movements, should be founded on values and on a sense of common destiny and collective responsibility.

Time will tell. Be that as it may, Gheorghe's legacy has been and continues to be influential in exposing our limitations and pointing us in the right direction.

31   Donatella De la Porta and Mario Diani, *Social movements: An introduction,* (UK: Wiley, 2006).

32   Gheorghe and Mirga, *"The Roma in the Twenty-First Century"*.

33   Ganz, *"Leading Change"*.

34   Guy, *From Victimhood to Citizenship*.

Nicolae Gheorghe: Activism and Scholarship

ANDREW RYDER[1]

Nicolae Gheorghe was what can be described as a Renaissance figure, a polymath whose expertise and knowledge spanned several fields ranging from high-level diplomacy to advocacy and activism. Added to this we need to acknowledge his prowess in provocative and stimulating academic papers that made important contributions to knowledge production. One of the important lessons we should draw from Gheorghe's life as a sociologist is courage. Courage is what produces great sociology, emboldening researchers to challenge orthodoxy and the establishment. In 1978 Gheorghe wrote a letter to Radio Free Europe describing the difficult situation of Roma in Romania, and later on he was investigated by the Securitate. During the final years of communism Gheorghe was banned from travelling and only allowed to publish elsewhere under a pseudonym.[2] Today the 'courageous' researcher faces a range of foes which includes an increasingly commodified academic environment where university managers and research funders are not always sympathetic to research which champions a despised minority and/or prefer weak and tepid research.

Gheorge's courage as a researcher extended to dealing with sensitive and/or taboo topics. In the edited volume *From Victimhood to Citizenship* Gheorghe grappled with the perceived failures of civil society and its disconnection from Roma communities.[3] In addition he bemoaned how some coping strategies within Roma communities were centred on reactive forms of tradition and/or survival tactics which reaffirmed negative stereotypes about Roma at the margins. However, in this critique it is evident that Gheorghe is desperately searching for an understanding of what is happening at the margins and within civil society, and seeking through mediation and dialogue to offer a new path, a reorientation in how Roma mobilise and frame their marginalisation. Gheorghe was surely timely and pertinent in his selection of dragons to slay, given that the initial flourish of optimism within Roma civil society and communities faded rapidly in the transition period, and to this day some considerable doubt remains as to whether Romani activism is sufficiently on course and on target to combat Roma exclusion. However, what is striking is that Gheorghe retained a "pedagogy of hope", a sense of idealism and belief that there was a way out centred on citizenship, redistribution and empowerment, but also that the Roma themselves had to make big decisions and be the masters of their own destiny in this reorientation.

Gheorghe's ability to measure a problem and present a frame which encompassed a plan of action, and then frenetically inspire and galvanise his supporters and whoever would listen to him, is surely needed at the present time in Romani Studies. Without going into the tedious detail of the squabble, many on both sides of the debate would agree that Romani Studies currently faces a crisis. A series of sharp debates amongst academics and scholars have created divisions and distrust which may damage Romani Studies as a discipline. The intellectual core of these debates centres on the relationship between the researcher and those being researched, but also on relations with centres of power. This debate has been an ongoing one for decades but flared up with an unprecedented level of intensity and rancour after Gheorghe's death. If Gheorghe were alive he would be the obvious choice to mediate not so much a consensus but rather a constructive understanding between the different parties (working dissensus). Bourdieu described a working dissensus as an arena which affords critical acknowledgement of compatibilities and incompatibilities. In other words a space where academics from diverging intellectual traditions can at least agree to participate in constructive dialogue.[4]

2   The Romani Elders "Nicolae Gheorghe: Intellectual, activist", available at: **http://www.theromanielders.org/elders/2/5/**.

3   Will Guy, ed., *From Victimhood to Citizenship: The Path of Roma Integration* (Budapest: Kossuth Publishing Corporation, 2013).

4   Pierre Bourdieu, "Epilogue – On the Possibility of a Field of World Sociology", in *Social Theory for a Changing Society,* eds., Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1991).

Gheorghe was no stranger to dialogue and mediation in polarised environments. His skills in mediation were honed in his ground-breaking mediatory work with Romani CRISS in Romanian villages which had become riven by acute ethnic tensions between Roma and non-Roma inhabitants. It was a skill he was also called upon to exercise in Romani politics, where he mediated between the International Romani Union (IRU) and Roma National Congress (RNC). At the turn of the 21st century the IRU tended to be portrayed as representing a more traditional and established stratum of Roma leadership, while the RNC was a breakaway faction which was deemed to be driven by grassroots politics and involved a younger cadre of the Roma leadership like Rudko Kawczynski. The schism between the IRU and RNC was less clearly defined than indicated by the brief outline given above but it was true that there was a sense of gridlock, and that divisions in the Romani Movement were proving to be counter-productive.

Gheorghe played a key role in dialogue between the IRU and RNC, the fruit of which was the formation of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF). In 2000, through the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Gheorghe established the International Roma Contact Group, which included the leadership of the IRU, the board of RNC, and a number of independent Roma activists and experts. Discussions between the Roma Contact Group and the Council of Europe led to the establishment of the ERTF between 2003 and 2005.[5] Gheorghe outlined his aspirations for the ERTF as follows - "My first hope from the Forum is that it will manage to create standards, precedents for the national Roma organisations, with its actions and that it will serve as a role model. My second hope is that the Forum will create

a vision for addressing the various issues that Roma are confronted with."[6] Gheorghe, until the time of his death, retained the hope that the ERTF might be a key factor in the development of Roma political culture at a European level but that the key ingredient was to establish nationally-representative organisations, based on inclusive networks of Roma NGOs, political parties or churches which would form the bedrock of the ERTF.[7]

Deliberation, meaningful connections to Roma communities and accountability were thus clearly-valued principles for Gheorghe in European-wide efforts by the Roma to influence policy and societal perceptions and to shape collective frames. How these principles square with and whether they can be transferred to academic fora centred on the Roma at a European level remains to be seen, as the concept of a European Roma Institute is at present at an embryonic stage and the European Academic Network on Romani Studies takes stock of the fact that its funding will shortly expire.[8]

A number of critical researchers, including the author, influenced by the writings and activism of Gheorghe, have formed the Roma Research and Empowerment Network (RREN). The RREN is based in Budapest and was established in 2011 and has sought to promote inclusive research. It stages debates in community centres and cafes in Roma communities for activists, practitioners and researchers. The RREN promotes a vision of inclusive research which *goes beyond* the academy and promotes participatory and community-based research as a tool for furthering social justice.[9] Gheorghe seemed to be searching for a sense of praxis, the fusion between knowledge and practice. As Gheorghe noted "…we may generate a movement only if we manage to find ideological tools

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5   Interview with Nicolae Gheorghe, "The Decade of Roma Rights", European Roma Rights Centre. Budapest, Hungary: 31 October 2006, available at: **http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2648**.

6   *Ibid.*

7   Guy, *From Victimhood to Citizenship.*

8   At the time of writing the Council of Europe and other stakeholders are engaged in discussions about the establishment of a European Roma Institute which according to a CoE paper would prioritise Roma representation, esteem-building and challenging stereotypes. The European Academic Network was established in 2011 with support from the EU and CoE and elected a scientific committee. Its stated aims include support for efforts towards the social inclusion of Romani citizens in Europe and facilitating intercultural dialogue and raising the visibility of existing research outside the academic community in order to foster cooperation with policy-makers and other stakeholders. In November 2014 the Scientific Committee informed the membership that elections (as had originally been planned) would not be held as the project would be scaled down due to the present round of funding expiring in the summer of 2015. Instead the EANRS would focus on the legacy outcomes of the project and the continuance of the online discussion forum. To this end a number of the members of the Scientific Committee would remain in place as a Validation Committee to vet continued membership admission and will invite the membership to think of ways in which the network and its resources can be further developed and promoted.

9   Durham Community Research Team, Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, *Connected Communities - Community-based Participatory Research: Ethical Challenges* (Durham: Durham University, 2011).

and messages to capture the feelings, the interests and the social imagination of the population in the grass-roots Roma communities…".[10] Participatory and collaborative forms of research which not only empower the Roma in knowledge production, but also help mobilise forms of critical consciousness at the grassroots in order to embrace a more emancipatory vision of society, could be a central part of the armoury Gheorghe envisaged.[11]

Visions of inclusive and emancipatory research prompt a number of valid questions: Are community researchers compromised by their close links to communities and/or tainted by activism? In turn these questions prompt a series of counter-questions: Are those researchers labelled as experts mistaken in their assertions of objectivity? Are they in fact imbued with a form of scientism which has fostered disconnection and compromised research? Have the experts usurped the role of Roma civil society as key advisers to policy-makers? These are some of the fault lines of

ongoing academic debate, a debate which some would say has of late become embittered.

Debate for Gheorghe was a valuable engine in knowledge production, but when it becomes internecine such debate fans the extremes of factionalism. Gheorghe could be described as having a rather platonic view on debate, welcoming deliberation and dialogue with those with greatly differing views. Alas some of the factionalism and 'dogfights' of present-day disputes in Romani Studies stoke division rather than insight and/or common action. All of us, no matter what side of the argument we adhere to in the ongoing debates in Romani Studies, must not lose sight of the civility and openness with which Gheorghe engaged with his detractors and opponents but there is also a need to balance this with the courage and honesty which Gheorghe also displayed; thus challenge and argument have a valid place. With these principles in mind the example of Gheorghe could leave a powerful and potent legacy for all researchers and scholars.

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10 Interview with Nicolae Gheorghe, "The Decade of Roma Rights", European Roma Rights Centre, 2006.

11 Andrew Ryder, *Co-producing Knowledge with below the radar communities: Factionalism, Commodification or Partnership? A Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Case Study* (University of Birmingham: Third Sector Research Centre Working Paper, 2015), available at: **http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/ documents/tsrc/discussion-papers/2015/gtr-discussion-paper-g-ryder-28janfinal.pdf**.

The Centrality of Economic Development in the vision of Romani Nation-building

BY JENNIFER TANAKA[1]

The context of confidence-building after inter-ethnic conflict in the early 1990s

It was in the mid-1990s that I first started working with Nicolae Gheorghe and other colleagues from Romani CRISS (Roma Centre for Social Intervention and Studies). This was a period just after a series of inter-ethnic conflicts and anti-Roma pogroms in which local communities attempted to violently expel Roma from their villages. While applying pressure on the state to ensure the administration of justice over the communal violence in which Roma houses were burned down, Romani CRISS also found it necessary to support local confidence-building processes in order to see the reinsertion of evicted families.

In this context, the necessity of economic development for local families was seen as central to creating more favourable conditions for improving inter-ethnic relations and the living standards of local Roma families. At that time, the accent of available funds was on building an NGO sector, including various democracy-building, human rights, confidence-building and educational activities. Funds for economic development were much less prominent.

With his consistent attitude of exploring the potential contributions of almost anyone interested in Roma issues, Nicolae and Romani CRISS had succeeded in accessing support from various donors and institutions in Europe. Among other things, this provided an opportunity to access support from private and public sources in Germany to support economic projects in Roma communities.

Supporting business development among Roma

The economic activities supported were a result of bringing together local Roma community leaders, civic organisations, experts on small and medium enterprise development and mostly external donors (primarily from Germany). I think

Nicolae was a master at bringing together people, ideas and various issues. As a person who always processed his thoughts externally, he also constantly enrolled other people in some sort of action or commitment, even when they may not have realised it until they received a follow-up letter or phone call.

Different types of activities were supported, including agricultural farming, metallurgy, basket-weaving, garbage collection – all led by local Roma with the purpose of providing income and jobs for Roma.

Although the business plans projected a picture of profit and return, in actuality most, if not all, of the projects proved much less viable. It was never really a question of producing or working, but rather of competing on local markets and expanding in ways to create self-sustainable businesses. In my opinion, one major underestimated determinant was the limited social and political capital of local Roma entrepreneurs and managers. The promising business plans produced by the SME consultants failed to acknowledge these relations and the influence needed to penetrate existing markets or to find new ones.

One of Nicolae's long-lasting requests was for an in-depth evaluation and analysis of the longer-term impact and results of these investments. I believe this was finally realised in part. Effective participation of Roma on the labour market, including entrepreneurial development, will be necessary for sustainable inclusion to work. Therefore, a sincere and more in-depth analysis of the reasons why these and other initiatives, in Hungary and Bulgaria for example, were largely unsustainable is worth exploring. Some of the original initiators may still be alive and able to tell their stories.

Affirming Romani identity and values as part of nation-building

It would be too much of an understatement to reduce this idea to that of the economic development of Roma in and

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of itself. In my reflection, Nicolae believed the realisation of such development should be done in ways that contribute to Romani nation-building - to the process of *ethnogenesis* on which he published as early as 1991.[2] This meant constructing Romani identity and affirming cultural values in the relatively "new" context of civil rights and democratic institution-building. As such, it meant dialectic interactions among Romani political and community leaders in terms of cultivating civic and social responsibility alongside local business development in post-communist societies.

The local economic project initiators were part of the post-conflict resolution processes and were also members of the Ethnic Federation of Roma, an early attempt to bring Roma together through civic organisations in Romania. The approach to economic development, therefore, was combined with a desire to cultivate solidarity and a sense of civic responsibility among Roma community leaders so that they would intervene in unjust situations.

Already in the mid-1990s Nicolae wanted to see the use of the concept of *pakiv (pachiv)* as a Romani value and a source of self-sustainability. With its meanings of "trust", "confidence" and "respect" among Romani-speaking members of the community, he wanted to extend and affirm this value in the context of the economic projects, among others. In practice this countered everyday prejudice as well, by conveying the message that Roma are trustworthy. Support for local economic development was given in the form of loans, and the repayment of these loans was to form the basis of a revolving and sustainable fund. The idea was that *pakiv*, as a value, qualifies the relationship among the people involved, a relationship grounded in an agreement that is more about mutual respect and honour than the legally binding contract of the modern world.

In joining the fund, members would themselves participate in its decision-making. This was in part already practiced among those who were initially supported, as a way to affirm shared responsibility and ownership. I **cannot** really count the number of meetings and long discussions among project leaders to discuss progress, debate dilemmas, and decide on how to address challenges.

Looking back now, it is maybe a bit ironic that one of the most successful persons in raising external funds for local development in the 1990s also ended up being the most adamant, life-long advocate for Roma to contribute to, govern and manage their own funds.

In this brief reflection, I think it is these dreams of solidarity and self-sustainability, the values and even the contradictions that stand out the most for me when I think about Nicolae and economic development. Many of us wondered whether the principles of civic responsibility combined with solidarity, nation-building and economic development are really compatible. However, I do not think Nicolae would have it any other way. It is an opportunity and potential too valuable to waste, regardless of how much it may be an amalgamation of various ideas and hopes.

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2   Nicolae Gheorghe, "Roma-Gypsy Ethnicity in Eastern Europe", *Social Research* 58:4 (1991).

Roma or Ţigan: The Romani Identity – Between Victimisation and Emancipation

NICOLAE GHEORGHE IN DIALOGUE WITH IULIUS ROSTAŞ[1]

Iulius Rostaş: Out of my private conversations with different Roma activists about the beginnings of the Roma movement after 1989, you were for sure the main character involved in all episodes, dealing with their experiences. There were some surreal moments, even funny ones.

Nicolae Gheorghe: When I established the Ethnic Federation of Roma (FER), in May 1990, I was still an expert of the National Minorities Committee, for the Temporary Council of the CPUN.[2] At the meeting to establish the FER, there were: Onoriu and Gabi Luncă, Boldor from Baia Mare, also a Pentecostal believer, I think there was also a leader from Oradea, Augustin Balog, and Ivan Răducanu and some others. I felt quite drawn to the Evangelist believers, because I attended the Pentecostal meetings before 1990. When we were supposed to eat something brought from home by one of the participants, first there was a prayer said by our pastors, with God, a blessing… And the Ethnic Federation was established and… we were at the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Ex-Romanian Communist Party, I was in my office as an expert for the Roma in the CPUN.

I.R.: Yes, it would have been an unbelievable situation just a few months earlier: the *Ţigani*,[3] inside the Central Committee, saying prayers and establishing an organisation.

N.G.: Yes, what an irony of fate!

I.R.: There were different stories, like a mixture, a real puzzle. Looking back to what happened to different Roma actors,

there were some unknown elements, the missing pieces of the puzzle. Where had this strategy of the NGOs come from, why was there no political mobilisation for the elections?

N.G.: Because I had this idea in my head: organising as many civic associations as possible (back then we didn't use the NGO word). Costel Bercuş asked me once: "Nicolae, please tell me what you want?" And I answered: I would like to have about 1,000 civic associations", meaning for some a real betrayal - other activists were discussing unity, about just one ethnic formation for the elections, in order to get a parliamentary group, back then in 1990, with the Democrat Union of the Roma, from Romania (becoming later on the Party of the Roma), and I was the heretic saying: "That's not possible. It is not that I don't want it, but it is not a realistic solution". My alternative was that out of the 1000 civic associations to gradually have a Federation on the basis of some clearly defined interests, maybe on a contract between these associations, making clear through a platform the content, the substance, the political interests of the ethnic identification as Roma, as citizens of the State, as a national minority… That was the intention for the Ethnic Federation of Roma…

I.R.: That is why you were suspected of treason, that you were the Trojan horse infiltrating the Roma, in order to dismantle the organisational efforts.

N.G.: Let's say that I had a 'vision': while intuiting a phenomenon, knowing its dynamics, its becoming…

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1   These conversations happened between June 27 and July 2, 2011, in Salerno, Italy. The dialogue was generated by a text written by Nicolae Gheorghe, for the project *The Price of Roma Integration*. Other texts in this possible publication are written by András Biró (Hungary), Martin Kovats (UK), and Christian Petry (Germany). A debate/seminar about these texts, hand-written, took place in Bucharest–Snagov, on September 23-24, 2011. Iulius Rostaş was among the participants at this seminar. A report of the debate was edited by Will Guy (UK). These texts, including the seminar debates formed the book *From Victimhood to Citizenship: the Path of Roma Integration – a Debate* edited by Will Guy, András Biró, Nicolae Gheorghe and others, and published by Pakiv European Roma Fund and Kossuth Kiado in 2013. The interview was conducted in Romanian.

2   CPUN (Consiliul Provizoriu de Uniune Nationala – Provisional Council of National Unity) was the leading authority in Romania from 9 February 1990 until the first election on 20 May 1990. It was comprised of representatives of all political forces at the time, including representatives of national minorities.

3   I decided to keep the term *Ţigan* in the original language of the interview to underline the negative meaning associated with it. *Ţigani* used to be slaves in Romania until the mid-XIX century. This term kept its meaning of a person with lower social status but also all other pejorative adjectives: dirty, uncivilised, uneducated, thieves, lazy. These characteristics continue to be associated in the Romanian public imagination with the term *Ţigan*. The English translation "Gypsy" does not have the same pejorative connotation and, moreover, some groups in the UK prefer to be called Gypsies as they fought to keep their ethnic distinctiveness, including their ethnic denomination as Gypsies.

I.R.: That would be a much too banal explanation; it was more than obvious that I was missing something out of these recollections; for example, the identity factor. Regarding the identity I said it many times, in different circles and a bit in our discussion: I think that you always had an identity complex, the experience with the Communist Party included. This aspect I could discern in the text[4] you had prepared here and where you had said that you didn't feel "Roma enough", in order to lead the Roma movement.

N.G.: Regarding the ethnic-identity aspect of representation, meaning Roma as a national minority, taking into account the ethnic politics, as long as we have discussed that in Romania, since 1990...

I.R.: Yes, about your identity as a Roma. And I remember when we shared our personal experiences of early socialisation, how we internalised the issue about the Roma and the Gypsies, all these identity aspects included. When I was just arriving in Bucharest, I was put in a context where people questioned my identity as a Roma.

N.G.: How did you approach this issue? As coming from me or from my group? How did you live it? Or what did you consider as intriguing, unfair, improper and ridiculous?

I.R.: I found it ridiculous that for all the others, my colleagues in Cluj included, those with whom I have discussed this issue, they didn't have such questions regarding the fact that I was assuming my identity as a Roma – it was accepted as a fact, the questions coming more out of certain curiosities. Here, in Bucharest, people say to me: "No, it is not very obvious that you are a Roma!" And it was strange: how come me, having come from the "gypsyhood" (*tiganie)*, from a family where this issue was openly discussed and my early socialisation was as a Roma?

N.G.: And do you still worry about this issue?

I.R.: No. I relaxed afterwards.

N.G.: I still worry about it.

I.R.: I relaxed the moment I succeeded in establishing some relationships with those from Bucharest, on different degrees of intensity and cooperation.

N.G.: I, in my relationship with myself and those around me, I perceive the Roma identity issue in a more complicated, in a more "philosophical" way, if you wish. The provoking issue for those around me was: "What kind of a Roma are you? Why are you a Roma?" I took as a starting point my readings as an ex-student in philosophy, from Immanuel Kant, following his questions about: "How is it possible?" - meaning for Kant, how is knowledge possible, how are space and time possible as cognitive categories... Eventually, the philosopher's question being: how it is possible to build on the thinking level, of epistemology... How can you establish logically something through the "signals" out of our senses, so, through the knowledge predicaments? That is how the whole debate from the very beginning of critical thinking in modern philosophy could be summarised, when the issue is to rebuild the world, under the conceptual aspect, and not only to live it. By comparison, the question for me, for us is: "How is it possible to be Roma?" By the way, reading about the surroundings of Salerno, I have discovered that some of the Greek philosophers we are referring to, the Eleates, had lived around here, where we are now: *Elea* (later on *Velia*, during the Roman Empire) was a settlement, a 'colony' in *Magna Greece,* located around here in the Centre and the South of Italy.

An anecdote – which I heard from my academic professors - that I have told many times, is the *batulinic* argument (the stick argument): the master explains to his students the theory of some philosophers from Ancient Greece, that from the logical point of view motion is not possible. That is why "Achilles the swift-footed can't reach the tortoise", or "an arrow shot from a bow doesn't move at all"... meaning the logical paradoxes structured with the intention to astonish you - to confuse, to perplex. All this in order to awaken your intellect to move from the obvious to the level of senses, to the thinking mood: how come a runner like Achilles can't reach the tortoise? And when the master explains to his disciples, a pupil stands up and starts walking. The philosopher was just arguing that motion was not possible… And the disciple stands up and says: "Look, I can walk!" Then the master takes a stick and hits his pupil hard saying: "The issue is not to practice the motion, but a philosophical one; to *think* the motion". That is why it is called the stick argument... As you can see I, now, here in Salerno, I walk leaning on a stick: so, beware!

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4   See footnote 1 above.

I.R.: And what has this anecdote to do with our talk about the naming of *Țigan* or Roma?

N.G.: Going back to our concern about the words, the names, the identities of *Țigan*, of Roma... I have lived this bewilderment, sometimes as shocking, as confusing... and I am going to tell you about a personal experience... The matter consists of rebuilding through knowledge, dialogue (as Zeno of Elea, Socrates or Plato were doing...) and not as we "feel" the Roma identity, not as we live spontaneously, naturally: we are *Țigan* and that's all. That is why we are Roma now! We have lived and are still living with names, with labels given from outside, names given/repeated by our own family members: We are *Țigan* that is why we are *Țigan*... I don't know who is a *Țigan*... or that she is not a *Țigan*... that this is *Țigan* music, etc.

Now as activists, you or I, brought up under this name of *Țigan*, we could consider ourselves as Roma or we can be Roma, because we feel it, like the disciple from the anecdote I just told, the one about starting to walk, which was used as an argument to falsify the master's logic.

My question then when you came from Cluj to Bucharest was intended to provoke you, to upset you to put both you and myself in a certain position, in order to think why we would like to redefine the label of *Țigan*, in naming ethnically Roma as persons consciously assuming a certain identity in public life, in ethno-politics...

I.R.: Yes, but even the *Țigani* were different kinds.

N.G.: My mother wouldn't allow me to mingle with the wandering *Țigani* (the tent-dwellers) telling me that they were dirty and dangerous. The first fright regarding the *Țigani* came from my mother who inoculated me quite deeply, and I still live with it. In a certain way I am still in the world of paradoxes of Elea: between me and the wandering *Țigan*, I suppose that there should be continuity, a communion, but I feel a void, a gap that either doesn't exist (the Ancient Greeks imagined the Cosmos as the opposite of Chaos, being full, compact, with no fissure); or, if the void does exist, there should also be a bridge at least a small one, that I can't cross. So under the aspect of a lived experience, there is no spontaneous or immediate continuity, between the *Țigan* identity, a more social one, imposed from outside, as long as *Roma* is assumed consciously, in a process of knowing the history,

the language and the culture of the people we are claiming as persons, active in public and political life, inside multi-ethnic communities and so on.

Of course I can juggle, as you say, meaning I have learnt the Romani language, I have competed for a position as an adviser for the Roma (when I was selected for OSCE, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti, in Warsaw, in 1999), but somewhere inside me, a rupture remained, an anxiety, a complex, as you were saying. And then the fundamental question remained – *Why am I a Țigan?* – meaning how could we reconstruct, conceptually, our identity, and not how we live it. Identity is not a naturally given fact; we are not Roma or *Țigan* just because of the colour of our skin, this being our "feeling", on the first view, when we are identified or self-identified as *Țigan*, as Roma. If you say that you are a *Țigan* or a Roma (as you were telling your colleagues in Cluj) then you believe you are and they weren't asking you: "Why?" People are taking your statement as such. Regarding the colour of the skin, the issue is more complicated.

I.R.: In a summer camp, organised by Vasile Ionescu the slogan was "Turn black and you'll be free!"...

N.G.: Yes... and no. For example, the colour of the skin here in Italy makes this statement irrelevant. In Campania, there are people as dark as or even darker than we are. The immediate question is: should we label them as *Țigan* according to our representations, our Romanian stereotypes? I say that, no matter the skin pigment and our feelings concerning this element of our identity, the question remains: Who are the *Țigani*? Or the Roma? That was the crisis that I wished to provoke in each and every discussion, the dialogue with you included, when I provoked you by asking: "Why are you a *Țigan*?" and "How is it possible" to be a *Țigan* or a Roma? The fact that we are labelled and we were labelled historically as *Țigan*, comes from classification, inside a category consisting of a system of definitions, in different historical periods: a socio-juridical category, during the *Țigani* slavery; a racial one, during the 1930s and, especially, during the deportation to Transnistria, etc. These definitions generated and imposed in particular historical periods have been internalised, taken over and even displayed by our families, by the communities we are part of. But I must repeat myself, there is a torturing question: do these socio-historical classifications, even cultural, such as *Țigan,* make us automatically Roma? I would say NO!

I.R.: For me my identity has no ontological significance or not only an ontological one.

N.G.: This is a subjective matter too. But not only that… In our case, it is not regarded as only a subjective matter.

I.R.: It is a subjective matter too. I am always giving this example. Why, when I see two people, do I feel closer to the one who I identified, or they themselves have identified, as Roma, out of instinct?

N.G.: I sometimes have a reverse reaction, I avoid them. I label them and then I avoid them.

I.R.: Instinctively I feel much closer to the Roma one, although sometimes I might realise afterwards that I have more common interests with the other, a common language with the non-Roma.

N.G.: I can see somebody in the street… and it quickly pops into my head that they are *Ţigan*… and sometimes I withdraw. For my own safety I choose not to interact. At other times, I go and try to establish a connection, but it is a rational decision to establish this connection, it is not by affinity.

I.R.: But I feel it… and in your case there is a schism … that is why I couldn't understand the internal mechanism of some of your decisions before…

N.G.: But that is not enough, in my opinion.

I.R.: No, it isn't.

N.G.: One can't decide all by oneself. I can feel Italian, because it is what I want, but I need some landmarks, in order to be recognised as such by others in my identity as an Italian, or Sicilian, Venetian, etc…

I.R.: Apart from a self-declaration, there is the need to be recognised by others. But there is another issue too: we also have a Romanian identity. On the other hand, there are contexts when the institutional affiliation has a more powerful character than other affiliations, loyalties, identities.

N.G.: Yes, this can be a relevant feature. It comes out of the phenomenology language, the Ego and the Self, their presentation and what is significantly relevant for me. Starting from this very moment, I think or I say that this aspect became relevant for us, for the others.

I.R.: I can't say, for example, that I am an American. I can say that I am a Romanian, in addition to being Roma, because I identify myself more or less with the Romanian culture.

N.G.: You have the language, the culture and especially the citizenship. That is why you are not an American, you may know and read the whole of American literature, but as long as you are not an American citizen you are not American. To be American means a citizenship. It is not a feeling, it is not just a way of living.

I.R.: On the other hand, I have the experience of living in Hungary…

N.G.: Your family and your friends are there. For a certain period of time… But that doesn't make you a Hungarian. You may establish relationships with other people, based on a certain criterion. You have common memories about Budapest or feelings connected to Budapest, but this is not an ethnic identity.

I.R.: It is about how I have internalised different aspects. Similarly ethnic identity is about the way we have internalised different aspects. These important elements of ethnic identity can be found on the levels of discourse and perception.

N.G.: Identity, *ethnos,* communion/community with others… these all have to do with birth, *ethnos* having as a fundament a "natural classification"; through birth, there is a blood bond. Then there is a church, where other bonds of religious beliefs and specific, church rituals are established: community events, of life in a community… there are the weddings, the christenings, rituals, religious holidays and so on and so forth. There are school elements when one says: I go and study in a certain language. This subjective feeling becomes relevant (for myself, for you… and for others) and it is connected to certain exterior landmarks, I can't call them objective, but exterior, according to which one establishes some of the ways of sociability, on certain criteria, these being elaborated and coming to life through social existence. One can create ways of sociability with others, on the basis of a certain criterion. Yes, we are here, in Salerno, in a kind of sociability, in the idea of something common, significant, important for both of us, that made you travel here: ethno-political identity.

We have this talk, supposing that together we have something in common, not necessarily out of tradition, but as I was saying before, you lived something in your childhood

that I also lived during my childhood, due to family histories. Now we may have a common project, an ethno-political project that we wish to build, and which has to do with *ethnos*, meaning origin, birth, forefathers, etc. Or, from my point of view, this is still something which has not been clarified, that has to be created through conceptualisation and public debate. Ancient Greek philosophy, for example, has its roots in the debates about the city-states, *polis*, democracy in Athens, for example, or the colonies established by the Greeks such as the city colonies in *Elea, Paestum,* here in the area of the city of Salerno, where we are right now, or in *Tomis* and *Histria,* on the shores of the Black Sea, where you organised the "Turn black and you'll be free!" camp when you darkened your skin, in order to clarify your ethnic identity!

I.R.: So, we go from the Ancient Greek polis to the name of Athinganoi,[5] from medieval Byzantium, and now to the polemic regarding our ethnic name in Romania?

N.G.: In the case of Roma, the issues about Roma, about the ethnic name and other issues - a huge void was created, a quite vast institutional-political space that should be filled with something through thinking and action, through methods based on ideas, on *ideology*.

I.R.: I see identity as a fluid feature for the following reasons; there is a strong, a subjective side referring to the way you internalise certain feelings, connected to the social and political system; then there are relationships with others defining and making relevant certain aspects of ethnic identities; then the relationships with the others become an important factor in the way you internalise your own identity and how you communicate it.

N.G.: Well, maybe you are more like Heraclitus the philosopher and the world imagined by him: "everything flows" - everything changes, a world opposite to the one logically reconstructed by the Eleates. In the case of certain persons or groups, ethnic identity is total and totalising. It "imposes" and manages a lot out of the existence of the individual and relationships with those both inside and outside the group, with the world beyond the cultural "frontiers" (following Fredrik Barth's anthropological meaning) and

so on. Identity is in this case, an 'ethnic uniform' that one always wears… Thus the group or the identity outlines/foreshadows/predetermines almost everything or a lot of the individual's life. In Wallachia and Moldavia, until the middle of the 19th century, Roma were slaves, collectively and hereditarily: you were born a *Țigan,* you were a slave by birth, and you had no choice other than maybe to escape by running away. During the deportation years 1942 - 1944, the Roma belonging to a clan (such as the coppersmiths or the sieve-makers) were classified as "wandering" and were deported *en masse*, as a group, not selectively, individually. They were denounced as *Țigani,* some of the house Roma, home Roma, or the so-called Romanised *Țigani.* Until recently, even to this day, some Roma sub-groups function as sort of artisans guilds, carrying on from generation to generation: if you are born into a wood-worker's family or a goldwasher's (*Bayash*) one, your profession is pre-determined, working with wood; if you were born into a silversmith's family, it meant working with precious metals, a coppersmith made buckets, etc.

Nowadays, this is the case for Roma living in extended families, in kinship groups, 'clan-like', (in an ethnographical sense, anthropologically, as peoples or *descendants*[6] of Roma); some of them preferring to identify themselves now - during our recent talks - as 'traditional Roma' in order to differentiate themselves from us, the linguistically assimilated. But also to differentiate themselves, by way of life, from the ones they call *kashtalii* (from the word *kast*, meaning wood in Romanes). A clear example is that of the women from these groups: not only the way they dress (the most visible aspect), but their entire way of life; once reaching the age of pre-puberty their destiny is predetermined by the rules of the group: rules for marriage, their specific roles and cultural interdictions, in relationships with older men and women, the image of their body as a 'tool' of biological reproduction, or/but also as a 'pollution' source, in a symbolic sense, etc.

Our case is different: yours, mine (especially because we are male); others like us, women and men, educated, being defined through their occupational roles, in global society (or the mainstream), being on different levels of linguistic, cultural assimilation, as you were already mentioning. In

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5   The Roma arrival in Europe was documented in Greece under the name "athinganoi" or "athinganos" from which the terms tigan, cygan, cigan, etc. are derived. See Angus Fraser, *The Gypsies* (UK: Blackwell, 1992).

6   The concept of descendants used here and throughout the text corresponds to the word "*neam*", signifying a group or sub-group of Roma united by common descendants, believed or imagined, and a specific occupation of the members of that group.

our case, the ethnic identity of Roma or *Ţigan* is just one of our roles, among many others through which we shape and show our personality. This is one criterion in establishing relationships. It is relevant in some situations, but in others it is completely irrelevant, you simply forget it. We decide when we give more space to this role; our parents, during their time, and us, we have a much higher social mobility than the clan or traditional Roma mentioned above; the ethnic role is just one of our possible roles.

I.R.: And how did you choose, how do you choose now?

N.G.: I have chosen to introduce myself as Roma. Otherwise I would have been free to go on with my evolution as a Romanian (from the point of view of the ethnic identity) - let's call it a masked Romanian, or a Romanian in disguise. I didn't experience any drawbacks, within Romanian society, as a Romanian. Well, of course, there are stereotypes, preconceived ideas… yes, but no major obstacle. So, it was my choice to introduce myself as a *Ţigan* or as a Roma, at a certain stage of my life.

But there are cases and groups, also particular situations in day-to-day life, when you can't choose, you don't have this freedom as it is written in national and/or international laws. You are born with this 'ethnic uniform' and you are dominated by the group and its relationships with the surrounding world. Your entire life is shaped by the group, according to certain cultural models, which can look like interdictions and preferences, 'traditional' we call them, in order to sugarcoat the bitter pill of this way of dominating the individual, of limiting their rights to choose and to 'play' with an ethnic identity role, or roles. Social inclusion (as we now call *Ţigani* integration or Roma inclusion) and personal development are their very dream. The Roma identity is a *choice*, an option, a *freedom exercise,* in public life, in societies organised according to democratic principles, as the ancient Greeks had started, in their polis, in their colonies.

The idea is – and this is something new, in the last decades – that in public and political speeches about ethnic, national minorities, about ethnic identity or 'national' identity, *it is not a compulsory point of view imposed* by a smaller or a larger group, a minority or a majority one, not only in number but also in position, in the power hierarchies of society as a whole. Inside this institutional vision and practice, with regard to private and public life, ethnic identity is included in human rights, because it is a right that you choose and exercise, in a lawful system. You are not forced to have an ethnic national identity, as it is called, defined, classified by a dominant group or by the political elite of a socio-cultural group, representing a majority or a minority, in a given society, in a certain moment, after certain cultural models (stereotypes and ethnic preconceived ideas included).

I.R.: Well, but these same cultural models influence us at a certain point.

N.G.: I can't say that my life was influenced by the Roma identity, as the lives of, let's say, in comparison, Ion Piţu Cioabă,[7] Luminiţa,[8] or Florin Cioabă,[9] and those in the family and group of the coppersmith Roma were influenced.

I.R.: Of course not, but have you been influenced?

N.G.: Why? In the early and mid-1970s, I met Piţu Cioabă, and we travelled together around the country, I admitted I was Roma, but when I had to choose my life partner, in 1977, on top of other random elements and hazards, I said to myself: Am I forced to act as a *Ţigan*, in this case? No, this is my right as an individual. And I chose as I wished to. And you can see the consequence, now I can say whatever I want. I was free, I said to myself, of this ethnic oppression as a *Ţigan*, an historic fact that came to me as a preconceived idea, as a stigma.

Ethnic identity generated through group relationships and social inter-groups also has its advantages: it can foreshadow your destiny, it can 'pre-judge' you, it can spare you as an individual from the thinking burden and from judging permanently, at each and every step. As in your case of identifying yourself as a *Ţigan* or a Roma, in your family or among colleagues in Cluj: spontaneous, non-problematic, visible and obvious, easy, I would say, convenient, as any form of non-critical thinking, and 'preconceived idea' is.

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7   Ion Cioaba, alias Pitu, was a Roma leader in Romania, coming from a Kalderash Roma family deported during World War II. Various rumours circulated about his influence during the Commmunist period. After the fall of Communism he declared himself the international King of the Roma. Luminita Cioaba is his daughter and a Roma poet.

8   Luminita Cioaba is Ion Cioaba's daughter and a Roma poet and writer.

9   Florin Cioaba was Ion Cioaba's son and he took over the title following his father death in 1997. Florin Cioaba was a strong voice in Roma activism and became the President of the International Romani Union. He died on August 18, 2013.

On the other hand, ethnic identity, as an option, as an opportunity to choose, it gives you room for freedom. But for many, this option still doesn't exist, it is not possible.

I.R.: That makes me think again of the summer camp organised by Vasile Ionescu: "Turn black and you'll be free!" When you get partially free of constraints, you have a larger area of freedom.

N.G.: Look at another case: the Roma living here, in Italy, in *campi nomadi* (camps for nomads). Their life is greatly controlled by the ethnic group affiliation. In some regions of Italy, there are laws for the nomads: if you come from countries of the ex-Yugoslavia or Romania, Bulgaria and you say you are a *Ţigan* (*zingaro, zingara)* or a Roma, by default you are labelled as a nomad and you are sent, you and your family, to a camp of nomads, to live there, in an authorised camp sometimes, but more frequently in a non-authorised one, in a 'tolerated' or 'abusive' one. In these cases you may say that the identity of *zingari/nomadi* is imposed, it is a preconceived idea, through popular stereotypes, as well as through administrative laws.

From another point of view, these people and their families have a certain degree of freedom: "I wish to live there and to have such a life." It's your right! You have chosen to live like that, but the nomad identification becomes your option too. You can't say that everything is imposed, that you are forced to live like that, that you are constrained through laws and administrative pressures, from the outside, being completely dominated. No, I say; there is a component of personal choice, of freedom and of personal responsibility, for the way you are labelled and treated in day-to-day life.

I.R.: This is not a completely external pressure, but they internalise it, as a constraint.

N.G.: But in this example, I repeat, there is also the exercising of freedom and of personal responsibility. People are leaving Romania, in the context of European and national laws regarding the free movement of persons for citizens of EU member states. In Romania you are labelled as a *Ţigan*; or you and your family, you prefer to self-identify as Roma. In Romania, the Roma are recognised as a national minority, on the institutional and political levels, in their great majority superficially, without any radical change in day-to-day life. Once in Italy, looking for a source of revenue, for a better life, you settle in a camp (authorised or, more likely, non-authorised) and

you are by default classified as *zingari* and *nomadi*, from the point of view of administrative treatment and generally, in public perception. In Italy, the Roma and Sinti are not recognised as a linguistic and cultural minority, like other minorities are, like the Germans, the Albanians, the Croats, etc. who are considered historical minorities, grouped in certain regions, out of which the modern state of Italy emerged as we know it today.

I.R.: From this point of view I say we immediately need an emancipation project, based on ethnic mobilisation, a kind of ethnic politics included, up to organising an ethnic Party of the Roma.

N.G.: Yes, but out of which of these labels and ethnic (self)-identifications - nomad, European migrant, Romanian citizen of Roma origin - on which could you start an emancipation project, in the public sphere or in the political one? The political project you are talking about should include, I would say, the effort of creating knowledge, of the new step, from the preconceived idea to just the idea, as an act of thinking, of logical ideas or of ideologies.

How can we build a social ontology (taking into account all criticism of a social ontology approach, for example, that all that is social is constructed) - becoming aware, through learning, through documentation, that at a certain historical moment, ethnic identification had been a choice, an option, just for some, and not 'natural data', such as the mountain and the sea here in Salerno? In the example I have just chosen, the adults, the parents decide to come to Italy, leaving Serbia, Romania etc., but their children – born and brought up in public squares*,* camps for nomads, in barracks or in caravans – learn from a very young age that they are nomads. Will they stay and be nomads for the rest of their life? Do these children and youngsters - future adults with the right to vote - do they keep any connection to the national minority of the Roma in Romania? Would they wish to become Italian citizens? Would they choose a dual citizenship, Romanian and Italian, according to the laws in both countries? Do we have a possible answer in the concept of European citizen? Are we interested in making our own contribution to the political project of the European Union, a distinctive contribution as Roma and not only as Romanian or Italian citizens, etc.? I think that this issue should be thought about, from Kant's question perspective: How is it possible to be Roma and what is the public significance, the political one, in the self-identification?

I.R.: How would you answer these questions?

N.G.: These are questions which are difficult to answer by oneself. But you are right. Maybe thanks to my philosophical, sociological approach I should have found an answer to at least some of these questions, by this stage of my life. I should have been able to get my point of view into a book or something, so as to give you, to convey to you something for you, Iulius, to think about, to take action, to build up your own critical speech, so as to establish something in our interpersonal relationships, something that would become maybe the very fundament of the social ontology, of an ethno-political entity or simply a political one, for the Roma.

I.R.: Why didn't you do that then, in the 1990s, at the beginning of the Roma Movement? Why did the recognition of the Roma, as a national minority, stay just on a superficial level, as you call it now? Where is your responsibility, that of Nicolae Gheorghe, regarding the direction taken or not taken by the Roma Movement in Romania during these years?

N.G.: In my opinion, the promotion of Roma emancipation as an ethno-political entity was not possible within the political space created in Romania, by the policies with and for national minorities, by the conceptual meaning and by the practice of the electoral representation of the national minorities, as it was established and now exists within this kind of politics in Romania, since 1990. If you and others from your generation could rightly reproach me for something, it is my critical opinion regarding the almost 'automatic' representation of national minorities in the Romanian Parliament. That is why I have my doubts that Roma associations with an electoral purpose (the Roma Party[10] of today, but not only) could politically rally the Roma, just by calling upon the 'ethnic vote' of Roma voters in order to get the reserved seat in the Chamber of Deputies. More promising is Roma participation in the elections for local councils; for that I contributed, through the FER, for example, during the local election in 1992 or 1996.

I.R.: Here some of our points of view are shared, but most not. Present-day states, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, Romania included, are states where real political power is held by a dominant ethnic majority: the Hungarians in Hungary, the ethnic Romanians in Romania, the Serbians in Serbia, etc. That is why the promotion of Roma interests can only be done by taking part in the competition for the distribution of political power in such states and societies; including by establishing an ethnic party of the Roma where they constitute a numerically significant national minority in these countries; so they have or could have significant election potential, they could share political power, including over state budget decisions and also local ones.

N.G.: In my opinion the political and electoral mobilising of Roma will become efficient, able to contribute to solving the specific issues of Roma (the so-called social one included) when there is also a simultaneous change of Article One of the Romanian Constitution, which defines the state as a national one. By way of compensation at present, through Article 62 national minorities benefit from the minority representation system in the Chamber of Deputies.[11]

The political practice of the representation of national minorities is an advantage for the Hungarian minority, represented by the UDMR;[12] it might be useful for other, less numerous ethnic groups, in Romania. But for the Roma, taking into account their specific history and the social situation in Romania and in Europe, ethno-politics based on the classical concept of national minority – as was the case in Romania after 1990 – hasn't worked, at least not until now. We will wait and see if 20 more years or several decades will be needed, until there is a new public and political will in Romania, among all citizens, Roma included, to change the Constitution and the electoral laws (as mentioned before). Thus, I think, we will be able to produce an efficient Roma ethno-politics in a coherent democratic state, and not in a collection of ethnocracies, more numerous for the Romanian majority, more restrained, geographically and numerically (local ethnocracies) or mini-ethnocracies of an elected elite of Roma, justified in ethnic terms.

I.R.: Then I will repeat the question from the beginning of our discussion: how did you decide to act then at the beginning of the Roma movement? What role did your personal experience, your way of thinking and identifying yourself as a Roma, play when taking these decisions?

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10 *Partida Romilor* or 'the Roma Party' in English is registered as an NGO. The Romanian electoral law allows certain NGOs belonging to national minorities to compete in elections. *Partida* has a double meaning in Romanian, and can signify either a political party or a card game.

11 See article 62 of the Constitution of Romania, 2010.

12 The Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania.

N.G.: Regarding that, I said that in the 1990s I preferred the civic option: I wanted to associate with people promoting an ethnic aspect, as citizens in a coherent democratic state – as the ancient Greek polis would pretend to be, the one we mentioned again and again, during this talk; but of course in the historical and social terms of today. That would be, I repeat, the fundamental intention in constituting the FER and, three years later, Romani CRISS – (the Romani Centre for Social Intervention and Studies) – I was using words such as: *Țigan, Roma, Romani, Kris Romano,* but there was a moral will for an ethnic construction within the civic space and within the legal framework, in a rule of law state, in Romania, as we imagined at that time, immediately after 1990. We do not start from the ethnic classification, as Roma specifically, as a fact given naturally by birth; neither do we start from an ethno–nationalist representation of Romanians, inherited by some followers of the 'Romanian spirit' of modern and contemporary history, as a myth about Romanians and Romania.

I am critical regarding the very concept of national minority, as a collateral effect of the formation of nation-states in the 19th century, and especially after the First World War. I think that this is the current representation of national majorities and minorities, in politics after 1990, as you say, while referring to states in Central and Eastern Europe.

I.R.: It seems to me that you are avoiding answering my question about your role and responsibility as a person, about the influence you had in the decisions of that time.

N.G.: From this point of view, I repeat that I could not represent the Roma national minority as long I do not live according to Roma tradition. I can't speak Romanes as a mother tongue and I do not follow Roma laws. I refer to clan law – in the sense given by cultural anthropologists, as a larger family, a social organisation, based on kinship, because we didn't have any other institutional reality created in real life, in social history. Now in the year 2000-and-something, you may say: yes I am Roma because I am part of the association, the party or a group more or less outlined, after being launched by those representing my generation of activists, during the 1990s. What would be my role and my responsibility? Going on in the same terms as before, I think that in Romania the distinction between the civic direction and the ethnic-electoral direction of the

public and political mobilisation of the Roma or at least the older or the younger Roma who are active in public life, in institutions, in public debates, etc. is better, more clearly articulated.

I.R.: Is this distinction valid only for the Roma in Romania when discussing this dynamic?

N.G.: From my personal experience regarding the circulation of Roma through Europe, I don't know… I think that these options, communication and political mobilisation, (as Karl Deutsch[13] called them) are mixed and more confused than in other European countries where Roma and Sinti are more visible in public life. Except, maybe, Macedonia, where there is a much greater number of Roma, men and women, well-educated, speaking Romanes and active in public life. Roma are recognised by the Constitution, among the constitutive peoples of the state, they have ethnic political parties, but are also quite skilful in making election coalitions in the Parliament and more recently in the government of Macedonia, etc…

In Romania, by comparison, it seemed to me the political mobilisation of Roma on the ethnic criterion is more or less blocked, due to the reserved seat in the Chamber of Deputies. From my perspective, of course a subjective and biased one, the civic mobilisation of the Roma seems to be a little bit better if we measure performance by the number of civic organisations and foundations, by a better ability to self-finance, without depending completely on central budget subsidies (as it was and still is the case for the Roma Party). Roma civic associations (NGOs, as we call them now) from Romania are among the very few in the EU having the capacity and the courage to take risks, especially financial ones, to access significant European funds, to elaborate and manage projects relating to concrete actions, in local Roma communities, in the field of human resources, training, etc.

In the 1990s and after Roma political organisations, especially the Roma Party, didn't agree with the civic associations' projects. Now, since 2007, when Romania joined the EU and gained access to funds from the EU budget for 2007 - 2013, all of a sudden the Roma Party remembers that it is an NGO. They started to have their own projects on European money, learning that partnership between

13   Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (Boston, MIT Press, 1966).

civil society and authorities (central, local) is an extremely productive tool (in the sense Erich Fromm[14] uses this term) for the local Roma communities. Of course, Roma civil society in Romania is still fragile, having some vulnerabilities, but you wrote about that, Iulius, in the analysis you have already published.[15]

As for me, now (over the last years), I wished to free myself from my 'shadow' of the 1990s. Now I say that I am not a member of staff of any Roma association. That is in order to feel completely free, not just of constraints, but also of the crutches of managing any administrative relationships in the process of building an Ego, including the ethnic component, the ethnic role, as mentioned before.

I.R.: The emancipator project… is something strictly personal, not including the *ethnos* as a group or as a collection of different cultural groups, the Roma population in Romania, and in the world is built by history, isn't it?

N.G.: I have included *ethnos* for a certain phase, but my personal emancipation goes further. I am over this phase. *Ethnos* is one of the roles I have, being one part of a combination of roles I am expressing and manifesting now, helping to provoke those around us when we introduce ourselves by affirming: "We are Roma politicians". In different contexts here, in Italy, too, I express and activate my ethno-political identity, as a Roma. I do that, so to say, deliberately, with a certain aim, having behind me certain experience. But each and every one of us, we have different roles to play.

I.R.: And how did you feel about this combination of roles all through your life?

N.G.: Let me tell you a story. In 1965, I was a student in military school. Everything happened during the first holiday from the infantry officers' school in 1964, in Sibiu, after graduating from military high school, at Câmpulung Moldovenesc. I went to visit a classmate and friend, a military student from a village near Târgu Neamţ. We were friends since military high school, and he invited me to his house. He was from a poor family, but the three children were well-educated. He had a brother who became a professor of physics at the University in Iaşi. My ex-colleague had a brilliant career in the military and he was also a poet,

a writer, a journalist with a very interesting career. We decided to go on a trip to the monasteries, by bicycle. We cycled from his village in order to visit the monasteries of Neamţ, Agapia, etc. One morning, we arrived in Târgu Neamţ to go to Neamţ Monastery, we passed by a market, it was market day… a townsman came out from a pub, all red… we were next to our bicycles, and he stopped just in front of me, and he asked: "Hey you! Why are you a *Ţigan*?" Just like that, out of the blue! I was perplexed, because I had never discussed this with my friend. He didn't know I was a *Ţigan*. For many years, I didn't broach this issue, hiding my ethnic origin, or else it was simply not relevant for me in my relationship with him or other classmates at the military school.

I.R.: Did you hide it or was it not relevant?

N.G.: Both, so I had an inferiority complex, I hid, but at the same time it was irrelevant, because I wished to build something else: a military career in the Romanian Army, the 'universal man' I read about in books at that time; the label of *Ţigan* stayed there, somewhere in my subconscious, at the back of my mind, in my childhood, something associated with my family in Roşiorii de Vede, and later on in Bucharest. I left home more or less, I left for the army in order to cut any relationship with my family, where my father (a driver) was known by the nickname Anghel the Ţigan. On our street they knew we were *Ţigani*, in school I was already labelled as *Ţigan* when I was just 14. It was extremely painful, the way I experienced it. So I was puzzled then in Târgu Neamţ. My colleague was delicate enough not to comment. I suffered horribly during that moment, and for the whole day. Then I relaxed, I left for the monastery. I was obsessed with this incident - it was in 1965. It was only in 1973-1974 that I started to try and answer that question: "Hey you! Why are you a *Ţigan*?" Why am I a *Ţigan*? I still wonder and go on answering that townsman…

In another context, let's say you are a friend of somebody and all of a sudden he says to you: "What the heck, you are a *Ţigan*! Go to Hell you *Ţigan* scum!" You are equal to the guy you are talking to, or at least you think that you are. But he wishes to label you, and he can. But why that guy, how did he feel, what were the reference points, how could he identify me as a *Ţigan* in this context? This is the mystery

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14   Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1941).

15   Iulius Rostas, "The Romani Movement in Romania: Institutionalization and (De)mobilization", in *Romani Politics in Contemporary Europe Poverty, Ethnic Mobilization, and the Neo-liberal Order,* eds. Nidhi Trehan and Nando Sigona (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

of stereotypes, of preconceived ideas… My big problem was and still is: I am a *Țigan*… because somebody from outside identified me as such, with or against my will? Or because I also wanted it, but only after I had already internalised his perception? The first person who decided that I am a *Țigan* was somebody else. Not me. So my choice is more or less secondary. This is a reaction not ontologically (or phenomenologically?) primary, or a primordial fact. So I was, I am… I identified myself as a *Țigan*, as Gypsy, Rom, Roma, all these issues stayed in me, growing like the layers of an onion, but in my deepest person this puzzling question stayed: why are you a *Țigan*? I still don't know why…

By chance, in spring 2008, I went again to Târgu Neamț, also on a visit, this time together with my small family of today. I was just by coincidence in the same market, the same place, without wishing it. And I ask myself: did I get an answer for this red-haired drunk? Since 1965… and we are now in 2011? I go on answering this guy, trying to answer his question. Frequently I avoid the question, not being able to give it an answer sometimes, saying to myself that I have an answer… as I do now, while talking to you. Sometimes I feel convincing, when I define myself as Roma, other times not. Sometimes I play, juggling myself and my identities, quite joyfully.

Other times I start to feel exposed in the void between these different identities – as if I am somewhere in the space between atoms, difficult to imagine for the Eleats, from Ancient Greece – I am lost, depressed, completely worthless, because I am in the void between identities… I am either a Romanian, or a *Țigan*, a Roma or a European, a cosmopolitan, I am either X or Y… and sometimes I feel in-between… In a sort of limbo… Lost in the void, in a chaos opposite to the Cosmos, from the Greek thinking, remaining with myself, and then I have no landmark for an ontological identity. My ethnic identity, the primordial, total and totalising, imposed by the group and not chosen, this is one way to fill this void, for safety, in order not to torture yourself with such questions. It is something sure, a given fact, something inherited, something defining you, that something or somebody (the group) controls you and is often one of those illusions that diminishes our anxieties. But if we kept asking this question: "Who am I…? Where I am going…?"… It would be terrible!

I.R.: Looking for the very essence…

N.G.: From my point of view, ethnic identity is one of the possible answers, but it is not a liberating answer, it is an answer that I partially feel as being narrow, too tight, stifling me, it doesn't satisfy at all. But this unrest or 'lack of ethnic fulfilment' is a *price to pay for my liberty,* if I am to use it in my interpretation, the title and the substance of Mateo Maximoff's book.[16]

I.R.: If I am to paraphrase a well-known local character, the fundamental question remains: "Why are Roma *Țigani?*" This question has a deep logic for many Roma who internalised so powerfully the imposed identity, the *Țigan* one, a sort of a label because of which they develop some complexes that they can't emancipate from. Even if in the meantime they become activists, they talk in the name of the Roma, they introduced themselves as Roma; but they stay *Țigani* because they internalised the label and the identity so much. So for them the fact of being a *Țigan* is oppressive. From my point of view, talking about and being a Roma represents an emancipative speech, an emancipative force regarding the complexes associated with being a *Țigan*, meaning trying to be proud of yourself, trying to be proud of you, as a person, of what you are, and what you represent.

N.G.: From the other point of view, the fact that you are married to a woman of another ethnic group could make them say: "You are not Roma, you are just pretending! You may be a *Țigan*, but you are not Roma".

I.R.: On the contrary, I am Roma! Maybe I am not so much of a *Țigan*.

N.G.: It is something that I still contest, as long as you do not live according to certain rules, considered as defining; of course there are customary laws, *muro romano,* or 'folk' laws, not institutionalised ones. Yes, but as long as you are in a clan, the Roma identity is relatively clear for you and for others, it is a group identity. It is a social fact, but not an institutionalised identity, by right, or at least it is not yet such an institution. We are trying to capacitate, to reconstruct such a public identity, institutionalised, through practices associated with politics, for national minorities, by teaching Romanes in some schools, by getting reserved quotas for Roma, at high school or college level, etc. This process could take some 10 to 20 years or more … It may or may not succeed. It is clear for me that the Roma identity was kept by the clan, according to a certain kind

16   Mateo Maximoff, *The Price of Freedom* (1955).

of marriage, following certain rules that can be of kinship, exchanges between families, etc. But you can't just be Roma because you wish to be.

I.R.: But identity changes, it changes completely. You can't stay secluded in a secular identity definition, because social relationships change.

N.G.: Why are we, you Iulius and I, Roma and not simply civic activists or sociologists, political scientists, analysts? What is the difference between X, who reads, writes about Roma, why are you more Roma than this X, who is 'an expert on Roma', either in public administration or in the academic world?

I.R.: Beyond assuming a certain social role, with its pluses and minuses, it is also about the experiences we are living through…

N.G.: They can have the same experiences as you had.

I.R.: Not at all. I internalise my experiences in a certain way and somebody else lives them totally differently. From this point of view, to be Roma is a personal experience… Of course, we have relationships with others, sometimes conflicting, competitive relationships, because that is life, you compete with others. But our roles are different not only in how we assume them.

N.G.: Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein[17] said in one of their books (I paraphrase): "Identities are some constructions of the elites, in order to have a more advantageous position in competing for resources: either inside the nation state or inside the world economic system". Yes, you can make ethnic business, in order to win. Ethnic affiliation becomes a competitive resource that you can use, you can trade it. It is a tool transforming the tradition, into a trademark, an exchangeable one, on a trademark market, meaning the ethnic, ethno-political, ethno-national one…

I.R.: Exactly. There are different types of resources, not only material, but symbolic too.

N.G.: Here your theory conflicts with some of the Roma. Let's say… *Țigan* musicians. For example X… he or a she is a *Țigan* musician, they do not need to emancipate themselves from this label - for them to be *Țigan* is an occupational

trademark. So 'Roma musician'… that doesn't mean a thing for them (for the audience, for the agents) but as *Țigan* musicians, they are somebody. They are living from trading their entity, their profession, their ethnic identity.

I.R.: Ok, it is a branding issue.

N.G.: But do they need to emancipate themselves from their *Țigan* identity?

I.R.: I think they do.

N.G.: I don't. For example, the Spanish Gitanos – flamenco dancers, do they need to emancipate from their Gitanos identity, that we the Roma activists consider pejorative? The Gitanos from Andalusia are trying to do that and they have partially succeeded: they are accepted in Andalusia and in Spain, as a state, through specific public policies, as Gitanos, not as Roma. Roma are just in the international language. So some of the Roma do not need to emancipate themselves from their *Țigan* identity or Gitanos, *Zingari*, Sinti or Gypsies or Travellers, *Nomadi* as they are here in Italy… That is why I want to say: why are some Roma *Țigani*? Because they chose to be, because they wish to be!

I.R.: Then I think that, from my point of view, some groups need an emancipation project, because there are some practices associated with their group which they do not agree with. Of course, there is a competition between the groups we call Roma. Whoever wins this competition to impose a certain identity trademark will also define the content and impose that identity in the end.

N.G.: It remains a competition issue, but that is why I prefer an answer to the question. "Why are certain Roma *Țigani*?" Because they want to be *Țigani*, it is a freedom exercise, in the sense we just mentioned. Not only because they are forced to be *Țigani*; there is a dynamic in here, a certain dialectic (as a cognitive process), a negotiation, a social practice.

I.R.: Yes, but there are some practices which contrast with dominant social values… early marriages, is it acceptable? If we believe not, then we have to debate the issue. That is why we need an emancipation project, an identity one, from my point of view.

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17 Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (New York: Verso, 1991).

N.G.: What does emancipating mean in this case?

I.R.: Some practices must be changed. Emancipating in the sense of rebranding, rethinking the role of Roma in society as well as of some social practices associated with the group.

N.G.: But who could do this emancipating and rebranding? Can we do it, the assimilated Roma, in the name of the traditional Roma who are practicing early marriages? Or can traditional Roma do it?

I.R.: This is where assuming is needed. Yes, these assimilated Roma are the people who should do it. If we look to all ethno-national emancipation movements, they have been done by these kinds of people. The emancipation movement leaders were those who left the group at a certain moment and got another kind of socialisation, coming back later to lead the emancipation project. They led!

N.G.: This is exactly my case or maybe yours, but can it be for others too?

I.R.: The issue is whether we could assume such a responsibility or not?

N.G.: The answer is that we assumed this responsibility, when, for example, the Democratic Union of the Roma between 1990-1994, and later on the Roma Party assumed this responsibility, when at the beginning Răducanu,[18] and now for 12 years already through Păun,[19] the Roma are represented in the Parliament of Romania as a national minority, as members of the national minorities group in the Chamber of Deputies, as members in the National Minority Council (subsidised by the State), etc. On the other hand, others among us, we also assumed since 1990 the role, the responsibility to act for Roma, with Roma, through civic associations, foundations, as enterprises and/or as partners for specific projects and in strategic social policies, in the long term, etc.

I.R.: And is that enough?

N.G.: From my point of view, there isn't any problem for some of us to assume political and civic responsibility. The issue is that after assuming such a responsibility, on an identity criterion, after taking new steps in our ethno-political assertion, after winning points, we stayed somewhere suspended in thin air, not having anywhere or anyone to go back to. We do not have a coherent and durable audience built (for example through periodical subscription fees, not only through project benefits. We do not have a political community to come back to with an emancipation discourse). Yes, we have *Ţigan*, house *Ţigani* with a similar experience to ours, the integrated ones, those integrated only fragmentarily, accessing the formal economy or public administration through education programmes, or insertion programmes.

Yes, for them we are trying to have an emancipation discourse, to help the emancipation according to certain ways or variants, or models of being Roma, in order for them to decide… if they are Roma or not … but as an individual practice and a voluntary association, a willing one in this sense.

I.R.: Exactly! On the symbolic and collective level the power to define belongs to these kinds of people, who had another type of socialisation, having the strength to redefine themselves. On the individual level, they have that project of individual salvation. Each and every one of them feels and acts in the way that he or she can, as they believe it is better and more profitable for them. There is, of course, an oppressive side because as long as you, on the symbolic level, you go and say: "No, you are not necessarily what you wish to be, in this case a *Ţigan* or what you were told you are, but you are simply Roma", then he or she could ask me: "Why?". An answer like "Because I say so" has an oppressive aspect. At the same time, I think that the advantage for Roma is that there are no institutions to put into practice this oppressive aspect. Let me give you an example: the nation-state - the fact that the Roma have no state with a bureaucratic system, or an army or an education system to reproduce the ethnic identity of the Roma, which is then eventually sanctified so the state becomes sacred too; this is a fact that I consider positive.

N.G.: The lack of a state, of a national state, is perceived as a weakness: that is why the Roma are not recognised as a national minority in Hungary, but just as an ethnic minority. That is why in Italy they are not treated as a linguistic minority, equal to other minorities. Even in Romania, the Roma are represented in the Parliament as a national minority, but

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18 Gheorghe Raducanu, Roma activist, was the first Roma to be elected to the Romanian Parliament to represent Roma as a national minority.

19 Nicolae Paun is the President of *Partida Romilor* and an MP since 2000 representing the Roma minority in the Romanian Parliament.

they are perceived rather as a social problem. The Romanian state is interested in the rights of Romanians in Hungary, just as the Hungarian state is concerned with the rights of Hungarians in Romania. So what can we do? Some say we should build ourselves as much as possible according to the historic national minorities model, even if we do not have and we do not claim our own nation state.

I say something else: Roma can advocate de-ethnicising the state through the separation of the nation from the state; just as religion through the Church separated from the modern state, after ferocious religious wars (still going on nowadays, in some regions or countries more or less near us). In states with no ethnic components, coherently civic, it is easier, I think, to guarantee fundamental civil rights and through a cultural association, in the civic space, to promote your own language, ethnic-national symbols, as partially private rights, but expressed in the public space. It may seem a politically naïve project, a utopia, what I am saying now, but I will go back to the beginning of the 1990s and try to tell you my reasons for choosing this 'Civic Charter' in a Roma political rally. Răducanu and his political friends preferred the election representation with the Charter of the Roma as a national minority and they chose the ace of clubs as an election symbol, a sign kept by the Party of the Roma until now. Was it or was it not a winner, this ace of clubs, in the electoral politics of the Roma, their politics of recognition as a national minority? This remains to be debated and evaluated!

I.R.: In the case of Roma, it is possible to contest the leader's speech, without affecting the nation-state, because it doesn't exist. You may say: "Well, man, I don't want to be Roma, I am a *Ţigan*" and then I would be given the possibility to say: "Ok, you may stay a *Ţigan*, it's your business, but on the level of public discourse, whether you like it or not, you will still be Roma". On the level of public discourse the term used will be Roma.

N.G.: Ok, I exaggerate, I simplify, but for me the experience of the reactions to the initiative of Deputy Prigoană[20] (autumn 2010 - spring 2011) was a test: the denomination as such and what is associated with the word Roma is not a mobilising force. It could become one in the future, but at that time (autumn 2010 - spring 2011) there wasn't the required context, there was a lack of a combination of favourable factors; public mobilisation didn't work. In another context, it succeeded (in 1995 and later on),[21] and maybe it will succeed again, in the future. But at that moment it didn't because it couldn't generate a vast social movement, a civic and politic rally, going to the roots, to particular groups and local communities of Roma.

We didn't succeed in giving the word, the denomination of Roma an associated political programme, a clear one, or in helping to mobilise, as was the case with the word Afro-American and the movement for civil rights in the USA. It is totally different to be called the 'n-word' and something else to be 'black' and something else to be an 'Afro-American'.[22]

We haven't succeeded yet in elaborating a political programme associated with the term Roma, a resounding programme, a real echo for everybody. Yes, we enjoyed resounding success in Brussels, in Strasbourg, at the OSCE, at the Council of the Europe, at OSI… on this level we succeeded in having an interlocutor and a certain influence, but on the level of the social masses… And I am not talking about, let's say, the woodworker and goldwasher Roma, but about the mass of activists trained in the dynamics of the last 20 years! Or maybe we took the success as it appeared in the public, and in national and international documents for granted. The denomination of *Ţigan* or Nomads or Travellers should be replaced by that of Roma; it was so obvious that in political-institutional discourse we are Roma, so there was no more need to mobilise on this issue.

I.R.: They were not conscious of this dimension - "Why is the Roma a *Ţigan*"!

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20 In autumn 2010 Romanian MP Silviu Prigoana proposed a bill to use the denomination *Ţigan* instead of Roma with reference to the ethnic group as a way to avoid possible confusions between Romanians and Roma among foreigners.

21 In 1995 the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a memorandum asking all public authorities in Romania to use the denomination *Ţigan* with reference to Roma as a way to avoid confusion between Romanians and Roma. Its adoption mobilised Roma groups to protest against this practice and to push for specific policies. It took four years for the Romanian Government to withdraw that memorandum in 1999. See Iulius Rostas, "The Responses of Romanian Authorities to Roma Migration" (Presented at the conference *Romani Mobilities in Europe: Multidisciplinary Perspectives,* University of Oxford, 10-14 January 2010).

22 An essay on this issue was presented by Mihaela Murdure, a professor at Babeş-Bolyai University, during the seminar *Roma versus Ţigan,* organised by ISPMN, Cluj Napoca, on 17 January 2011. See also: Mihaela Murdure, "From the Gypsies to Afro-Americans" in *The Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* (2003/4).

N.G.: I don't think we have a crisis of conscience yet, as Kant and other philosophers from the beginnings of the modern era had, when it was about the fundaments of knowledge, especially of verifiable or scientific knowledge. We are not yet in a critical phase, we are not yet in a phase of establishing from the epistemological point of view a political action. That means in our epistemology discourse: through thinking, through analysis, through reflection, through dialogue and through a contradictory discussion, through a political practice, even ethno-political, so as to establish the basis of such knowledge, an ideology, a political platform for Roma, but also for society as a whole…

I.R.: We have to create something and to brand it, in such a way as to have some resonance among the 'ordinary people', to evaluate and re-evaluate where we really are. That is what I wanted to say - what we should do in a critical manner, in a debate.

N.G.: We are Roma 'by profession', Roma as an international brand. How do we deal with: "Well you are not a genuine *Ţigan*, if you do not feel Roma, then automatically, you are not recognised as Roma by others"? That is what I wished to say: to provoke, to stimulate this 'pain' in order to wake us up from the dogmatic sleep of spontaneous ethnic identification, without proper thinking and without praxis based on a specific thinking, an ideology.

I.R.: How could we move from Roma 'by profession' to simply Roma?

N.G.: Could you be Roma, just spontaneously, from Mother Nature? No, I would say no, me, Nicolae Gheorghe, in order to provoke you and others who are curious (in the philosophical sense). Yes, I tried and I am still trying, I imitated, I juggled, I "bewitched" (as Max Weber said) the world around. So, essentially, my solution in this very moment of my life is: either I am a human or a *Ţigan*.

I.R.: So, the *Ţigan* is not a human?

N.G.: The *Ţigan* can't be Roma. Human, maybe yes, but tolerated as a species, as sort of sub-human, that - yes, it is possible.

I.R.: That would mean preconceived ideas towards Roma; there is even a saying: the willow is not a tree, as a *Ţigan* is not a human.[23]

N.G.: Yes, of course, he is not human! Conversely Roma, those from the *descendants* (or from the clans which we already mentioned), they say that the *gadjo*/the non-Roma is subhuman. So you may do whatever you want with him - trick him, that is the best solution, isn't it? And even maybe kill him, just as the *gadjo* could kill you because you are Roma (in the traditional sense) and/or a *Ţigan* in the social sense. Meaning you may make fun of this guy, because anyhow he is impure, he is not human… according to simplistic ontology there are two completely exclusive realities, the *gadjo* and the Roma, products of social history especially in Europe, and seen as being traditional. This establishes parallel societies, where an explosion may happen, the 'dynamite' which appears when the *gadjo* and Roma try to be together, when they decide to build a society together, an inclusive society as we call it nowadays. For that, somebody should try and justify this new social form, to establish it in a Kantian approach, through knowledge, and then to build, as Kant was also saying, in a more general sense, an "eternal peace", or a "perpetual peace" - *Zum Ewigen Frieden,* as a philosophical, cosmo-political project, published in 1795.[24]

I.R.: Then this category of Roma was invented, a category that should be defined not only as a name, etymologically speaking, but also as an historic subject, as a political actor, the bearer of a political platform.

N.G.: It is for us to invent it, if we do succeed in inventing it, to build it through our experience. Otherwise, in order to go on, with our discussion about the Roma in Macedonia, they made progress in building Roma as a national minority, in the classic Eastern European sense. There are two generations of Romani intellectuals who published grammars and dictionaries in Romanes. They write literature and journalism in Romanes, they teach the language, in a bilingual school in Šuto Orizari.[25] They are following the example of the Roma in Serbia, and more recently, in Croatia and Kosovo. Their problem is that today Macedonia is a sort of 'little Yugoslavia' with the vulnerabilities of ethnic-nationalism that provoked

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23 The saying in Romanian is: "Nici salcia nu e pom, nici tiganul nu e om". This tendency to dehumanise the Roma is a constant of anti-Gypsyism, expressed in other popular sayings, such is "Tiganul nu e om nici in ziua de Paste" (The *Ţigan* is not a human being even on Easter day).

24 Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch - Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (1795).

25 Šuto Orizari is a neighbourhood of the Macedonian capital Skopje, with a majority of Roma inhabitants, which became a separate municipality.

the fall of the 'greater Yugoslavia' of Tito's time, through wars, inspired by national ideologies, religious ones, out of an ethnic nationalism. During the conflicts and the wars generated by such ethnic nationalism, competing within the same state entity, on the same territory, the 'very primitive' Roma (not necessarily just their elites) are always losers, remaining in the middle and rejected by each and every nationalism, as happened in Bosnia and even more obviously in the conflict in Kosovo. That is why I think that the eternal peace or at least the 100-year peace between the Roma and the non-Roma isn't possible on the basis of nation-state ideologies and national minorities, as some of these political realities and ideologies in the modern, contemporary history of the nation state developed, as we know them now. The historical opportunity of such a Roma peace has been provided by the recent practice of human rights, of civil rights (in the USA), of the fundamental rights of the European Union.

I.R.: We have established up to now that on the one hand the *Țigan* can't be human, but if we are talking about human rights, can the *pakivalo*[26] Roma be a human rights activist?

N.G.: You can't be a human rights activist – in the sense of the social ontology and ethics of universality, of Judeo-Christian values, taken in full, and at the same time be Roma, according to the rules of the Roma descendants - the values and rules of some communities which, in order to survive and to protect themselves (in the cultural sense, but also in the personal and group security sense) avoided the world around them, placing themselves at the edge of this world. Historical practice in those 'traditional' communities is based on a relationship of exploitation with the world around; the world around exploiting them and they exploiting the world around. This is not an equal relationship, but an asymmetrical hierarchical one, one of the hegemony of the outside world. If we accept this premise, then you can't be a *pakivalo Roma,* according to the Roma descendants and also a human rights activist.

Human rights are valid, meaning they can function in a society based on equality before the law, where there are lawful, neutral institutions, where men, women, any individual has to or is supposed to *trust (pakiv)* the already-mentioned institutions, because (ideally) there are political and judicial guarantees for practicing this trust. The world of traditional Roma from the different descendants (coppersmiths, Lovari, Sinti and other Roma guilds) is organised internally

on a hierarchical basis, and on *distrust*, on a fundamentally suspicious attitude between Roma and *gadje*, between the community of the descendants or the clan (which follows a hierarchical order, but is also protective of the individual) and the *gadje* society, which is fundamentally threatening.

I.R.: The Roma world operates according to a hierarchical order and many try to change it through democratic means. This is another paradox.

N.G.: There is no equality between people constructed in the Roma world (those from descendants, the clan Roma or *vița* world based on family relationships): between men and women, between old and young, between children on one side and married adults, between men and women, between rich or poor, between 'clean' people, (in the symbolic sense, meaning behaviour) and 'impure' ones, *Mahrime,* so as far as I see it, in my opinion, the world of the 'traditional' Roma is a coherent hierarchical organised world. So how could you believe in a dialogue between these worlds based on conflicting values if we accept, I repeat, that European society or the Western world has as a fundament the value of equality before the law, and towards the institutions governing human rights?

I.R.: It is not just hierarchy, because somebody could come and say: "Do you mean that the non-Roma world is not based on hierarchy?" But from a certain point on, it is about certain practices and values.

N.G.: Yes, it is about the values the hierarchy is based on, the *gadje*/non-Roma and the Romani/Roma are according to the already-mentioned analysis mutually exclusive. And then here comes the question inspired by Kant: is it possible to be a civic activist and Roma, at the same time, according to the traditional sense of the words? My answer is no. My personal experience tells me that between these two worlds, these identities, there is an irremediable conflict that tore my life apart for 30 years.

I.R.: So what would the solution be, a possible answer to my question about *pakiv* and your speech about human rights, about civil society and so on?

N.G.: An 'inclusive' society, eternal peace between non-Roma and Roma, would be possible if and when the dominant hierarchy would change (could we change then?). Starting with the oppressive approach, the exclusivist and exploiting

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26   Trustworthy, honourable, someone that is trusted and respected by the community.

hierarchies (especially) in this society, being both in the past and at present, a *gadje* society, for the fundamentally exclusionary (socially, according to rank or social layer and more frequently, in the ethnic and cultural sense). Through the same practice or a comprehensive social process, based on *reciprocity* (expressing the "equality of chances" as we call it in our talks), hierarchies must be changed in the Roma world, 'traditional' or not, because they are also oppressive. But because they are practiced on a smaller social ladder we accept them as part of tradition like in the case, for example, of the relationships between men and women, or in the case of compulsory marriages, mentioned above, etc.

I.R.: Can somebody be a *Rom pakivalo* and an intellectual Roma too?

N.G.: An intellectual like me, but I can't generalise… They can't be *Rom pakivalo* up to the end; somewhere there is a split, a fracture. If I am an intellectual, in the end I give up in front of a solid argument, a value or a right considered to be generally accepted, so I can't follow the tribe's law, because I ask questions, I discuss it and then I am eliminated; in the best case scenario I can be accepted as a *Ţigan* by a *Rom pakivalo*. I don't know… Some of the worst opinions about the 'house *Ţigan*' (as I am) I've heard from the *Rom pakivale*, in the sense of traditional Roma. And of course from some non-Roma, but you expect that because a non-Roma is an adversary and not a *manush* (a nice guy); in the vocabulary and the Roma mentality, a non-Roma is something frightful, a terror, a menace, it is one against the other, the non-Roma against the Roma. In the end, the social game is a question of life and death between the two of them; between the Roma and the non-Roma, one will win and one will lose in the end. It is a relationship based on conflict. But I want to remind you that I also heard awful opinions from my own mother, a house *Ţigan*, about the wandering *Ţigani*, ex-tent *Ţigani* living in the Cotorga slums in the suburbs of the little town of Roşiorii de Vede.

I.R.: So, the relationship Roma versus non-Roma is a Manichaeism-based one, an exclusivist one.

N.G.: Both groups (identities), *gadje* and traditional Roma, can tolerate the *Ţigani* as subhuman: according to ontolo-

gies of both the non-Roma and the Roma. My problem/worry, and yours… is that we are trying as '*Ţigani*' (as we were labelled in our childhood) to become 'human,' combining a humanist concept, about man, a universal one, with a particular fundamental concept of the Roma (the clan Roma). This seems to me quite impossible… I haven't found a solution on the personal level, at least not yet. But the problem, the dilemma, is similar for Romanians, Hungarians, and Italians, and usually for all people trying to find an answer to such questions…

I.R.: One of the paradoxes?

N.G.: Yes, if Achilles the swift-footed can't reach the tortoise it seems that (please forgive my reference!) neither can I, born as a *Ţigan*, a civil activist for Roma rights, be a Roma, from the ethnic-cultural point of view. I could be a good activist. I was, maybe, a 'successful Roma' in the non-Roma world; but in the 'real' Roma world I am culturally disqualified. I can't exist in both worlds simultaneously, as if I had reached eternal peace on the subjective level with myself (as long as I am still alive!).

I can't accept either on the intimate relations level, the personal, the family, Roma behaviour in its tribal approach. If you are Roma, fully Roma, you have firstly to respect your kind, your extended family first. On the level of basic values, and also of daily practice, there is no place for somebody outside the descendants, outside the tribe. The first loyalty is to your own kind, the others don't count - everything is allowed; or my humanistic conception (well, it is my self-labelling) disqualifies me. So from this point of view, I am rather a *gadjo*/non-Roma, also in the sense that I am a danger to some of the traditional Roma who would like to get public affirmation. That is why, for example, I was 'kidnapped'[27] around 1992, I think. In this sense, the traditional Roma – X, Y, Z, they got the idea that I could be somebody dangerous.

I.R.: In the non-Roma world, thus, non-Roma could justify their collaboration with you as a representative of Roma.

N.G.: So, I'll go on; some of the traditional Roma, willing to be a presence in public and political life (many were then leaders of political parties, according to the old law of the parties),[28] they got the right idea, that I was a 'danger' who

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27 In 1992 Nicolae Gheorghe was kidnapped by a group of Roma after accusations that he acquired large sums for Roma projects and was not accountable to anyone for this. Details can be found in Isabel Fonseca, *Bury me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995).

28 In early 1990 several Roma political parties were registered in Romania as the law required 251 members to register a political party. Most of these parties were registered in order to receive the state subsidy for the 1990 electoral campaign which was a fixed amount.

should be somehow eliminated. They wished for, let's call it, a symbolic elimination, not a physical one. This was followed by my self-elimination when leaving for Warsaw in 2007, and after, because of depression; and then, for the last two year, my illness… the personal salvation solution is to become human again, without being Roma but simply a man, as a person deeply and painfully internalising the label, the complex of the *Țigan*. I tried during my school years, and then in the 1970s and the 1980s to free myself as a man from the new man the socialist, communist one. I tried in the 1990s, and until recently, to save myself as Roma. But I didn't succeed.

I.R.: Why didn't you succeed as a new man, the socialist kind? You were a member of the Communist Party, weren't you? Why so many paradoxes in your life?

N.G.: I partially succeeded. I was an outstanding pupil and student according to the parameters of that time - my activism inside the Communist Students Union included, during my university years - but then I refused the nationalist discourse, a point of view expounded during the nationalist era of Ceaușescu. That was during the second part of the 1970s and then the 1980s, when I lived through the invention of a Romanian ethnic nationalism, created in order to justify the communist institution. Regarding the origin of this nationalism, it was (a paradox again as you say!) the great victory of Ceaușescu: it was his protest, in the name of the Romanian state, during the summer of 1968, after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the USSR and the armies of the Warsaw Pact countries (the communist equivalent of NATO, at that time). This protest, supported by the masses during the summer of 1968, had a huge influence upon me and maybe upon my generation (ex-high school classmates were just finishing officers' military school). Then, step by step, the public situation got worse and maybe I felt the threat earlier than others, because I couldn't be 'one hundred per cent Romanian'. I knew that I was a *Țigan* inside, even though I knew (or I just imagined?) that I was behaving 'like a Romanian', in daily public life. I never had problems with my mother tongue, my public language, with Romanian…

I.R.: Didn't you discuss publicly or among close friends, not necessarily *Țigan*, but these different identity problems?

N.G.: During my university years almost never. My classmates never called me *Țigan*, and I never talked about me as a *Țigan*.

I.R.: But later on, at the institute?

N.G.: At the sociology institute, step by step, starting with the second half of the 1970s… Maybe some of my colleagues presumed, but they never said anything disrespectful to me. I took the "*Țigan* problem" as a subject for my research. I needed several years, I told you that it was easier for me to say it in English: "I am a Gypsy*"* than to say it in Romanian: "*Sunt țigan".* I needed some time to be able to say that. So, in order to say it in Romanian, to a Romanian interlocutor, I needed about 10 years. Even now I don't feel completely safe emotionally while talking in Romanian with a Romanian, to say that I am a *Țigan*. Even now, when I am talking to you in Romanian too. This word is so full of pain. I didn't heal myself. It was easier for me to say it in English: "Gypsy" or in French *tsigane*… It was simpler, because they weren't lived languages, but trade languages (as I mentioned before), they were in exchange, a way to communicate. It was and it is easier for me to say in Romanian that I am Roma.

I.R.: When did you start using the Roma word in public life, as you are doing now?

N.G.: It was during the second half of the 1990s when the Minister of Foreign Affairs proposed a memorandum[29] to the Romanian Government, which recommended that state institutions use the word *Țigan* and not Roma. I then protested regarding the denomination of *Țigan*. A word imposed through on administrative act…

In my consciousness a vivid reaction took place and, then together with Vasile Ionescu, and other friends, much younger activists, we rallied the others. People perceived it as something artificial, the very name of Roma that I claimed, as a protest against the attempt to be labelled as *Țigan* through an administrative act, coming from a government institution, so with a dominant position in society. I think that through our action then, we succeeded in promoting the designation as Roma in public communication, especially in Romania but also for example in the CoE. But critics started to say that these activists (meaning us), we were not real Roma: or that one should spell Roma with a double r.[30]

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29   This is Memorandum MAE nr. H03/169 January 31ˢᵗ, 1995.

30   See the article Nicolae Gheorghe, Ian Hancock, and Marcel Courthiade, "Rroms ou tsiganes? Quelques commentaries sur l'ethnonyme du peuple rromani", *Etudes tsiganes* Number 5 (1995).

I.R.: And this made you more relaxed regarding your doubts about ethnic identification?

N.G.: I tried to rehabilitate as Roma, especially through public action, because I never, even now, I never felt safe from the emotional point of view to say in Romanian that I am a *Ţigan*. On the other hand, I discovered at a certain moment (during recent years) that it is alienating to mystify myself as Roma, as long as I do not live according to Roma law; that is, a cultural law, a law of some specific social forms. I say again: there are rules of marriage, rules of behaviour, rules of symbolic cleanliness, a moral approach in Roma law, in the descendants' law, only constituted in social forms, in history, as institutions in a sociological sense.

I.R.: But what would be the implication of your (non)clarifications for the other, for Roma politics, that you discussed in your texts, including in your talks with András Biró, regarding the project on the book that you wish to publish?

N.G.: What we discuss and try to do relates to the abstract Roma, the political Roma, Roma as citizen in a state of law, Roma as a European citizen, Roma as a constitutive people of the European Union… all these are still works in progress, open structures, perceived by many Roma and non-Roma as artificial forms. But let's not forget that the European Union of 'political peoples' and not only of nation-states is still a work in progress.

I.R.: But there are already a lot of mutations among the traditional Roma too - changes of customs and practices among the traditional Roma.

N.G.: Of course there are. Similarly, in the globalisation context, a lot of partial, local identities are under threat and 'obvious' identities, like for example the Romanian identity, may change or even disappear. These identities, even some national identities, feel threatened, no matter the nation state, the language, the institutionalised culture… Here, in Italy, some inhabitants and politicians from Northern Italy are claiming a distinct identity as *padani*; and a speaker of the daily language of Napoli is not always accepted, let's say, in Milan, as a 'real Italian.'

When I go for medical treatment, if I tell the other patients or the sanitary staff in Salerno that I am from Romania,

using, with my Romanian accent, the bit of Italian that I know… many don't believe me, and say that I am an Arab. What I want to say is that language is not sufficient for an ethno-political identification, in the sense of the 19th and 20th century idea of "a language, a territory, a nation-state". In this new context of 21st century postmodern globalisation this concept might explode at a certain moment, due to its internal contradictions, because it is an artificial construct. The word, the ethnonym *Rumanian,* yes because the *Rumanian* had a social history, a certain connotation in local communities, and it is said as such in the main European languages such as: *les Roumaines*… The Rumanian, …*gli Rumeni, die Rumanien, Rumun* in the Slavic languages… or *o Vlaho, o Rumuntzo*, in Romani…

The word Romanian is an artificial creation, an invention of a philologist, Dimitrie Philippide[31] around the end of the 18th century. It is similar to what Mr Prigoană says about us, that the word, the saying, *Roma* is artificial, being just an invention of Roma activists after 1990. Returning to our discussion… if I am constantly in a dialogue with death, I would like to die as a *human* or as a *Ţigan,* but I couldn't die as a *Roma*. Meaning that I am not, I can't qualify as a Roma and I feel more complete and more comfortable as a *Ţigan* in the Romanian vernacular of the term: whether I want it or not, because of the way I was brought up, this word is closer to me, like the saying: "the shirt is nearer to the skin."[32]

I.R.: Although you refused it all your life…

N.G.: I refused it explicitly, but I deeply internalised it, and now in my old age, when all censorship comes back, like parents, while dreaming, the word *Ţigan* is more comfortable, nearer to my skin than the word *Roma* which for me has a civic identity. In our case, in your case, in my case, there is no ethnic identity from 'nature' and birth as there is for the traditional Roma, from the descendants, the guilds or the clans which we talked about. We started, in our conversation, to talk about how to build ourselves and maybe how to participate in the building of Roma as a *political people*; that is, as people with a civic identity, an ethno-political one inside the space of the human rights of citizenship, with rights and obligations established through laws and through the institutions of political democracy, both in national politics and within the EU, etc. This is the beginning of the manifesto that I would propose to some

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31   Dimitrie Philippide, a historian and philologist, published a History of Romania in 1800 and a Geography of Romania in 1816 in Leipzig.

32   The Romanian saying is "cămaşa e mai aproape de piele".

interested people who would be capable of elaborating it better through debates and public actions. Others may say no! But they can't resist this idea.

I.R.: What would be the counterarguments?

N.G.: Because through the discussions about civil space, human rights, the liberty to be Roma (in the sense we are discussing it), some Roma and non-Roma, they simply feel the civil and political as being on the one hand artificial and on the other hand quite 'dangerous': it is like a threat to the group control that the traditional Roma have over the members of their group, for example men's control over women and children; or it could be a threat to the ethnic-electoral monopoly, as it is practiced through the present mechanism regarding national minority representation, on the level of democratic institutions in Romania; or, for others, it is as if we were organising a new political entity, not only as a political party, but also under forms of a sort of political radicalism… It can also even be a state at a certain moment - not a classic state, with territory and frontiers, but a state according to the postmodern era, with no territory, a virtual political entity, in a very changed world made possible by electronic communication and new ways to rally political support, different from the 19th, 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century… In this field there is room for a political utopia, for you and your generation of activists, for the next generation, consisting of better prepared youngsters, who will travel more, are more unsatisfied with this world, the world which is organised in a way familiar to us.

I.R.: Ok, ok…there is a problem: how do you build something with a meaning for people in the community, not for academics and the over-qualified, educated at fantastic schools, while keeping the humanist values?

N.G.: Because we have used the word *Ţigan* another more subtle specification is needed: until 1995, we the activists, we didn't have a problem identifying as *Ţigan* because we called those we had contact with *Ţigan*. We called ourselves both *Ţigan* and Roma. The designation of the ethnic group wasn't a priority although the great majority of associations established by us at the beginning of the 1990s had the phrase "of the Roma" in their names. But we succeeded in implementing our basic programme; for example, in the case of FER we reconstructed houses in several places where violent conflicts had taken place, and there was a programme

of sanitary education for people from the towns of Mihail Kogălniceanu and Vălenii Lăpuşului, in Maramureş, and even Hădăreni, where we started something.

In these activities we can find the origins, for example, of the sanitary mediator programmes and those of the school mediator, or the origins of 'the project' as a series of actions at the local level (and not mainly as an administrative-financial act). We always wished to bring something to the people in the field. These conflicts, which brought attention to local tensions, gave us the chance; I instrumentalised them, using them from the ethno-political point of view, I said they look like pogroms, and some didn't agree at that time, they stepped back, frighten by my language at the time…but I brought something to the people in the field.

I.R.: You have been perceived as an agitator.

N.G.: Perceived as an agitator. I was a traitor, of the Roma and of the Romanians, because I was talking about a *pogrom,* in Romania, at the very beginning of the 1990s.

I.R.: Of Romania for sure.

N.G.: Yes, but not only… That is why they kidnapped me the so-called: Bobu Nicolae - Stoica Octavian… maybe with the discreet involvement of Cioabă, the old one. I said to myself: "Oh, my God, this guy is a spy. Firstly he is not a real Roma, and not even a real *Ţigan*. He is a spy, a *gadjo* dyed… etc."

I.R.: There were other conflicts or disputes between Roma activists, the most recent one being between Păun and Florin Cioabă, when Păun asked Cioabă to justify how his family got all their gold. How could such disputes be explained through traditional values like *pakiv* and *pakivale*?

N.G.: None of us, civic activists like me or you, and not even Păun, the politician, would obey such rules. The rule of the *pakivalo Roma* is a descendants' rule, of the Roma tribe (in an anthropological and a sociological sense it is an alternative to the state organisation). *Pakiv* and *pakivalo* are found only in descendants, and *vitsa*/guild Roma, social organisations based on kin relationships. Your first loyalty is towards your descendants, towards the clan. Outside it the word *pakivalo* and the moral-behavioural values associated, do not exist, they have no sense. One of the opposite concepts to *pakiv* is *slyness* as a behavioural guide and role model which is well spread both in Romania and in Balkan societies, or sometimes even in Italy.

Then the question arises: "can you build civic and political identity on *slyness* or *pakiv*?" - meaning answering a question similar to Kant's: is a politics only for the Roma possible in the civic sense and is it possible for you as a civic activist to be a *pakivalo*? My quick answer is: no, or not yet!

I.R.: How can we build or rebuild the Roma identity?

N.G.: This is the Kantian question; a crisis of conscience needs to be started: how is it possible to be Roma? We have to reconstruct the Roma identity through thinking similarly to the identity-building for Roma in the political and legal fields and so on. From here on the questions I annoy you with in our discussion: in order to wake up from this dogmatic sleep, ethnic naturalist when we say: "I am a *Roma* because I have that pigment through which I am classified by others as being a *Ţigan*". That is what we have to refuse. Out of the need to assert, you internalise the classification made by others, with the whole history of this classification: exclusion, oppression, racism and so on. And not, alternatively, by questioning the historical and social mechanisms which classified Roma thus, and so unfairly and painfully. As long as others classify us, *name* us, it is to our disadvantage, it is an act of racism. Similarly, when we try to categorise others, for example the *gadjo*/the non-Roma, we apply the system that otherwise we reject: we are exclusivist, intolerant, even racist. The paradox is that to some Roma activists the exclusivist element starts to dominate. See the recent dispute when X and Y[33] think that all Romanians are racists. They say that X, Y being victims, this gives them the right to say anything. These attitudes are also consequences of non-critical thinking, as are all preconceived ideas.

I.R.: From this perspective I see the intellectual project with Roma as emancipatory in the sense of being able to overcome this victim-like, victimised discourse when saying: "Look, I am so proud of this and this and this…".

N.G.: This is for sure a personal attitude, but how could you elaborate it further, within those discussions which occupy the primary position in civic activism nowadays? How should you interpret slavery? How should you interpret deportation? How should you interpret the Holocaust? How should you interpret the sedentary period or the communist one? How should you interpret the situation in post-communist countries? How should you interpret the symbols of the cultural

nation of Roma, as they were launched at the congress in London, in 1971: the International Roma Day , the flag of the Roma? How should you interpret the Roma coming here, to Italy? The migration from the East to the West?

I noticed that during the talk tonight, quite ironically, autocratically, I said that I am guilty, because I contributed to the idea that all Roma are mainly victims: of racism, of poverty and so on. I've understood that better since being here, in Italy: this discourse justifies the practice of philanthropic associations, assistance: we have to help the nomads because they are poor, etc. This discourse and this practice does not help to elaborate the Roma emancipation platform in the sense that you are talking about. Of course some of the Roma coming here are willing to be helped, to be perceived as victims. I stop there, and I do not want to simplify the issue because it is more complex. I will go back to your question: on what can you build trust in yourself, in order to trust later on in others? In order to generate a relationship based on trust you need to trust yourself. And you will go back to the words *pakiv, pakivalo…* to the values, the rules, the preferences and interdictions culturally constructed as some of the cultural practices of the descendants of Roma. Is a translation of some of the values and the cultural practices in the language of civic activism possible?

I.R.: Exactly, the change and the emancipation will come from inside.

N.G.: If you rely on self-hatred and self-victimisation you can't make any progress. In our conversation or when talking with others you have to remain stuck in the status of a victim, to invent yourself continuously as a victim, to project yourself in this way, to make out of a victim a political paradigm, or from victims a unit of measurement, with which one can analyse contemporary issues. One of the messages that I wished to convey, through my text for the project *The Price of Roma Integration* is that in order to assert as a Roma you don't need to reinvent yourself as a victim, a victim of racism and preconceived ideas. You may be Roma without being a victim. You may be Roma and assume the history of Roma, the personal history of Roma, without seeing just past suffering. In the end, being Roma is also a victory, of surviving in history, so it should be celebrated. Of course, that doesn't mean denying the periods and episodes of oppression, of individual or collective persecution, or putting

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33 The mentioned debate took place on an e-group. Since the persons involved were not asked to give us permission to use their names, we preferred to keep their anonymity and use letters.

them into brackets; you have to place them in a specific historic context, measure them, according to other means of oppression, domination, exploitation…

I.R.: There is still a moral landmark in the way we approach the Holocaust, the deportation, what happened then should stay as a moral landmark.

N.G.: It stays as a moral landmark, as something that should be well-documented. Many people talk about the Holocaust, without knowing what really happened, meaning the Roma deportation, without knowing how they were deported. Who were the deported? What was the dynamic, the mechanism, the policy, the deportation administration? Otherwise everything becomes a slogan. Let me give an example, regarding the interpretation of another moment in the life of the Roma. In August 2007, I think, I was invited to a reunion of the Adventist Roma, *Gabori*; I was in a panel. An activist for the human rights of Roma gave a presentation about slavery. My colleague was intrigued that the audience, *Gabori* Roma near Târgu Mureş, wasn't interested in our speech, us being educated in Bucharest.

Then we talked among ourselves, the protagonists of the meeting: how can we talk to some *Gabor* Roma from Transylvania, about historical experiences, of life, of slavery, which was the legal and social status of the Roma in Valahia and Moldavia? Many of the *Gabor* Roma always succeeded in maintaining an economic autonomy based on entrepreneurship, because they found a niche for handicraft and/or trade; in a way they consider themselves aristocrats (by way of wealth and dignity) in contrast with other Roma; their fortune was made with dignity and has nothing to do with *Ţigan* oppression or their *Ţigan* complex, as in the other two principalities.[34]

I.R.: They succeeded even during the socialist economy, the centralised one…

N.G.: Yes, but I go back to my example from local histories. They are very proud to be "*Gabor* with hats". In some interpretations of the young and educated, they consider it a privilege received, inherited from Gabor Bethlen, Prince of Transylvania.[35] They were permitted to wear hats made

out of cloth while others, such as Romanian peasants from Transylvania, were only allowed to wear mouton fur caps. They had cloth hats during the Middle Ages, when everything was codified, hierarchical; the clothes were a privilege they got, as their leaders say, from the Prince, because they were making cauldrons and weapons. They are people who in their personality didn't internalise preconceived ideas or stereotypes, not even discrimination, as I had internalised it, being born in a family of house *Ţigan*, descendants of *Ţigan* slaves from Câmpia Valahă.

So to talk to them about slavery and to say that Roma in general, including them, the *Gabor* Roma, had been slaves, didn't make sense to them. We are trying to build a history, generalising or totalising the experience of slavery for the whole Roma population, ignoring the fact that the contemporary Romanian state was built out of various provinces or states – Wallachia, the country of Făgăraş, Székely Land, etc – with different economic and social histories. A totalising history is a first step to totalitarianism, and this applies in the case of Roma too.

I.R.: Could we say the same about the Holocaust?

N.G.: How do we treat the issue of the Holocaust? How can we internalise in our memory, build a memory, an identity – in which persecution and suffering are important moments - without victimising ourselves for eternity? Before 1990 I had the privilege of discussing this issue with people who had been deported, during those years when there was no chance of compensation. Some of them wished to underline how they 'managed' even then and how they survived while others died. I quote from memory: "We had a good life then. We didn't die - it was quite OK because we discovered a food store… We used others, we took their gold"… It was an oral history… how should I put it? It was an oral history. .. It wasn't built ideologically as we are doing today; there was no documentation or serious discussion about complicated and sensitive historical moments.

These random opinions collected by me don't minimise the gravity of the genocide politics practiced by the authorities between 1942 and 1944, towards Roma, especially

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34   Until the mid-19th century there were Principalities of Moldova, Tara Romaneasca (Valachia) and Transylvania. Moldova and Valachia were under Ottoman dominance while Transylvania was part of the Habsburg Empire, the late Austro-Hungarian empire. In 1859 Moldova and Valachia united under the name Romania. Romania became an independent state in 1877. Following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian empire at the end of World War I, in 1918 Transylvania united with the other principalities.

35   Gábor Bethlen, 1580-1629, was a Calvinist prince of Transylvania and, for a short period, King of Hungary (August 1620 to December 1621).

'nomads'. But listening to these opinions, I think I got it… I mean the roots of the stereotypes that many Roma groups have towards other groups who lived the same traumatic experience of deportation; and/or the very differences between Roma 'ex-nomads' who were deported *en masse*, and the house Roma or Romanised, persecuted only in part because of their ethnicity and mostly on an individual basis within the ethnic group.

My mother barely escaped from the danger of deportation (this happened in Roşiorii de Vede, during the September 8th Fair) and that was while my father was a soldier in the Romanian army, for the whole war; he came back home at the end of the war, in spring 1945. There are some delicate aspects, we can't easily talk about them, simplifying this historic moment. I would like to say that if we could study this subject more and analyse it, we could better understand why different groups of Roma, from different areas of the country, respond so differently to the appeals to ethnic unity, to self-declare as Roma.

The memory that the families have suffered and survived deportation was conveyed to the next generations, up to this day, under certain representations of, as meanings of the identities of *Ţigan* or "Roma from a certain group", through shared feelings of a group psychology, of which we, as Roma activists do not have enough knowledge. From my point of view, a large part of Roma activism is still interested in globalising victimisation of the Roma. How can you work with that? How can it be transformed into something else? How much of our life represents the experience of preconceived ideas, frustrations, pains, humiliation, emotions… and then how do you turn them into something else, connected to the emancipation idea, as you say?

I.R. An ex-professor and good friend of mine whose way of thinking deeply influenced me asked me this question: in the history of the Roma there are many experiences which give a certain cohesion to the group, there is a certain solidarity against the enemy, but which are the positive aspects of this cohesion? My answer was based on an historical argument: in a hostile surrounding Roma succeeded in surviving for centuries, while other peoples disappeared. Without having a state, or a church, with no institutions

to protect them, the Roma succeeded in surviving up to now. This is a significant historic element, it is positive for Roma, a source of pride.

N.G.: And who succeeded in the end: the Roma or the *Ţigan*?

I.R.: I think that we introduce ourselves as Roma and not as *Ţigan*, because the emancipation project is for Roma and not *Ţigani*.

N.G.: Whose emancipation project? Who is the political actor presenting this project?

I.R.: The Roma activists.

N.G.: They are *Ţigani*. The majority are from *Ţigan* families and not from traditional Roma descendants.

I.R.: They define themselves as Roma, they rebrand themselves as Roma.

N.G.: Yes, but they are not necessary recognised as legitimate Roma.

I.R.: It is not a question of legitimacy. When you rebrand something, it is not a question of legitimacy. It is more a question of public relations, of manipulation. Public relations in the communist period meant propaganda.

N.G.: By the way, this is not what I meant with the question: Who succeeded? I consider, and this is my obsession, that part of the Roma elite, meaning us, representing the political electorate of Roma, and influencing public discourse, and the symbols of individualisation and representation, we are in a deep crisis, because we are also manipulators, even sly. Our success in the world of the non-Roma disconnected us from the Roma world. We don't have a common language with them, with the Roma descendants, from the local communities. More and more people notice this, and that is why they reinvented the traditional leaders: *bulibaşă,*[36] *crisinitori,*[37] *vaida*[38] etc.

I.R.: One of the factors explaining the inefficiency of Roma activists in controlling or self-controlling the community

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36 A traditional Roma leader in a community, especially in regions which were formerly in the Ottoman Empire.

37 Roma that were highly regarded by the community and entrusted by them to judge certain cases or disputes inside Roma communities.

38 Traditional Roma leaders in communities in regions which were formerly part of the Habsburg Empire.

is connected to the paradoxical situation that you wish to change a profoundly non-democratic society, a community, through democratic means.

N.G.: As András Biró says in his text, the ethnic community based on blood relations is pre-modern, hierarchical and patriarchal. We can't be democratic in a medieval society. Us, András, me… we believe that through civic associations we can create the premises of a democratic behaviour, a democratic literacy.

I.R.: You are right. You can create some reflexes and customs which are transferable to the political world.

N.G. Even in those communities which do not have such a practice and which are oppressed?

I.R.: Unfortunately, I realise that Roma organisations are far from being able to fulfil this function.

N.G.: Our lack of success or our failure is due to a success we had. We had a quicker and surer, a stimulating success, in the world of the non-Roma: in governmental institutions, in political parties, in foundations, in international organisations and so on. Our energy was oriented to the easiest direction and enjoyed immediate success. Me as a person, I have a responsibility because I illustrated this as a role model for example: through my activity of lobbying within intergovernmental organisations. But we didn't succeed in getting our ideas, our victories, on the international level to the local level; some of us disconnected from the Roma communities, which continue to be dominated by non-democratic authoritarian leaders, sometimes even outside the law. We, as successful activists, can't communicate with such leaders.

I.R.: As Roma activists we enjoyed the situation, living in an illusory world: "Oh, my God, we are so important that these non-Roma institutions are accepting us".

N.G.: That comes from the fact that we were more easily acknowledged as Roma by the audience and less so in the community, especially because you can't legitimise yourself as a Roma in a Roma community. There are some criteria that we don't fulfil. That is why we run to the world where we knew success and were accepted as Roma. No questions asked, like: "Why are you Roma?" "We are Roma because we wish to be". "If you wish to… You are Mister Rom, you are Madame Romi , you are Signor Nomado,

I notice you, but I used you. I use you because you are a Roma, and I can be as well."

I.R.: That actually happened.

N.G.: That is what I want to tell you. We do not have a clear criterion for affiliation or exclusion. Anybody can become Roma.

I.R.: We have also been used because they (non-Roma and non-Roma institutions) need to legitimise, to justify. They used us and we also used them.

N.G.: If you can access resources by playing the Roma card then it is considered acceptable, because at a certain moment we are all Roma! Maybe we'll manage better during the next step of the emancipation process for Roma, during the setting up of the ethno-political structure, the self-determination of the Roma as a political people. We haven't yet succeeded in having 1,000 Roma civic associations or their federation based on a shared interest, clearly defined and accepted through a common platform, through a social contract in an explicit formula, through a peace treaty between us, firstly, but also with European society, Romania included.

We have in Romania, now, at least 1,000 people working daily in associations, in electoral organisations (with their pluses and minuses) in public administration, in schools, etc. The issue of the denomination Roma versus *Ţigan* could come up again "as a matter for consideration" in the near future. This controversy isn't over yet just because of the rejection of Mr Prigoană's initiative, (due only to technical reasons, because of an interpretation of parliamentary procedure).

After this, the conversation will start again. Then I try to imagine a protest by 1,000 Roma activists and active citizens from other segments and layers of society, of the lawful state of Romania: majorities and minorities from different ethnic groups, intellectuals and clerks from the public administration, activists from Romanian civil society and why not from other countries too. Besides the protests (already routine) expressed through press conferences, seminars and debates, messages on the Internet, we could imagine a civic rally, with the slogan: "Revolt and you will be free!" Imagine such a moment! Dreaming on I would say: Yes, "*et in Arcadia ego*"… I am Roma too, I became Roma!

In Search of a New Deal for Roma: ERRC Interview with Nicolae Gheorghe[1]

In September 2001, the editor of Roma Rights spoke with Mr Nicolae Gheorghe - founder of the Bucharest-based non-governmental organisation Romani CRISS and currently Advisor on Roma and Sinti issues at the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, based in Warsaw - about political participation, Romani politics and civil rights work in Europe.

Roma Rights: *Mr Gheorghe, you've been working for over ten years on Roma Rights. We want to talk with you about "political participation". What has changed since the beginning of the 1990s? Where are we now? Where do you see progress? Where do you see things that need to be worked on? Where should we go from here?*

Nicolae Gheorghe: Well, I think it started with chaos and we are starting to identify now some lines along which we can create order. The chaos at the beginning of the 1990s was productive - it was like a big bang: There was heat, light, energy - for good and bad - and a lot of us drew a lot of creative activist strength from the years immediately after 1989. There was an emergence - an enthusiasm, a flowering - in which Roma went forth into public life, to be acknowledged and to affirm themselves. It was refreshing. It was a time when a lot of people started to work for organisations and parties. Activity took different clear forms in different countries, depending on the political climate. Take Czechoslovakia for instance: ROI - the Romani Civic Initiative - came as a sort of junior partner to the dissident group Charter 77, which took power. They were on a progressive track; President Havel shook Emil Scuka's hand in Bratislava and the ROI came in with something like 11 Members of Parliament in the three parliaments - the Czechoslovak Federal Parliament and the Czech and Slovak lower houses. Today, there is no more ROI in the Czech and Slovak parliamentary houses, and between the two countries, there is only Monika Horakova. She is on the list of the Freedom Union party and has no links to that earlier generation of Romani politicians; she came like a meteor into Romani politics.

So if we are talking about Czechoslovakia and post-Czechoslovakia, we see a situation in which now there is a greatly diminished presence of Roma in parliament. The Romani party is almost defunct, there is a growing rejection of Roma in the wider society - as shown by the 1993 citizenship law and the flight of many Roma from the country, so there is a sense of a loss over ten years in Romani politics. International Romani Union President Emil Scuka has said repeatedly that the causes of this loss are first of all the break-up of Czechoslovakia. He says that the number of Roma in the Czech Republic is now too low for Roma to compete as Roma in the political system. All in all, Romani party politics in the Czech Republic are dead.

Emil Scuka has also said that one of the reasons for this is the flourishing of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This is the other development throughout the region: the dramatic growth of Romani non-governmental organisations. There are hundreds of NGOs throughout the region - in Bulgaria, in Romania, in Slovakia. This hasn't killed off the political parties, but we can see that, over ten years, Roma explored a variety of forms of political expression and political participation: through non-governmental and traditional political forms. This is the achievement: I think we have a plurality of channels through which to express ourselves and to try to channel the mobilisation in political life. And now, after ten years, I think we need to start to assess and try to strategise a little about which way to go. Some people in political parties look critically at the role of NGOs. They say, "look, our young and talented and educated people are going into work in NGOs - doing basically civil society work - humanitarian, civil rights, etc. They are no longer interested in Romani politics. Who remains in the political parties? The old ones: the traditional ones, the self-appointed presidents and 'vajdas' [editor's note: a "vajda" is a local community leader]." In many ways, they are people who have not succeeded in other areas, and in many ways they are doing rather badly in political life - at least, the political parties are doing rather badly.

So there is a crisis now in Romani politics: The bright ones are drawn into work in NGOs; they are better paid, they are self-appointed, they are less accountable to the people - they are less democratic. And this would be my criticism of the Open Society Institute, of the Council of Europe, of the PHARE programme of the European Union - those considered, through their funding preferences, to be responsible for this proliferation of NGOs. It may also be a symptom of a generation gap, but it is something I am concerned about: How can we re-launch Romani politics?

One way that is encouraging to me is via Romani electoral politics, where Roma have started to play a role in individual countries. I am encouraged by the growth of individual Roma participating in mainstream politics. This is the case of Monika Horakova in the Czech Republic and this is the case of Normunds Rudevics in Latvia. Now there are two Roma in the Bulgarian parliament from various parties, in Romania there is one Romani representative of the mainstream Social Democratic party, and we still have the reserved seat - the one seat in the Romanian parliament reserved for a Romani representative. In Romania, the Romani Party (Partida Rromilor), which has existed for ten years, decided before the last election that they would not try to get elected on the strength of the Romani constituency alone, and they made an alliance with the Social Democrats two years ago, when they were in opposition. On a local level, this strategy lost to some extent, but on a national level, this strategy paid off: There is now a second Romani MP. He is the head of the Parliamentary Commission for Human Rights, Minority Rights and Churches. They have an advisor to the president, they have a state secretary in the Ministry of Public Information, and they have about 40 people in local government. So actually they made a pretty good political deal. We will see if this deal will pay off. In any case it is certainly better than before. In Bulgaria, the four or five Romani parties that competed in the election lost, while those Roma who stood on individual party tickets are now in parliament.

I think, we are moving now into a kind of maturation among Romani politicians. For example, Macedonia: In Macedonia, there has always been one strong Romani constituency because of the huge number of Roma in the Suto Orizari municipality in Skopje. The MP from the district is Romani. The local council and the mayor are Romani. Competition is now between three Romani parties, plus the mainstream parties have Roma on the ground competing.

This reflects the development of pragmatic political thinking. There is an electoral success of Roma - still very limited, but success nonetheless. There is even a new growth of successful Romani politicians in Western Europe. For example, there is a new Romani representative - Mr Rudolf Sarkozi - on a Vienna district council. Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia will all have elections next year, so it will be interesting to watch what happens further.

If we think about how political ideologies are starting to be articulated in the Romani world, most of them are dominated by ethnic thinking: "We are Roma, we are an ethnic Romani party, we need to go forward as Roma." There is not that much debate among us about political ideologies: Who is a social democrat, who is liberal, who is a Christian democrat, etc. This is a mistake, in my opinion: Roma are pushed all the time onto an ethnic ticket, rather than into a wider debate about political philosophies and where we stand. We are still at the beginning of fleshing out our ideologies.

Roma Rights: *Can we go back to the recent Bulgarian result? I found it rather depressing; I mean, activists painstakingly put together a Romani coalition of a number of Romani parties, and it won only 0.6 percent of the vote. Is there a way to imagine a Romani platform that is not purely ethno-nationalistic? Are there issues specific to Roma that would stand distinct from mainstream politics, address Romani concerns, attract Romani voters, and yet not be simply the lowest common denominator of ethnicity?*

Nicolae Gheorghe: The loss in Bulgaria, I think, has a lot more to do with the fabulous success of Tsar Simeon, and the way in which he captivated Romani and non-Romani Bulgarians, and much less to do with anything particular about Romani politics. Roma are part of Bulgarian society. There is a high level of integration in Bulgarian society. For example, social democracy has rather deep roots in Bulgarian society. If you look closely at what goes on on the ground in Bulgaria, you can see that Romani voters in Bulgaria have tended to behave rather coherently as a Romani segment of Bulgarian proletarian voters, rather than endorse ethnic parties that would pull them out of their local context and push them toward ethnic-specific politics. I see more productive and useful work toward mainstreaming Roma in the political system - I would rather see Romani social democrats, Romani liberals, etc.

Another interesting recent development in Bulgaria is the fact that some of the new Romani political formations are

much closer to the "tribes"; there is, for example, a party of Kalderash Roma. These people are reacting not only to their marginalisation in society, but also to their marginalisation in Romani parties. What we at the Contact Point have tried to do is to network commonalities and foster coalition between Romani parties, as well as to try to get smaller Romani parties allied - and with good positions - on the lists of the mainstream parties. But again, I am still hoping that young Roma will come from the NGOs and re-enter mainstream politics - and we have seen this in Bulgaria during the 2000 elections with the training programme by the Open Society Institute and some of the follow-up activities of that group. I was heartened to see a team of around ten young people whose clear aim is to be politicians - not NGO activists, but mainstream politicians, doing basic parliamentary and governmental politics.

Roma Rights: *More donor money has gone toward NGOs in recent years than towards other areas of Romani life. Some have said that this money may have been detrimental to the growth of Romani grassroots politics. Is that true? Or is there a better way of using these funds to focus Romani power?*

Nicolae Gheorghe: Well, as I said, I speak from the far side of a generation gap. My generation of Romani activists grew up in trade unions, in the Communist parties, and young people probably needed to break that model and get some distance from it. But we are now in a new phase. Governments are adopting policy documents on Roma. We are moving into a period when those policies will have to be implemented. This means the focus is moving much more to a local level and to specialised areas of expertise. We now need Romani officers and experts to fill the ministries and governmental offices - professional Romani administrators. Roma who have been working in NGOs are in a good position to fill these positions. Funding might now focus on encouraging these people to go into public administration. Of course, these people may have to accept lower pay. But it may now be important to break the cycle of "monitoring" and "community work" and send people into government. We need Romani experts - I am one. My NGO training was crucial for my preparation for my job as an international officer in the OSCE.

Of course, NGOs continue to have a key role. They are more policy-oriented now. They will be important for developing new ideas and new areas. Also, it is of course crucial that NGOs monitor the performance of Roma in the administration. Some of us now are in those jobs - not enough, there should be more - but NGOs must monitor Roma and non-Roma in power. We are, if you accept my metaphor from earlier, post-big-bang.

Roma Rights: *You travel a lot and meet with Romani activists in many countries. Do you see clearly emerging issues - specific cross-border issues - around which Roma can mobilise? Are there common issues around the region? Or is the Romani issue still about separate states, separate conditions, separate realities, and in need of redress at a local or national level?*

Nicolae Gheorghe: Most Roma are entrenched locally - local groups, local issues. From time-to-time in the course of the 1990s, we have found ways to mobilise nationally. For example, in Romania during the serious mob violence episodes in the early 1990s, we managed to build national Romani unity. In spite of initial resistance by Roma to recognise that what goes on in the next village matters, Roma acted in solidarity with those Roma who were attacked around the country. We also managed to react as a cohesive group when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Romania tried to impose the name "Tigan" on Roma in the mid-1990s. We reacted with a common voice and made it clearly known that the ministry had no right to name us. That was the last time I think. There have been some street demonstrations since then, but I think they have been mainly shows, and not really organised around issues.

In the late 1990s of course, Roma have organised in pressing through policy programmes. I am thinking mainly of Romania and Bulgaria. Romani activists in those countries shaped a platform and worked to get support from Roma around the country to endorse a Romani platform.

The only truly transnational issue thus far among us has been the refugee question - whether or not to show real solidarity with Roma who have fled their home countries. I am not sure there is genuine widespread solidarity with Romani refugees, but at meetings, you will generally hear statements of sympathy, and it is a basic fact that no Romani leader today can be without a position on refugees and causes of flight. And of course in some countries, the refugee issue has caused deep disagreement among Romani leaders as to what kind of politics to pursue.

Of course one issue that could unite us is Kosovo and the situation of Roma in the former Yugoslavia. I confess I

was surprised by the low level of solidarity among Roma with the Roma from Kosovo. Early on there was a lot of emotion; we gathered some money among ourselves for the victims. But two years after the ethnic cleansing, there has been no major Romani-led action. I don't see mass action built around the Kosovo crisis. We are still concerned mainly about unemployment in our own countries, whether EU money is being properly spent, etc. I really was amazed; maybe I am wrong, but I have noticed that it is actually difficult to focus people's attention on the crisis of Roma in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. So I think we are still very concerned with our own families, our own groups, our own localities, our own countries.

Roma Rights: *You are now Advisor on Roma and Sinti Issues at the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. What will your office do over the next few years to increase Romani power?*

Nicolae Gheorghe: We have spent money and energy on organising a series of roundtable events aimed at bringing together the major competing international Romani organisations and trying to assist them in reaching a coherent programme to present to their partners at an international level. We have had some success, but it is generally fleeting - sometimes up, sometimes down. It is still basically a zero-sum game between the major Romani organisations. One side wins everything or loses everything. I will continue to work in this area both out of inertia, and also because I think it is important.

In the coming years, I also intend to devote more time to fostering Romani electoral politics with the goal of increasing the number of elected Roma in the OSCE region countries. I would like to see more Roma with knowledge of how the game of politics is played. Elected Roma can

have real legitimacy. I would like to devote energy to getting us out of the self-appointed leadership model.

I dream of transnational Romani elections - to implement mechanisms to elect our leadership democratically, to foster accountability and legitimacy. Today we choose undemocratically among the self-appointed. I want to see a more democratic Romani movement. One small step toward this end is happening presently: We have been holding meetings on the initiative of President Tarja Halonen of Finland to create a constituent assembly of Roma at a pan-European level. This body would have links to the Council of Europe and aim to influence decisions taken on Roma at the European level.

I will also continue the work of the OSCE, begun in the early 1990s, to find mechanisms for the international recognition of Roma as a people in diaspora. The issue of Roma is discussed often in the OSCE and is an OSCE priority. We may now begin to think about a Roma peace conference - to make peace between Roma and the wider societies, to make a political deal between Roma and others - a peace conference to settle the issue of Roma in the Balkans and to establish Roma as a legitimate and constituent member of the Balkan peoples. A deal about what? Possibly about the European Roma Rights Charter proposed now for several years by Rudko Kawczynski. Perhaps about the "Roma nation" idea promoted by Emil Scuka. About how to implement human rights principles in reality and how the work of anti-discrimination activists can find its place in the machinery. There are a number of perspectives that can be harmonised, but I would like to sit down at one table with all of the players - governmental and non-governmental - and hash it out. We need to work out a draft of our deal - of our peace treaty.

Roma Rights: *Thank you very much.*

The Decade of Roma Rights

INTERVIEW WITH NICOLAE GHEORGHE[1], AUGUST 2006

ERRC: *You have been in charge at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)'s Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues (CPRSI) for seven years. Your mandate has come to the end. How do you evaluate your actions in the last decade and what do you think your office has added to the course of the Roma rights movement?*

Nicolae Gheorghe: Well, currently I am in a self-critical mood while I try to collect the memories of the work I have done in the ODIHR CPRSI since 1999 and in the OSCE since 1990. Let's say that one of my first steps when employed by the ODIHR, in 1999, was to support the International Romani Union (IRU) and the Roma National Congress (RNC), which were the most visible organizations but, at that time, were somehow weak in their self-organization and in advocating for Roma rights. I provided them with the ODIHR's political and financial support and I managed to bring them to dialogue. In 2000, we established the International Roma Contact Group, which included the leadership of IRU, the board of RNC, and a couple of independent Roma activists and experts. This structure worked rather well for about one and a half years. The first discussions in August 2001 between the Finnish diplomacy and the Roma representatives, about the creation of a pan-European Roma body, were facilitated by this Roma Contact Group. The conjunction between the Finnish diplomacy, the institutional mechanisms of the Council of Europe and the group of Roma representatives led to the establishment of the European Roma and Traveller Forum (ERTF), in 2003-2005. This brought the Romani movement to a different stage. And I look at this as an achievement.

There is also the ODIHR contribution to the negotiation of the OSCE Action Plan for Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area, adopted by the OSCE Ministerial Council in December 2003. It is a complex document, too comprehensive I may say, focused on the pledge of the participating states to "*eradicate the discrimination*" against the Roma and Sinti and to implement effective policies "*for Roma,*

with Roma". For sure, not enough results can be reported after almost three years since its adoption; there are too many words in this Plan (out of its ten chapters and 6,030 words) which are poorly or not at all matched by the actions recommended to the participating states or/and tasked to the OSCE institutions. Some senior diplomats have said that the OSCE Action Plan is a "living document", susceptible to be altered (eventually by shortening and better focusing its wording), strengthened, better matched by institutional and financial tools, better staffed, etc. We will review the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan during the forthcoming OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), Warsaw, 2-13 October, more precisely in the Working session on 11 October. I hope to have the ERRC as a participant and as a contributor to this debate and to hear, again, your informed criticism of particular participating states as well as of the strengths and weaknesses of the OSCE institutions' current actions for the Roma and Sinti.

ERRC: *Five years ago, in an interview with the ERRC, you urged for a democratically elected constituent assembly of Roma at the pan-European level. Is the ERTF something you wanted? Has it met your expectations? What do you hope the Forum will be able to achieve that previous initiatives could not?*

N.G.: I think that it is too early to evaluate the merits of the Forum, and we still have to maintain both supportive and friendly critical approaches. As I mentioned, I was part of creating the Forum, and I was actively involved in the discussions until mid-2003, when I took a little bit of distance. I believe that the Forum is the best arrangement that we could achieve for the time being in the process of the Roma self-organisation. But this is exactly the problem: the current Forum is an "arrangement" and not yet an elected body. It is created by consensus after taking into account the realities of different structures and stages of Romani organisations Europewide and in the represented countries. In some countries, Romani organisations are mature, whereas in some others, they are still embryonic. In the future, the Forum will have to

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[1] This interview first appeared in the Roma Rights Journal in 2006, in an issue marking the 10th anniversary of the ERRC. The full journal is available here: **http://www.errc.org/roma-rights-journal/roma-rights-2-3-2006-errc-10th-anniversary/2707**. In the original interview it was noted that the views expressed in this interview are Nicolae Gheorghe's private views and they do not necessarily represent ODIHR's positions.

reach a higher level of democracy in electing the national delegates through transparent democratic rules, based on which the European elections can be organized. In 2008/2009 there will be new elections for the Forum. Constituent delegations have to take steps in advance to better prepare for the elections of national representatives.

My first hope from the Forum is that it will manage to create standards, precedents for the national Roma organisations, with its actions and that it will serve as a role model. My second hope is that the Forum will create a vision for addressing the various issues that Roma are confronted with. For instance, it might take a stand on issues and dilemmas such as assimilation, integration, cultural separation. Or it might form an opinion on whether we should advocate for general human and citizenship rights being applied in a non-discriminatory way for Roma, or do we need a stronger minority status in each particular state, or should we have something trans-national, like the *European Roma Rights Charter* that the Roma National Congress has proposed in the mid-1990s. The Forum should also voice an opinion about the Kosovo Roma during the talks on the political status of Kosovo and use its credibility, its mandate and legitimacy to express a clear vision about what should be done for Roma – in Kosovo, in Serbia or in other countries where they have fled and are being expelled as refugees and IDPs – and how these measures should be put into effect.

ERRC: *As regards Kosovo, do you think that there is solidarity among Roma with the Roma from Kosovo? Do Roma mobilize themselves and act with a common voice when the fundamental rights of a larger Romani group are seriously violated?*

N.G.: Unfortunately, I have to say that I am amazed about the lack of sufficient solidarity between Roma from different countries. But I also have to mention positive developments, for example when Martin Demirovsky, as assistant to the Member of the European Parliament Els de Groen, organized a debate on the situation of Roma in Kosovo in the European Parliament on 6 March 2006. The ODIHR Contact Point managed to bring the discussions further and hold a debate in Skopje on 26 March and in Vienna during 29 March-1 April. In these discussions participated, or let me rather say, they were attended by a large number of Roma from Kosovo and by the representatives of the European Roma and Travellers Forum, although they were not ultimately very productive. Compared to the gravity and the urgency of the Kosovo issue, we are still quite slow and low

profile, so I have to say that most Roma are more concerned with their immediate needs and with their own families and are not in solidarity with the most vulnerable Roma groups.

ERRC: *Five years ago, you said that Romani politics was in crisis, as "the bright ones are drawn into work in NGOs", and you called for a relaunching of Romani politics. Has the situation changed, are there more Roma involved in politics? Are there more professional Romani administrators – officers and experts – in ministries and governmental offices?*

N.G.: Yes. There is a slow but constant increase in the number of the Roma elected in the local and national parliaments of some countries, such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Slovakia and Romania. But Roma continue to be underrepresented on the voters' lists and in the elected offices, compared to their number and visibility in the public debates of many states throughout Europe. In what concerns the governmental and administrative offices, yes, I see also some modest developments. See Klara Orgovanova as the Plenipotentiary of the Commission for Roma Affairs in Slovakia, where there are already 30 staff members hired, not only in Bratislava but in the regional offices as well. In Romania, there is the National Agency for Roma, where 40-60 people will be hired by Maria Ionescu, State Secretary, who came from the NGO world. Currently, many young people work in the administration of Roma policies, like Gábor Daróczi in Hungary, who is the Ministerial Commissioner for Roma and Disadvantaged Children in the Ministry of Education and Culture, or Andor Ürmös, who leads a Roma Integration Department in the Hungarian Ministry of Social and Labor Affairs and I could mention other examples. But I don't see enough similar development in other countries, for instance in Bulgaria or in some "old member countries" of the EU (Finland is an exception), although there is a large number of educated Roma, probably because they are still more interested in the NGO work. So, I see some positive changes, although of course I would be happier to see thousands of Roma in governments and involved in politics, but this could sound like a Maoist revolution's slogan. My hope is that the Decade of Roma Inclusion will manage to generate awareness among the Roma NGOs so that they can move into key and influential positions in the public administration in the field of education, housing, health care, employment, etc.

ERRC: *When we talk about Romani politics, can you see political philosophies and ideologies behind Romani parties and political groups?*

N.G.: I think we are still in a premature phase as regards the political philosophies and ideologies elaborated by Roma for Roma. What I see is that some main leading political parties opened their doors to Romani politicians. See for example the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) or the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) parties in Hungary, which provided seats for two Romani women – Lívia Járóka and Viktória Mohácsi – in the European Parliament. So Romani people join mainstream parties more frequently instead of creating one on their own. Romania is another example, where the Romani party decided to join the Social Democratic Party in the 2000 and in the 2004 elections, without elaborating a coherent social democratic platform, so it was rather a personal coalition by political arrangement. These are stages in a process of political confrontations and clarifications. Roma are still taking a rather comfortable approach to politics, and this is a criticism not only to my generation but also to the next generation as well. International organizations, like the Council of Europe, European Parliament, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, invite Roma participants to their meetings usually to draft texts – or rather to comment/revise already-drafted texts – where we frequently behave in a "take-it-easy" way and do not use these occasions for political debates and confrontation. We still tend to believe that rights are granted somehow mechanically by laws and policy documents. After 15-20 years of such "resolution-driven" Romani activism, we could learn that the adoption of such documents, while useful, is far from being enough; neither is the "small-projects driven" approach successful enough. In this context, I have to acknowledge my whole responsibility for keeping myself and others in the "trap" of these approaches, in the limbo of the gap between the illusions of the activists and the realities of the every day life of the grass-roots people (by the way of "illusions and realities", this was also the title of an international Roma meeting in Snagov-Bucuresti, May 1993, organized by the Project on Ethnic Relations).

The lack of confrontation is also due to the fact that we who are educated and took the responsibility to portray ourselves as leaders – in the sense of influencing perceptions of Roma and about Roma – are clients or employees of foundations and international organizations, sometimes beneficiaries of affirmative action policies, so we are not political fighters. I see a clear need for confrontation among ourselves and I think we are not urging such possibilities enough.

ERRC: *There are a lot of expectations of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015. Do you think that there is real inclusion of Roma in the decade activities and decision-making? What can be the indicators of success of the Decade?*

N.G.: We are still at the very beginning of the Decade and I hope that this political initiative will be what it was announced to be: putting rights into practice in given countries. An indicator of success is to have more Roma involved in governments and in the administration or in policy-making bodies which are supposed to implement the provisions of the Decade and make policies in housing, education, employment and health care. But there is very little progress in that direction yet, except the launch of the Roma Education Fund, which I find great. I think that there was a misperception of the Decade: people in the governments, including some of those prime ministers or deputies who signed the declaration, took the Decade as a philanthropic initiative. They think that the World Bank and the Open Society Institute give money to the governments to implement projects at the national level, but this is a distorted interpretation. The message in my understanding was different: the government of each country has to find financial resources for the aims of the Decade, and then derive support from the outside world. That is why another indicator to asses the success of the Decade is the amount of funding for Roma programs allocated from the budgets of relevant line ministries (Housing, Education, etc.) and the municipalities with Roma populations, as approved (voted) by the national parliaments and by the regional/local authorities of the countries involved in the Decade's action plans. And I have to say that neither the governmental officers nor the experts and Roma activists associated with the Decade have done enough to implement this spirit and this indicator of Roma inclusion. Otherwise, I do not see yet a difference being made by the Decade *per se.*

ERRC: *Whereas Roma-related topics seem to appear regularly in the political discussion in the Decade countries, many Western countries, the Russian Federation and other countries in the former Soviet Union ignore Roma rights issues. Why is this so?*

N.G.: In international politics, you always have fashionable items that occupy the attention of politicians and appear regularly in the international and national media. If you want to maintain the Roma issue, you have to fight for that. There was a little bit of awareness in the Western-European countries before the accession of the new European Union countries, which were ringing the issues of Roma.

But then, interest vanished after the accession took place. It is true that, for some real or maybe artificial reasons, the issue of Muslims in Western countries is much more in focus. But we have to clarify that it is not about Muslims as such, as religious and cultural groups in the respective countries, but about violent militancy and about the political ideologies behind those destructive actions. It is not comparable with the Roma issues, which involve discrimination, racism or poverty.

After the riots in Paris suburban neighbourhoods, last autumn, I heard opinions that the situation of Roma in Europe (in particular in some central and southern countries) is similar to the situation of young Muslims in EU countries. Indeed, both Roma and Muslims of Europe are confronted with similar challenges generated by racism, discrimination, social exclusion and in some cases, poverty. There are commonalities which deserve to be better analyzed, and there is room for more intense coalition building among groups and associations fighting the same or/and similar effects rooted in racism and exclusion.

There are also differences among these very same groups, and one basic one, in my opinion, is that Roma of Europe have been settled in many countries as sedentary populations for centuries, being a *de facto* constituent population of the respective states. While the groups of Muslims – that we talk about in the present day's media – are issued from more recent, post – Second World War migration. (There are differences among Muslim groups themselves in this respect, but we can not enter in details here). I recall here, for example, the position of the Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma which insists that the Sinti and Roma are a "Deutschevolksgruppe", a German population, in the historic, legal and political meanings of the concepts related to "nationality" in German society. Also, the Sinti and Roma have been explicitly targeted for persecution on racist grounds by the German Nazis and the nationalist regimes of many of the European states during the Second World War. By the way, this is one of the reasons why we speak in the OSCE documents, institutions and events about the Roma *and Sinti.*

These historic and political differences generate lessons for the type of policies recommended to the states to adopt when dealing with the particularized tools of action aiming to curb racism and to eradicate discrimination faced by various particular groups within the common racism and anti-discrimination legal and institutional framework of given states.

In this respect, I may say that the state policies addressing the racism against the Roma are not as clear and as strong as the ones which address other types of racism against groups of the population experiencing both cultural distinctiveness and social exclusion, including the Muslims of Europe. Take the case of France: while the French state accepts some forms of "positive discrimination" for the French Muslims (for example, there is a member of French government in charge of the issues of this population), there is not yet a clear and public recognition by the French authorities of a political status for the Roma of France – there is only the administrative category of the *gens du voyage*, which is a rough equivalent of the English Travellers – although France is a sponsor, together with Finland, of the initiative for the European Roma and Travellers Forum within the Council of Europe.

I thank you for this question giving me the chance to speak about Muslim populations, religion and cultures. I would like to point out here that a large segment of the Roma population in the world is Muslim, mainly in the Balkans and in the Middle East, but also among the Roma Diaspora in EU countries and in the Americas. We can hardly discuss the prospects of the Roma in post-crises situations without taking into account the church affiliation and the religious beliefs of particular Roma groups; this is the case, for example, of the Muslim Roma groups and persons who live among Christian populations (the Christians as various denominations) as majority or minority populations in various countries, regions, cantons or enclaves of the current Balkans.

ERRC: *Concerning the Romani movement, you said once that "this is not a movement, it is a sect". What did you mean by that?*

N.G.: It is a way of inciting a debate with my fellow activists using meanings borrowed from the sociological analysis of the "sects" and "churches". An established church is a mass organization which has hundreds of thousands or millions of followers. The sect is a small group which goes after the fundamental beliefs of a religion in a sort of break-away from an established church. Do not forget that Christianity first appeared as a sect among the Jewish ideas and beliefs too. All sects start with a few people only, organized usually around a charismatic leader, and grow bigger through supporters who make such initiatives become a church. In the case of the established churches, you have enduring beliefs, passed through generations,

large meetings and pilgrimages; there are also codified rules and church courts to enforce such rules. There is an institutional structure where you have church boards, administrators and a hierarchical leadership, just like in the context of Catholics: priests, bishops and the pope. In a sect, there is a strong and exclusive control over the people who join, as it is a small group. In a church (like in a business or in a public corporation of the present day), you have to cope with diverse personalities: there are idealists, opportunists, good and bad guys, genuine believers and hypocrites, and the leaders have to find solutions for all these characters and overcome the endless challenges of keeping them together. Think about how the pope deals with homosexual priests for example. The church cannot just expel them, but it has to accommodate what is controversial. A church is an institution which has to attract, include and keep a large constituency of believers; and this is the very reason they incite the breakaway of charismatic leaders who establish their sects in order to recall the original, "incorrupt", "true credo" of the founding beliefs. If successful, a sect is an early stage of a church; alternatively, its challenge could be accepted and "absorbed" by the establishment of the mainstream church which may react by implementing the change brought to the front stage by the sectarian dissidence.

Mutatis mutandis this is the way I understand the breakaway of Rudko Kawczinsky with his followers from the International Romani Union (IRU)'s establishment, in the mid-1980s. Rudko openly confronted the IRU leadership during the IVth International Roma Congress in Serock-Warsaw in May 1990; and he initiated the Roma National Congress (RNC) in autumn, the same year. It was, somehow, like a "sectarian" departure of the RNC group from an ailing IRU of those times. The RNC "radical" discourse and actions (street protests and sit-ins, like those organized with the Roma asylum-seekers in Germany) served, during the 1990s, as reminders of the original rights-oriented, militant agenda of the Romani self-organization, as illustrated by the spirit and the "manifesto" of the First World Romani Congress in London, in April 1971. The provocation launched by the RNC (whose merit, among others, was to remain a rather small-scale but well-articulated body of committed activists, devoted to their leader) has been a catalyser for political in-fighting, for partisan realignments of various national organizations and for their renewed activism in the 1990s and into the new millennium, including the efforts to politically reform and revitalize the IRU. See,

for example, the complex, even complicated, re-organisation of the IRU leadership during the Congress in Prague, June 2000; or the *Declaration of a Nation*; or the renewed political symbolism of the Roma flag, anthem and of the Romani language launched by that Prague meeting and by the IRU Congress in Lanciano (Italy) in October 2004. All these reforms aimed to reach the souls of millions of Roma world-wide. The dissidence of the RNC (as well as the less vocal but effective criticism expressed by the Scandinavian Roma, in particular by the late Aleka Stobin and by Miranda Voulasranta, following the IRU Prague meeting) has been also productive in stimulating the successive series of compromises among various factions of the Roma structures, such as the above mentioned ODIHR CPRSI-brokered International Roma Contact Group, which led to the recent establishment of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) as a more inclusive organizational framework for both the IRU and RNC, as well as for other international networks (International Roma Women Network, Forum of European Roma Young People, Gypsies and Travellers International Evangelical Fellowship), for national Roma political parties and NGOs, etc. It remains to be seen if the ERTF is able to promote organisational growth and change by its own dynamic within the established institutional frameworks (including those provided by the Council of Europe) or, alternatively, if the need for political creativity and effectiveness will require a new challenger, or "dissenting", break away political grouping.

Coming back to your questions pointing to the current Roma politics of self-organization, I may say that Romani organisations are (*mutatis mutandis,* I repeat) rather like "sects", not "churches", not yet part of a social, mass movement. We don't have enough followers because the discussion about Roma issues takes place among ourselves, Roma activists, and to tell you frankly, I see a serious, even widening disconnection between us, the "clubs" of Romani (national and international) political elite and the Romani communities in each country and in the world Romani Diaspora. It is a reminder that we may generate a movement only if we manage to find ideological tools and messages to capture the feelings, the interests and the social imagination of the population in the grass-roots Roma communities or/and in the general public (as, for example, various groups of mainstream human rights activists).

Said another way, I don't think we are at the stage to call the current course a "Romani movement". We are not there yet,

because we are still capsulated in our small NGOs (sometimes rather exclusivist, rigid and intolerant among ourselves); in our families; in clan-based political parties (with modest electoral success); in Roma-labelled governmental offices (with minuscule budgets); or in our email-groups (frequently jammed by real or alleged technical inconveniences). We have to focus and upgrade the effectiveness of fighting the racism and discrimination against Roma Europe-wide; but we also have to discuss several sensitive issues like the inequality of women with men in Roma affairs, early marriages in some traditional groups, use and misuse of child labor by some families, freedom of sexual orientation in contemporary societies, etc. Talking about how to keep the Roma identity: what are the enduring "markers" of our ethnicity and what should be changed if we wish to achieve wider political mobilisation? Or, what is the impact of the religious/spiritual leaders on particular Roma groups; why and how are they more "successful" than the Roma political leaders or civil rights activists? Some people have to take the responsibility to discuss such issues *"for Roma, with Roma, by Roma"* so that we can have a debate (including controversies), but also common points and agreed steps on how to move the Romani self-organization to a next, more inclusive, more mature stage of the process – and how to reach and mobilize the Romani people, not only and not mainly the self-appointed representatives. And one more point, please: both "churches" and "sects" (or the "clubs") can function properly only thanks to the financial contributions and donations from their own followers, especially from the rich ones!

ERRC: *You talked about representation of Roma in various bodies. How can you explain that international, intergovernmental organizations still lack Roma staff members? Who is responsible for that?*

N.G.: Well, this is a sensitive and painful issue. In our OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, after I had been hired – through an open competition and have not just been appointed as many believe – I recruited twice Romani colleagues. This generated complaints from some other competitors who perceived that they were disadvantaged by this decision. The difference at the Council of Europe or the European Commission is that they always recruit in open competition, as opposed to governmental bodies, where people are many times appointed based on their ethnic origin and/or political affiliation. So affirmative actions have to combine the main criteria for the job and the elements of policies related to sex, gender, ethnic origin, etc. If we talk about legitimacy of people in positions, I see sometimes contradictions between two dimensions: political legitimacy and competence. They both are needed for successful and legitimate work. The Council of Europe is currently recruiting officers for the secretariat of the ERTF; and the OSCE recruits staff on a continuing basis for the ODIHR CPRSI, for the Focal Points in the OSCE Field Missions and for the OSCE mainstream vacancies, many of them being relevant for the Roma and Sinti policies. From my modest experience in staff recruiting, I may say that the Roma and Sinti themselves, those individuals, women and men, with the required skills have to take the time to complete the application forms and the trouble of entering in competitions for given job vacancies. The success is not 100% assured, but it is worth trying, and there is always someone who wins. Like in the Olympic Games: it is as important to participate in a sport competition as in dreaming to win it.

ERRC: *What are your plans for the future? Will you remain affiliated with the ODIHR office?*

N.G.: In the very near future, by the end of 2006, I have the task to assist the ODIHR in recruiting a new Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues and to "hand over" the work done in the ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues (CPRSI). I hope that some of the projects started over the last years in the framework of the OSCE Action Plan for Roma and Sinti – such as the CPRSI projects on Police and Roma; or on Roma in Kosovo and in other crises situations; or the participation of Roma in the elections in various countries; or upgrading Roma housing and settlements programs – will continue in the coming years. If my contribution will be considered valuable in some of these or other OSCE actions, I would be glad to volunteer it. On a more personal side, I and my family will return soon to Romania, where we hope to rejoin the NGO world. I dream to have the time and the curiosity to read some of the basic books in philosophy and sociology which I was supposed to study during my college years.

ERRC: *Thank you for this interview, we wish you all the best.*

EUROPEAN ROMA RIGHTS CENTRE

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is an international public interest law organisation working to combat anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma. The approach of the ERRC involves strategic litigation, international advocacy, research and policy development and training of Romani activists. The ERRC has consultative status with the Council of Europe, as well as with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

The ERRC has been the recipient of numerous awards for its efforts to advance human rights respect of Roma: The 2013 PL Foundation Freedom Prize; the 2012 Stockholm Human Rights Award, awarded jointly to the ERRC and Thomas Hammarberg; in 2010, the Silver Rose Award of SOLIDAR; in 2009, the Justice Prize of the Peter and Patricia Gruber Foundation; in 2007, the Max van der Stoel Award given by the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Dutch Foreign Ministry; and in 2001, the Geuzenpenning Award (the Geuzen medal of honour) by Her Royal Highness Princess Margriet of the Netherlands;

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