From the Gypsies to the African Americans

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This paper is an analysis of comparative multiculturalisms. Starting from the historical reality that both the Roma and the African-Americans were reified through slavery and discriminated against because of their racial visibility, the author analyses the position of the two groups in the Romanian, namely, the American society. The lead of the African-Americans in overcoming the racial stigma is explained by the author through: the opportunities offered by a powerful and consolidated democracy, and by the existence of an elite of the minority group. These factors should be envisaged by Romanian society when trying to make both the minority and the majority cooperate in order to avoid the transformation of the Roma into an under-class group, a great challenge with a view to Romania's integration into the EU structures.

For centuries both Romanian Gypsies and African Americans have occupied a problematic space in their respective societies: they have been a negative Other on which the majority could throw most of their fears[1]. The Romanian Gypsy[2] and the African-American problems have had a common cause: slavery by an outsider group coupled with visibly racial otherness. For both groups, the legal status of slavery ended in mid-19th century, and since then, both groups have had to fight for full emancipation and full respect in their societies, which they still do not enjoy. Even though these two communities have grown in differ-

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ent historical environments—the Romanian rural society lacking strong democratic traditions, and the U.S., a highly industrialized society with a democratic tradition— the attempts at solutions are strikingly similar: mutual efforts both by the minority and the majority for fullest emancipation at all levels of society.

A reading of the Romanian Gypsy situation in comparison to the African- American experience facilitates two different kinds of comparisons. On the one hand, I will discuss the historical reality that the Gypsy situation was often indeed read in Romanian nineteenth-century history through African-American lenses, with the appropriate nuances, of course. On the other hand, I claim that in the contemporary circumstances the African-American community has accomplished a lot more in its effort for full emancipation and acceptance at all levels of society than has the Romanian Gypsy community. By reading the situation of the contemporary Romanian Gypsies through African-American lenses and comparing the two groups at the beginning of the 21st century, I hope to point to some possible solutions for the still very problematic position of the Gypsy community in Romanian society.

The Romanian intelligentsia of the 19th century followed with great interest and empathy the evolution of the Abolitionist movement in the USA. They raised the problem of Gypsy slavery in Romania, a question they became acutely aware of through Masonic channels. Already during the 18th century, the idea of the Gypsy and Black slaves' manumission appeared in the Masonic Lodge of the Nine Muses. This Lodge, among whose members were Franklin and the famous La Fayette, and whose president was the French revolutionary Brissot, focused both on the Black slaves of America and on the Gypsy slaves of the Old World. Since many of the important Romanian militants of the 1848 Revolution were Masons, they became particularly sensitive to this issue.

It is also important to note that the Romanian abolitionist discourse developed at the same time as the Romanian nationalist discourse. Nationalism "may be an excellent way of determining identity, but it has little or nothing to say about political participation"[3] or about the distribution of power within the community. History being such that the Romanians lived for hundreds of years in the orbit of political entities dominated by other religions or ethnicities, for them it seemed more important to create a state as the instrument of a majority, than to look at the state as "the agent of governance for the whole society,"[4] minorities included. Therefore, the manumission of the Gypsy, a humanistic ideal, was not followed by political programs meant to integrate them and turn them into citizens with full abilities of participation in the political life of the nation.

One of the intellectuals influenced by both the nationalist and the abolitionist ideas was Mihail Kogalniceanu (1817-1891). He offered one of the most consistent and thorough Romanian perspectives on the Gypsies problem at that time. In 1837, as a student in Berlin, Kogalniceanu wrote a presentation

of the Gypsies at the request of Alexander Humboldt. Interestingly, Kogalniceanu complains about the momentary and biased interest in the nineteenth-century slaves, yet, on the other hand, he criticizes the "lack of civilization" of this "miserable" ethnic group, the Gypsies.[5] Kogalniceanu presents the peculiarities of the Gypsy slave situation in Moldavia. The master has no right over the slave's life or over his/her property except when the slave does not have heirs. But if a slave runs away, the master has the right to follow the fugitive slave. The Gypsy slaves are allowed to have a home, a garden, and a little store, but they cannot have a farm or an estate. Kogalniceanu also describes the various forms of punishments that the owners had a right to use—punishments that are impressively cruel. The most frequent ones were: the whip and the "falanga." In Wallachia the situation is almost the same. In both principalities there were also Gypsy slaves who wandered all over the country practicing their trade and paying the master certain dues. Slaves were not only private property. Monasteries and the Crown also had slaves. Gypsy slaves had their own rulers who were also the judges for cases among the slaves. If there was a case between a slave and a free man, the master represented the slave at the trial and paid any damages.

During the Middle Ages there could be no legitimate union between a free person and a local slave. If two Gypsy slaves decided to marry they needed the approval of their master. If they belonged to different masters, there was usually an arrangement between the two masters. The couple were to live on one of the estates and a compensation or another slave was offered to the other master. If the masters could reach no agreement, the couple were separated. Under the influence of Enlightenment ideology this began to change. In 1743 Alexandru Mavrocordat, Prince of Wallachia, forbid the separation of slave spouses and also ruled that the offspring of a union between a slave and a free person from Wallachia are free.

However, in spite of his good intentions, Kogalniceanu's approach to the Gypsies is that of one writing from a superior and paternalistic position and is imbued with the ordinary stereotypes about the so-called "inferior" groups. For instance, his description of the Gypsy women alone shows that he is influenced by well-known stereotypes about the representation of marginalized groups. Women belonging to these groups are usually associated with nature and considered more potent or more sexually accessible than the "civilized" groups. The same stereotype has held true for African-American women throughout history. The Gypsy woman is an icon of attractive and subversive sexuality and fertility, often represented as an insinuating flower girl. Kogalniceanu claims that Gypsy women are very accessible sexually[6] and even hyper-sexual.[7] And indeed the stereotype of the attractive Gypsy woman has had a glorious career both in Romanian literature and Romanian painting!

This paternalistic attitude leads Kogalniceanu into failing to see the causes and the solutions from within the community, although he intends to describe

Gypsy status in fairness. His solution is purely moralistic and assimilatory: "The Gypsy have vices, but if we succeed in uprooting them from their hearts, they will be extremely useful for Moldavia and Wallachia, mostly working as workers in the factories."[8]

Sympathy from a paternalistic perspective had been a peculiarity of Romanian mainstream intellectuals in general ever since *The Gypsiad*,[9] the mock-heroic epic by Ion Budai Deleanu (1763-1820), the first significant literary work in which Gypsies appear. Written with a lot of humor and benevolence, *The Gypsiad* actually reinforced the stereotype of cowardly Gypsies interested more in feeding their bellies than in the actual fight for Wallachia's independence and their own equality. And as Gypsies had not developed a written culture to respond, stereotypes were very likely to develop further.

In addition to these writings by Romanian intellectuals, the Romanian press often included articles on slavery in America and on the Abolitionist movement. Already in 1853, only one year after its publication in the USA, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in translation: *Coliba mosului Toma* translated by Teodor Codrescu. Mihail Kogalniceanu wrote a preface for this translation. Commenting on this publication, the Romanian press did not fail to establish a relationship between the American and Romanian circumstances. For example, *Gazeta de Moldavia* includes an article *"Sfada de la Unchiul Tom"* ("Argument Starting from Uncle Tom")[10] where the anonymous author talks about the polemical echo of Harriet Beecher Stowe's book in the United States and England and makes a reference to the slaves in the Romanian principalities. In another article published in the same periodical, the author (also anonymous) talks about the success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the Romanian principalities and he emphasizes "that the Moldo-Romanian reader will find an unfortunate similarity between the fate of the Blacks in America and those in our country."[11] The popularity of the book led, indeed, to the appearance of two almost simultaneous translations of the best-seller under two different titles. Shortly after Teodor Codrescu's *Coliba mosului Toma,* D. Pop published *Bordeiul unchiului Tom.* Both translations enjoyed great success among the Romanian readership. In the February 5th-6th, 1844, issue of the journal *Propasirea*, Mihail Kogalniceanu published an article entitled "Dezrobirea tiganilor" ("The Manumission of the Gypsies") wherein he takes pride in the abolitionist discussions from the Legislative Assemblies of Moldavia and Wallachia as compared to the legislative bodies of the USA and France, which still teemed with people who believed in "rightful" slavery.[12] Alecu Russo, another prominent intellectual and writer of the 19th century, argues, in an article published in *Steaua Dunarii* in 1855, against slavery.[13] It is interesting that his argumentation follows, without quoting, the argumentation of modern economics (Adam Smith). Slavery must be abolished because it is not economically beneficial. It is better to have a free worker who buys what he wants and contributes to the development of the market than to have a slave

owner who only provides for the slave's barest necessities.

Manumission was finally made possible by a combination of ideological and economic factors. On the one hand, in Romanian culture there was a sort of belated continuation of the Enlightenment axiom "that all humans are free and equal." The emerging of a Romantic *forma mentis* created a favorable public opinion for the enslaved people. Kogalniceanu himself acknowledged this influence of the ideological humanist tendencies of the time.[14] The attraction to the American abolitionist movement fit into this mindset. Because of these comparisons with outside models, in this case American slavery, the general Romanian public became more aware of the issue. Having slaves became embarrassing because Romanians were not in tune with the outside, civilized world – a 'catch-up-with' mentality that still lingers in Romanian culture today. On the other hand, the appearance of machines on the big estates where Gypsy slaves worked led to greater productivity in agriculture and to less need for a large labor force, a factor that also contributed to final manumission.

The manumission of the Gypsy slaves was a long process which finally ended with the manumission of the slaves of the private slave owners on December 1 0/22, 1855, in Moldavia, and on February 8/20, 1856, in Wallachia. Petre Mavrogheni and Mihail Kogalniceanu in Moldovia, and Barbu Stirbei in Wallachia were the authors of this law. Hundreds of slave owners in both Romanian Principalities refused the compensations proffered. One can only speculate about a possible influence of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in this case.

In any case, the manumission of the Gypsies gave Romanians a happy conscience that is very well expressed, in its nad've limitations, in the memorial text *Vasile Porojan* (1880) by Vasile Alecsandri. This text reflects the resistance of prejudice under the mask of egalitarian ideology. While Alecsandri, the boy of aristocratic descent, and Vasile Porojan, the Gypsy boy, can play together as children, they will separate as soon as socialization through education occurs. Alecsandri will go to college, but Vasile Porojan will remain at home and become, at best, a baker's apprentice.

Manumission was only the beginning of emancipation and the dawn of a new life for the Gypsies, because the 19th century manumissions were actually only acts of juridical emancipation. In an agricultural economy, as the Romanian principalities were at the time, the newly free citizens should have been given land. The *Rural Law* of 1864,[15] which contains provisions about the peasants being given the land they had previously worked for the boyars, does not even mention the manumitted Gypsies. Neither were there any coherent, well-organized social or cultural programs to integrate the new citizens. There were singular voices, such as the Romanian writer Gheorghe Sion, for instance, who talked about the necessity of offering vocational education to the manumitted Gypsies,[16] but nothing organized and coherent was

done and the Gypsies did not have an intelligentsia of their own to represent their perspective on Gypsy emancipation. Romania enters the modern age with this social group hovering on the margin of society, a relic of obsolete slave-master relationships. The origins of present-day economic marginalization of the Roma go back to this period. Prejudice was easily grafted onto the image of a group that was often pushed to crime by poverty and lack of opportunities. Marginalization, an open process, changed its boundaries. The slaves had an economic niche of their own, but no political or juridical representation; the manumitted slaves have a political and juridical personality but they are pushed to the periphery of the modern economic life.

Years later, in 1891, Kogalniceanu summarizes, in an *Address* to Charles I, king of Romania, the efforts of the Romanian society to manumit and integrate the Gypsies. One has to wonder if his nad've and/or blind enthusiasm that manumission would automatically lead to the acceptance of the Gypsies by Romanian society is confused or is mere flattery for Charles I,[17] or perhaps both. Nowadays one hundred and fifty years after manumission the Gypsy community still faces tremendous poverty, racial discrimination and stereotyping.

After their manumission the Gypsies were practically forgotten by the Romanian establishment. In the USA as well, in spite of all the efforts of both the African-American community and (mostly Northern) intellectuals, African-American problems were not solved with the abolition of slavery. As late as 1963, Martin Luther King said about African Americans: "One hundred years later the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later he is still languished in the corners of the American society and finds himself in exile in his own land."[18]

And still, even though both ethnic groups started their way toward emancipation around the same time and in somewhat similar ideological circumstances, and in spite of Martin Luther King's 1963 discontent about the few accomplishments made since then, one can claim that the situation of African Americans has improved much more up to today than has the situation of the Roma. Looking at the reasons for the African American lead, one can actually find some possible answers for the still miserable and sometimes even worsening Roma situation of today.

Unlike in Roma culture, in American culture one can find many African-American personalities who contributed to the formation of an intellectual, cultural, and literary African-American tradition. Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington are among the first to have become spokesmen for their people in the American society at large. Douglass depicted slavery as hell on earth, Washington called it a "school" that prepares the former slaves for their role in the post-war economic order. Washington was vig-

orously opposed by DuBois who also realized that the Black people's organized collective action needed an institutional structure in order to be effective. This conviction led him to became the main organizer and coordinator of the "National Association for the Advancement of Colored People." DuBois' perspective is of much greater sophistication and it metaphorically expresses the Black otherness by combining the gift of second sight with the pain of ambivalence.

The different approaches to slavery of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington, the intellectual arguments between DuBois and Washington, as well as the active efforts of American society (mostly in the North) to help former slaves overcome the consequence of their oppression, and the two Black charismatic personalities of the 20th century, Martin Luther King and Malcom X, do not have any counterpart in Romanian culture or history. If one compares several historical aspects of African-American development to that of the Romanian Gypsies, one realizes that a main difference between the two groups, both subjected to reification through slavery, is their intelligentsia. For a long period of time the African-American community has had many intellectuals who have contributed either to the passing on of a powerful oral tradition or to the formation of a written intellectual, cultural. and literary African-American tradition. As one has been able to observe in the African-American case, such a tradition has been necessary for the formation of group identity. And group identity has been a necessary foundation for political organization and activism. Nothing comparable exists in Roma history so far, since a written culture has not been part of the traditional Roma culture. Although Roma culture comprises a set of specific cultural patterns (language, music, dance, oral literature), it does not have the political and social history that would provide the strong cultural foundation necessary for the cultural identification of a group. It is only after December 1989 and the breakdown of the Communist system that one can really talk about an emerging Roma intelligentsia that is influential enough to valorize Roma culture through consistent efforts and to become spokespersons for the Roma.

At one point in time, however, such an effort did indeed almost come to fruition: a Roma elite that could have become quite influential politically and had the potential to produce powerful spokespersons did form long before the 1990s. During the period between the two World Wars a few Roma were interested in the appearance of journals and magazines and in organizing their minority within the democratic political framework then existent. In the 1930s two periodicals appeared, *Glasul romilor* (*The Voice of the Romanies*) and *Neamul Tiganilor* (*The Gypsy Nation*). Yet they were forced out of existence in the 1940s by specific historical circumstances. Also in 1933 some Gypsy militants (Gheorghe A.Lazarescu-Lazurica, Gheorghe Niculescu, and Calinic I. Popp Serboianu) organized the "General Association of Gypsies in Romania," which quickly split into two splinter organizations. One of these splinter groups, the "General

Union of the Romanian Gypsies" organized the first congress of Romanian Gypsies on October 8th, 1933, and elected Lazarescu-Lazurica as the "voivode of the Gypsies."[19] Aware that their plight extends way beyond the boundaries of Romania, the same group organized the first international meeting of the Gypsies, which took place in Bucharest in 1934. Another Gypsy militant, Aurel Manolescu-Dolj, organized a regional organization of the Gypsies in Oltenia supporting either one or the other of the Bucharest organizations. In spite of rivalry and dissension, the agenda of these organizations was pretty much the same. They were interested in creating educational opportunities for the Gypsies, welfare benefits, settling down the nomadic Gypsies, and improving the image of the Gypsies in the media. The leaders of these organizations also employed common strategies, offering to certain Romanian mainstream politicians the support of the Gypsy vote in exchange for affirmative action policies for the Gypsies. It is interesting that the Gypsy leaders of the 1930's combined very modern political stratagems with traditional elements, negotiating their "Gypsiness" in ways which they thought were acceptable and better understood by the non-Roma majority. The position of "voivode" is a romanticized version of Gypsy leadership as seen, understood and accepted by the non-Roma mainstream society. On the other hand, the members of the organization were also obliged to submit to the orders of the "voivode" very much like feudal vassals to their sovereign. Democratic practices in these organizations were very limited. The Roma internalized outside perspectives in order to be more visible, according to non-Roma expectations, but also in order to express their own agenda. The mixture of traditionalism and modernity in these hybrid strategies is a main feature of Roma identity.

Unfortunately, these efforts to make Roma visible on the Romanian political and cultural scene were terminated by the disastrous general development of Romanian politics in the 1940s. At a meeting of the State Council, on February 7th, 1941, Ion Antonescu spoke, for the first time, about the Gypsy problem. In the xenophobic and anti-Semitic atmosphere of the time, on April 6th, 1941, Marshall Ion Antonescu, then leader of Romania, noticed Gypsies robbing houses in Bucharest during a curfew, while American aviation was bombing Bucharest. He ordered that all the Gypsies be driven out of Bucharest. Then the idea came to deport the nomadic Gypsies to Transdniestria, a Romanian-occupied territory of the USSR east of the river Dniester, that was turned into a "dumping ground" for the Romanian "aliens"—Gypsies and Jews. Between 1941-1942, according to some historians, a total of 25,000 Gypsies were deported.[20]

There is very little material about this painful episode in the modern history of Romania except for some references in the documents of Ion Antonescu's trial or the novel *Satra* (*The Gypsy Camp*) (1969) by Zaharia Stancu, a novel inspired by real events. In a recent collection of Gypsy oral histories, one can find some discreet references to this period: "… when I

was a maiden, the great war started. The Germans came to us, to our country. Then came an order from the king and they took us Gypsies far away, to another country, in Russia, near the river Bug."[21] It is interesting that in this self-contained and extremely reserved testimony, which was preserved as part of a family history, the author fatalistically considers the deportation of the Gypsies as somehow inevitable or to be expected in a long history of discrimination and marginalization.

In 1944, as the Red Army was approaching Transdniestria, the Gypsies were set free. Until today, no moral or material compensations have ever been offered to the survivors of the Transdniestria camps or to their heirs.

After 1948 the Roma do not reappear in public discourse until after 22 December 1989 (the fall of the Communist regime). As the Romanian Communist Party encouraged minorities and the underprivileged to join its ranks, some Roma became policemen or even minor Party activists but reference to their ethnicity was never made and the price for their integration into the Communist power structures was their acculturation. The Communist regime installed after World War II tried to forcibly integrate this ethnic minority. There was a first wave of sedenterization in 1957 and then a second one in 1962, following similar programs in other Communist countries. The industrialization process and the collective farms offered jobs to many Roma. Some of them were also given the modest facilities of an apartment. As this kind of "integration" was executed under pressure, it often happened that the nomadic Roma did not appreciate their sedentary dwellings and often destroyed them, which increased the animosities between the majority and the Roma minority. The authorities of the totalitarian Communist regime never consulted the Roma about the way in which they saw their own integration. In 1960 and in 1978, by decrees of the State Council,[22] the gold of the Roma (their traditional way to deposit valuables) was confiscated. For the Roma it was a large economic and cultural trauma. Free medical care, modest but free housing, guaranteed (but also mandatory) employment and general education improved the situation of the Roma but with a price that some of them did not want to pay: their acculturation. The consequence: "the Roma themselves have cultivated their marginal status by preserving their distinctive identity and resisting recurrent attempts at assimilation and integration by dominant groups in the area."[23]

Interestingly, Communist Romania had its own connection to African American issues. In the 1950's and 1960's the situation of African-Americans was used by the Romanian establishment to read America as a place of oppression and exploitation, thus especially highlighting the nature of oppression-free communism. Yet the racial problems of Communist Romania with its own Gypsy community seemed not to exist. Following a long tradition of bleaching Romanian history, the Communist regime turned a blind eye to the racial problems under the pretext that in

Communist Romania discrimination based on ethnicity or race did not exist.

The fall of Communism gave the Roma the possibility of having a public voice of their own, but it worsened their economic situation. Again in Romania's history, marginalization, an open structure, changed its boundaries. The transition painfully affected the less educated and those who did not have professional skills to survive in the modern world. Most of the Roma are not formally educated, still cling to traditional ways of life, and are at the bottom of the underprivileged classes. In the post-Communist times after 1990, freedom has sometimes become anarchy or wild voluntarism. The decrease of the prestige of public authority has sometimes led to violent outbursts against the Roma.[24]

Education is an extremely important factor in the process of changing Roma from within. Although according to Romanian legislation, the right to education is guaranteed for every citizen, practically speaking, education is often impossible for poor people, and particularly for Romany children. After 1992 the Romanian government tried to do something about this problem by implementing specific positive discrimination measures. Special places for Romany candidates were offered at the School of Law, the schools for police officers, and the Faculty of Social Welfare Assistance at Babes-Bolyai University. At the University of Bucharest a special department for the study Romany language and literature was founded. At the level of each county there is a school superintendent responsible for Roma education. In 2002 an experimental affirmative action policy was implemented in Bucharest. 100 Roma students were admitted to the best high schools in Bucharest, despite having examination grades lower than those of the mainstream candidates. In spite of these efforts, and because of the extreme poverty of many Roma, the prejudice against them, and the negative tradition of marginalization, many Roma children drop out of school.

The plight of the Roma obliged Brussels to insist that the improvement of the Roma situation be a requirement for Romania's EU membership in 2007. [25] Yet I think it is ridiculous to believe that a marginalization which, in spite of its particular variations, has persisted for centuries, can be eradicated in a mere several years. Actually, Brussels is concerned about massive westward migration of the underprivileged Roma. Germany, for instance, is a favorite target of this movement, because of Germany's high standard of living. In 1992 the German authorities signed an arrangement of repatriation for rejected asylum seekers (most of them Roma) and also offered financial resources in order to create job opportunities for the Roma in Romania, which is, I think, the right solution.

Stereotyping and verbal abuse are important elements in Roma discrimination and marginalization. In order to eliminate these problems, awareness about the tendency of the majority to make negative global statements about the Roma must increase. Exactly as

it is risky to make statements about the African-American identity and culture as a uniform whole, it is dangerous to forget that "Romany culture is, like any other culture, diverse, hybrid, and complex."[26] Interestingly enough, this monolithic, lacking-nuances-and-distinctions perspective on Gypsy culture is itself hybridized by an abstract love for Romani music and dance. The same is true of African-Americans. In both countries slavery was not a monolithic institution and slaves had a different rank and position according to the work they did. In both countries musicians were ranked higher. But love for Romani or African-American music does not mean absence of racist ideology. It is rather an abstract love that overlooks the loathed ethnicity of the performer.

Yet, even with all the problems that Romanian society is facing on its post-1989 way to true democracy and better economic circumstances, historically it is the first time that Roma have had a chance to be integrated into Romanian society in respectful and fair ways without being forced to give up their own cultural identity. But to accomplish this the Romanian society faces a very complex and challenging task. The non-Roma majority has to learn the multi-cultural and inter-cultural nature of modern democracy, and the Roma need modernization from within their community in order to meet the challenges of the 21st century for the benefit of their community. It is interesting that the emerging Roma intelligentsia and the Romanian government try to combine stratagems inspired from the African –American experience to overcome racial labeling and teach the Roma up-to-date professional skills. For instance, in August 2002, several Roma NGO's and the Ministry of Culture organized a Roma Summer School in the town of Saturn, on the shore of the Black Sea. The motto of the School is significant: "Be Black and you will be free!" Participants were taught to use computers, to valorize their Roma cultural heritage, and to respond to racial stereotypes by taking pride in their Blackness.[27]

In the process of modernization both the so-called "sold-outs" and those of mixed race must also be given a voice. It is particularly since 1990, when international organizations began paying more attention to Roma issues, that some voices in the Roma community have argued against mixed-race persons from the point of view of their ability to express the authenticity of the Roma point of view. The fact that for the moment, at least, many of the Gypsy Roma and militants are mixed bloods shows the necessity of urgent rethinking of certain traditional attitudes on the way towards modernization and towards economic prosperity.

The position of women in Roma society also poses a challenge to Roma modernization. Roma women marry very young. Traditionally, Gypsy girls are still "sold" by their parents to the suitor who gives most. After marriage they are expected to give birth to many children and keep a low profile in public life, all their energies should be dedicated to their homes and families. Female Roma intellectuals, such as Delia Grigore, are very rare, and female writers, such as

Luminita Mihai Cioaba, are exceptional. Much more common is to see, on Romanian streets, the Roma woman following her man and her elder son (if a teenager) at a distance, usually bearing in her arm a baby and holding a toddler by the hand. Any comparison with the feminist movement or with the sophistication of Black feminist criticism is still a long way off.

But again, in spite of these problems, which the Roma have to cope with themselves, the 1990s are historically also the first time when one can see changes—where a Roma intelligentsia is emerging, when Roma become their own spokespeople for their own concerns. For the first time in Romania's history the Roma people have their own representatives in the parliament. The Roma have also been included into the restitution policies of the post-Communist Romanian administrations. The Romanian government (1990-1992) returned the gold confiscated from the Roma in 1960 and 1978, according to the official records of the time.[28] Also a Roma civil rights movement has been developing in Romania since the inception of democracy in 1990. This movement includes the appearance of Roma political organizations, Roma NGO's, and efforts to cultivate the Roma language and culture to prevent further acculturation—all things necessary to help create and further a sense of communal self-esteem. Politically, a great problem for the Gypsy community in Romania is its lack of cohesion beyond the extended family. Even when such culturally uniting efforts did happen (for instance, in the 1930s, as discussed above), such prestigious moments in the history of the Romanian Roma are not widely known, even among the Roma themselves. We are still very far from any of the prestigious organizations of the Black community in the USA. The coronations of Emperor Iulian and King Cioaba (two elders of rival Gypsy clans) after 1990 point to a felt need to replace the more impersonal and less spectacular modern forms of political representation with supposedly more charismatic royalties, traditional forms of authority.[29] Traditionalism and modernity continue to coexist in Romani politics and public representation. Present-day realities are not very different from Romani politics and public representation between the two World Wars. On the other hand, several Roma organizations and parties are simply power-bases for single prominent individuals.[30]

While one must wait to see the effects of the affirmative action strategies of the Romanian government, one also has to observe, at the same time, how during the 1990s stereotypes have often openly ruled public opinion and discussion. The study of Romanian newspapers alone is relevant in this respect and serves as one example of the imperative necessity to discuss race and racism in Romanian scholarship. By their use of language, Romanian mass media contributes tremendously to the aggressive stereotyping of the Roma, which proves the dire need for a politically correct language. It often happens, for example, that within a group of criminals, journalists distinguish Roma specifically. Most Romanian journalists are not

acquainted with politically correct language, and freedom of speech is often confused with freedom for verbal abuse. If a public personality is criticized he or she is sometimes called a "Gypsy." The deeper problem is that such labeling relies on a linguistic practice embedded in Romanian vocabulary that gives negative meanings to the word "Gypsy" and to its derivatives.

Another big problem is that Romanian society lacks any serious discussion of race and of racism at the complex and sophisticated theorizing level that exists in African-American situation. In American culture there is strong awareness that race is "a fundamental organizing principle of social relationships,"[31] that "racial meanings pervade US society, extending from the shaping of individual racial identities to the structuring of collective political action on the terrain of the state."[32] In Romanian culture "race" has been used mostly in the anti-Semitic discourse, in the syntagm "the Jewish race," whereas Blackness, although it is a factor of behavioral regulation, was practically never theorized upon because of its obvious visibility. In Romanian history it was national identity that was the most important legitimating principle, which is to be explained by a long history wherein Romanian ethnicity and national identity were prohibited from being expressed in public life. Consequently Gypsiness was not discussed in racial terms, but in ethnic terms. Reading contemporary Roma situation through African-American lenses points to the importance of a consolidated democratic environment in dealing with racial issues.

A recent development among the Roma elite is the theoretical discussion of Romani nationalism[33]. A recent seminar in Jadwisin, Poland became an excellent opportunity to consider Romani empowerment by creating a Romani nationalist ideology. The demand for political recognition led to various possible solutions: a Romani nation in diaspora, a Romani transnationality, or a Romani non-territorial European minority.[34] This is a typically European development, Europe being the continent whose history seems to be forever scarred by various nationalisms. Whether this evolution is in the interest of all Romani people or only in the interest of a more and more active elite eager to get as much power as possible is a very complex and important question. Debates have pointed to the danger of an increasing disparity between the Romani elite and the Romani people. However, the question remains open. The consolidation of the European Union to the detriment of national sovereignties may lead to and facilitate the growing awareness of a Roma nation all over Europe.

As for the comparison with the African-Americans, one must notice that a nationalist African-American movement has been feeble in the USA, a country of immigrants where civic citizenship has prevailed over ethnic citizenship. Racial formations have been much more powerful, but the attraction of nationalism is not completely absent. The recent debate over Ebonics,[35] as well as the Oakland School Board

pronouncement, is actually about the African-American wish for more influence and social control through language. Issues about language use and language policies are always issues of power, and language is a key element in any nationalist configuration. Therefore, comparisons will always prove useful because real understanding can never be from egotistic self-admiration but only from reciprocal knowledge.

Like the African-Americans, the Roma were reified through slavery. While during the Middle Ages the Gypsy slaves did have an economic niche of their own, nonetheless they were politically and socially marginalized. After manumission they gained a social status typical to a modern society, but they continued to be politically marginalized and their economic niche became marginal. Their own efforts at modernization in the 1930's were brutally interrupted by the succession of dictatorships from the 1930's until the collapse of Communism in 1989. After 1990 their economic and social exclusion worsened, but their political and cultural representation improved.[36] The dynamics of marginality have changed, but until now breakthroughs have been too slow for the Roma. The "vicious circle that starts with inadequate education, continues with inferior work opportunities and ends in crime and other social ills"[37] must be broken primarily with the help of the Roma themselves and through the Roma themselves. The example of the African-Americans who have been able to "produce" their own elite is relevant, in this respect. Otherwise, marginalization will breed marginalization and the pattern will continue into following generations, which could endanger the development of the whole country towards a market economy and EU accession. If neglected, the Roma "could become a permanent underclass,"[38] a great challenge for the whole Romanian society.

The understanding of the historical and changing characteristics of Roma marginalization as an open process in which this minority has negotiated its participation in the public sphere in order to preserve its private space from assimilatory tendencies is a must for the majority. More scholarship needs to be done in this respect, with the required nuances and avoiding any positive or negative monolithic perspective on the Roma community. The Roma themselves have to develop their group identity beyond professional or clan affiliations. This can be done through acquaintance with their history, culture, and cultivation of their language. The growth of an elite is a prerequisite in this long process. This elite will modernize the Roma from within, preserving their identity or negotiating a new identity with both traditional and modern components. >From among this elite, politicians, spokespersons for the group, will emerge. We are only at the beginning of this process, but any failure or neglect may result in enormous negative costs both for the minority and the majority.

Notes:

1 All translations from Romanian are by Mihaela Mudure.

2 I have used the term *Gypsy* in the title of my article because my work concentrates on the stereotypes about the Gypsies and on the Gypsies' adversarial relations within Romanian society. *Gypsy* is a rhetorical and stylistic device to stress the issues at stake. At present there are three competing names for this ethnic group in Romania: *Gypsy*, *Roma* and *Rroma*. The first is the name given to this population by the majority; *Roma* is their autonym and also the scholarly and neutral term, whereas *Rroma* is a very recently coined term meant to spare certain Romanian sensibilities because of the closeness of the words *Roma* and *Romanian*. The Roma themselves are divided over their autonym. There are Romani people who want to be called *Gypsy* and who take pride in this traditional name. The relationship between the terms *Gypsy* and *Roma* is very similar to the relationship between the terms *Chicano* and *Mexican-American*.

3 Schöpflin, 223.

4 Schöpflin, 226.

5 Kogalniceanu talks about "an interest which, unfortunately, will only be transitory, for that is how Europeans are! They found philanthropic societies for the abolishment of slavery in America, whereas on their own continent, in Europe, there are four million Gypsies who are slaves and two hundred thousand more who are swamped in the darkness of ignorance and barbarism! And nobody does anything to civilize an entire people!" (Kogalniceanu, 1837, IV).

6 Kogalniceanu, 1837, 1.

7 Ibidem, 11.

8 Ibidem, 25.

9 *The Gypsiad* was published posthumously between 1875-77.

10 Gazeta de Moldavia, no. XXV, 1853, pp. 101-103. (Bibliografia analitica a periodicelor românesti, vol. II. 1851-1858. Partea a III-a, p. 1154).

11 *Gazeta de Moldavia*, no. XXV, 1853, p. 169. (Bibliografia analitica a periodicelor românesti, vol. II. 1851-1858. Partea a III-a, p. 1155.

12 Achim, 86-87.

13 Ibidem.

14 "That is why according to the spirit of the century and the laws of humanity, several old and young boyars decided to do away with their country's shameful slavery." (Kogalniceanu, 1891, 14-15).

15 Inaccurately considered by Crowe (57) as the full emancipation of the Gypsy slaves, which would have occurred "three years after Romania became an independent state" (Crowe, 57). Or Romania became independent in 1877, which is 13 years after the *Rural Law* of 1864.

16 Achim 86-87.

17 "The emancipatory reform soon had its salutary effects: besides the Layesh Gypsies who still live partly in camps, and besides the Ursaries who still practice their trade taming beasts, but also till the land, almost all the other groups of Gypsies have blended into the mass of the nation. One can only differentiate them by their dark Asian face and by the vivacity of their imagination; otherwise we find them in all the classes of our society." (Kogalniceanu, 1891, 17-18)

18 Martin Luther King, 2483.

19 Nastasa and Varga, 16.

20 Kenrick, 169; Achim, 142.

21 Copoiu, 79.

22 Decrees 210/1960 and 244/1978.

23 Barany, 323.

24 The attacks upon Roma in several post-Communist countries are a regrettable manifestation of this process. Barany refers to such an incident in Hadareni, Romania (332) considering it a case of Gypsy-bashing. I think that this is a transition phenomenon due to the inability of authorities to function in a democratic environment and under the rule of law. The general pattern of such regrettable incidents is pretty much like this:

some Roma individuals have committed a crime. The authorities (the police, the D.A.) do not intervene either because they are inefficient, or because they are corrupt and have been bribed. Desperate because of the offences, the villagers decide to do justice with their own hands by attacking the Roma neighborhood of the village. Culprits and innocents are then equally victimized. The solution is to apply the rule of law and punish all the criminals for their deeds (including those who attacked the Roma neighborhoods, irrespective of their ethnicity). We disagree with the very widespread tendency in international sources or Western scholarship to call these incidents "pogroms" (See Cahn, p. 66 and Kenrick, the entries on Central and Eastern European countries). There are big differences in the causes and manifestations of Roma and Jewish discrimination. Pogroms had mostly religious causes, they occurred particularly during the great Christian festivals (Christmas or Easter), and were not spurred by the criminal behavior of Jews and the passivity of the authorities in not bringing the culprits in court.

25 Purvis et. al. talk about the necessity of "pressure from Brussels" (70). Cahn also considers that pressure is necessary and gives the example of South Africa: "under an international sanctions regime, apartheid really did collapse" (68). I consider Cahn's comparison to be purely rhetorical. It does not help solve the Roma problem. Eastern or Central European democracies are not apartheid regimes.

26 Beissinger, 49.

27 Tripon, 6.

28 However, there are Rroma voices who claim that not all of the gold was returned because part of it had not been recorded.

29 Barany also talks about these Roma leaders (kings or emperors) whose authority is actually limited to their clan and who are better at offering a media show than solving the very complex problems of the Roma communities (334).

30 See Barany, 334-335.

31 Omi and Winant, 66.

32 Ibidem.

33 Barany also mentions this tendency (331- 332). He links the survival of the nationalist discourse during the post-Communist transition with a counter-evolution, the development of Romani nationalism.

34 Project on Ethnic Relations, 4.

35 Ebonics is the African name for Black English. Efforts are being made to turn Ebonics into a prestige language as English and to have it taught in schools.

36 See also Barany, 328.

37 Barany, 330.

38 Burke, 11.

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