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NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US? ROMA PARTICIPATION IN POLICY MAKING AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

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CHALLENGING DISCRIMINATION PROMOTING EQUALITY

Romani Studies and emerging Romani scholarship

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The Romani people have been an object of academic inquiry for centuries. The first scholars who applied scientific methods to studying the Roma can be traced back to the 17th century;¹ the Gypsy Lore Society was founded in 1888 and remains in operation to this day. As an object of academic inquiry, Romani people have seldom taken an active role in shaping academic knowledge about themselves. Numerous historical reasons explain why Roma have not ascended to ranks of academic relevance and have consequently been excluded from producing knowledge regarding themselves. Today, however, this situation is gradually shifting: the increasing numbers of Romani university students and Romani scholars pursuing academic careers is bound to provoke a deeper reflection regarding Romani Studies, challenging the existing relationship between the researcher and the researched in relation to Roma. This debate regarding the emancipation of Romani scholarship and its implications for Romani Studies as an academic discipline comes late – among other minority groups such as Indigenous communities, Aboriginal communities or Afro-Americans such discussions have already been taking place for some time. Post-colonial studies have also been influential in challenging dominant academic discourses, providing the “subaltern”² with their own voice. What do emerging scholars of Romani background mean for the development of Romani Studies?

Shifting discourses on Roma

Throughout the past two decades there has been an outstanding shift in policy approach towards the Roma issue,³

from a more general, human and minority-rights oriented approach, emphasising equality and non-discrimination, through explicitly targeting Roma and the more specific and targeted efforts of the current National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) to support the social inclusion of Roma (although within the broader European Union (EU) policy framework supporting the social inclusion of disadvantage people, including Roma). This shift can be seen through analysing the policy approaches of international and inter-governmental organisations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe (CoE), and especially the EU towards Roma.⁴ Both contextual factors, and also Romani activism and lobbying, have contributed to this change. For the former, the post-transition period, EU enlargement and intra-Europe migrations were decisive. For the latter, lobbying by various groups of Roma civil society and Roma representatives, supported by non-Roma civil society and scholars, proved effective. Academia has also contributed to this process: research and data have provided much-needed evidence and supported Romani claims for a more focused Roma policy addressing key issues or areas. This shift in approach has been concomitant with a discursive shift towards the Roma, especially in EU Roma policy formulation, favouring a clearly targeted approach to Roma (although not ethnically exclusive, i.e., “allowing for participation of other persons in similar situations regardless of their ethnicity”⁵). However, this targeted approach is not without its possible dangers. Despite the calls of the European Commission to increasingly mainstream Roma issues in the framework of broader social inclusion policies, the Roma are commonly

1 Andrew Ryder, *Co-producing Knowledge with below the radar communities: Factionalism, Commodification or Partnership? A Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Case Study* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Third Sector Research Centre, January 2015), 4.

2 The term “subaltern” was coined by Antonio Gramsci. The concept has been developed further in the works of Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among others.

3 Peter Vermeersch, “The European Union and the Roma: An Analysis of recent institutional and policy developments”, *European Yearbook of Minority Issues* 9 (2013), 341-358; Márton Rövid, “Cosmopolitanism and Exclusion. On the limits transnational democracy in the light of the case of Roma”, Dissertation (Central European University, Budapest, Hungary. Doctoral School of Political Science, Public Policy, and International Relations, 2011).

4 Balint-Abel Beremenyi and Anna Mirga, *Lost in action? Evaluating the 6 years of the Comprehensive Plan for the Gitano Population in Catalonia* (Barcelona: FAGIC-EMIGRA, October 2012).

5 Commission Staff Working Document: Non-discrimination and equal opportunities 2008 COM (2008) 420, 5. This principle was later on consecrated in the “10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion” document, available at: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Documents/2011_10_Common_Basic_Principles_Roma_Inclusion.pdf.

seen as a group *sui generis*⁶ which enjoys special benefits (often causing tension between local Roma and non-Roma communities and further fuelling anti-Roma sentiments). The very existence of special policies on Roma (NRIS) leads to *othering* of Roma, emphasising the perceived ethnic and citizen-status difference between Roma and non-Roma. The Roma ethnic identity acquired a political dimension, but a stigmatising one - associating ethnicity with marginalisation, poverty and discrimination. In consequence, Roma are treated, and often inexplicitly defined, as a socio-economically deprived group, identified by its vulnerability, social exclusion and marginalisation rather than as a viable and complex ethnic group. In extreme situations, such a discourse leads to the “securitization of the Roma issue” in state policies, evidence of which can be found in different European countries (Italy, France, Hungary, Slovakia).⁷

The role of academia

No doubt, academia has its say in shaping dominant discourses and policy approaches on Roma; after all, scholars and researchers are the ones who produce and build up the body of knowledge on Roma. This authoritative scholarship and expertise influences policy makers and society as a whole. Through specific research questions scholars frame the reality by defining groups, acknowledging social phenomena and problematising issues that are the object of academic inquiry.

But the way in which research frames social phenomena or specific groups carries with it an interpretation and implies meaning regarding what, in fact, is considered a problem.

As Mihai Surdu's research suggests, for example, academic and expert writing on Roma has greatly contributed to shaping the negative image of Roma, concentrating on deficiencies, limitations and a panorama of socio-economic problems. Surdu, through in-depth analysis of the textual and visual content of the most influential (most cited) sources of knowledge on Roma (such as reports of the World Bank), accurately demonstrates how Roma have been classified through academic research and consequently that “Roma identity tends to be recognized by the strength of the stereotypes related to it”⁸.

Other studies also reflect Surdu's hypothesis to some extent. The recently published study on Roma housing in Spain,⁹ for example, demonstrates how policy interventions targeting Roma, seconded by “diagnostic studies”, have inexplicitly framed the Roma population as deficient, gregarious subjects in need of protection. The language used in policy and academic inquiries results in a stereotypical portrayal of Roma; and “although the use of ethnonym is avoided, and a careful use is made of these expression that could be considered ‘racist’ or ‘discriminating’, the diagnose (*sic*) of the housing condition of the *gitano* in the selected territories is based on the

6 Some analysts have advocated mainstreaming approaches and, called for “de-ethnicising” Roma issues (for example: Martin Kovats, “*The Politics of Roma Identity: between Nationalism and Destitution*”, *Open Democracy*, 29 July 2003, available at: https://www.opendemocracy.net/people-migrationeurope/article_1399.jsp), and reducing potential tensions caused by somehow “privileging Roma poor” over other disadvantaged categories of mainstream society (see for example: Andrey Ivanov, Jaroslav Kling and Justin Kagin, “Integrated household surveys among Roma populations: one possible approach to sampling used in the UNDP World Bank-EC Regional Roma Survey 2011”, *Roma Inclusion Working Papers* (Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme, 2012). The colour-blind approach, however, ignores Roma ethnicity and its complex nature and leads to over-simplifications and/or generalisations. In both interpretations the very fact that Roma disadvantage has been caused by their ethnic belonging (the relevance of anti-Roma feelings and racial prejudice) was omitted or ignored. This approach has struggled with additional challenges when it comes to quantifying how Roma have benefited from available funding for Roma policy implementation or how many Roma were among the beneficiaries. On the other hand, establishing inclusive policies – ones which accommodate targeted/tailored needs and their corresponding policy responses into the mainstream policy frameworks – can embrace both, seemingly exclusive, approaches.

7 See for example: Huub van Baar, “The Securitization of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in Europe: Context, Critique, Challenges” (Keynote speech delivered at New Scotland Yard, London, UK, 3 December 2014), in the context of the international seminar *Crime and Punishment: Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in the Criminal Justice System*, organised by IDRICS, Bucks New University and The University of Warwick. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/10862181/The_Securitization_of_Gypsies_Travellers_and_Roma_in_Europe_Context_Critique_Challenges_2014_; Horia Bărbulescu, “Constructing the Roma people as a societal threat: the Roma expulsions from France”, *European Journal of Science and Theology* 8.1 (2012): 279-289; Sergio Carrera, “The Framing of the Roma as Abnormal EU Citizens: assessing European politics on Roma evictions and expulsions in France” in *The Reconceptualization of European Union Citizenship*, ed. Elspeth Guild, Cristina Gortázar Rotaecche and Dora Kostakopoulou, (Boston: Brill Nijhoff, 2014), 33-63.

8 Mihai Surdu, “Who defines Roma?”, *Open Society Foundations Voices blog*, May 8 2014, available at: <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/who-defines-roma>.

9 Juan de Dios López López, Stefano Piemontese, Guiseppe Beluschi, Marc Ballester i Torrents, *WE: Wor(l)ds which exclude. National Report: Spain* (Seville: Taller de Antropología y Ciencias Sociales Aplicadas, 2014), available at: http://weproject.unice.fr/stream/2014-11/spain_nationalreportwe.pdf.

understanding of poverty as a specific ‘culture’.”¹⁰ The authors rightfully conclude that “the definition of the ‘problem’ is part of the problem”.¹¹

Providing evidence of Roma marginalisation or the appalling social conditions in which Roma live in many instances has been considered necessary to raise awareness among governments and build a sense of urgency to mobilise the authorities to act. This is a justification for many efforts in this area whether undertaken by international organisations, scholars from academia or Roma and non-Roma civil society. Unintentionally, however, producing and reproducing such images of a socially-deprived ethnic group rarely works towards diminishing prejudice or raising acceptance at the receiving end – that is, the majority society.

On the other hand, academic research tends to claim authority over other sources of knowledge or other fields of knowledge-production. Rigney writes: “The notion that science is ‘authoritative’, ‘neutral’ and ‘universal’ privileges science. It gives science the status of a standard measure against which all other ‘realities’ may be evaluated and judged to be either ‘rational’ or otherwise.”¹² Indeed, Ryder also writes about similar dilemmas with regard to Romani Studies, namely the fissure between scientism and critical research, when he recalls the controversial statement of the Scientific Committee of the European Academic Network on Romani Studies (EANRS) that “the academic engagement with Roma culture belongs within universities”.¹³ Ryder rightfully dismantles the notion of value-free and detached research. After all, “research is not an innocent distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions”.¹⁴ Academia is also inherently hierarchical (from within and also towards ‘the outside world’) and imposes the superiority of academic over other knowledge (local, non-academic etc.). The scholarly world may too reproduce

inequalities, and is a space of intricate power-relationships, especially during research. Recognising and understanding these power relations and existing hierarchies within academia in general and Romani Studies specifically may help open up the discipline to critical reflection regarding epistemologies, methodologies and scientific approaches.

Romani Studies and its limitations

From the point of view of an early career scholar, it seems that Romani Studies is somewhat limited – geographically, methodically, and paradigmatically – and lacking the necessary plurality of approaches, which is so enriching for the development of scientific disciplines. If we take as an example the Annual Gypsy Lore Society Conferences, arguably the most important annual academic event in Romani Studies, the picture becomes clear. The most recent Gypsy Lore Society Annual Conference in 2014 took place in Bratislava.¹⁵ Out of 103 papers presented during the conference, only five reached in their scope beyond continental Europe (papers on Roma in the US, Brazil, Brazil/Canada, Algeria/Iraq and Egypt). The vast majority of papers oscillated around classical themes of anthropology (rituals, identities, religions, music and other cultural expressions), linguistics or historical research. The other portion dealt with state policy on Roma, or within the area where public policy and academic research intersect. Eight papers were comparative (or quasi-comparative, including data gathered in more than 1 country). Five papers dealt with questions of gender-relations or women specifically. And out of all 100 plus speakers, fewer than 10 were of Romani background.

Despite the increasing popularity of Romani-related scientific inquiries,¹⁶ from this example, but also by analysing the vast body of literature on Roma, it seems that researchers tend to ask more of the same questions, typically related

10 *Ibid.*, 86.

11 *Palabras que excluyen. Recomendaciones. Guía práctica para mejorar la imagen de personas gitanas en los textos administrativos* (2014), available at: <http://we-project.unice.fr/publication/recommendations-palabras-que-excluyen-spain>.

12 Lester-Irabinna Rigney, “A first perspective of Indigenous Australian participation in science: Framing Indigenous research towards Indigenous Australian intellectual sovereignty”, *Kaurna Higher Education Journal* 7 (2001): 1-13, 3.

13 Ryder, *Co-producing Knowledge with below the radar communities*, 19.

14 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (London: Zed books, 1999), 5.

15 Annual Meeting of the Gypsy Lore Society and Conference on Romani Studies 2014, Bratislava, Slovakia, *About the Conference*, available at: <https://sites.google.com/site/glsproceedings/home/about-the-conference>.

16 Among others, Andrew Ryder speaks of this “new popularity” of Romani Studies. Andrew Ryder, *Co-producing Knowledge with below the radar communities*, 5.

to Roma marginality, integration and inclusion strategies, discrimination, Romani dialects and cultures, or the ever-popular topic of defining who the Roma really are. Seldom do research questions on Roma focus on different aspects: why not conduct research on the historical contributions of Roma to local or national cultures?¹⁷ Or look into the participation of Roma in national independence struggles in their corresponding countries? After all, the Roma have also been part of the national histories of the different societies among which they live. And seldom do research questions on Roma relate to more general debates on inequalities, multiculturalism, the practice of citizen rights or the state of our democracies, linking Roma with other sectors of society.

Romani Studies, although represented by a variety of academic branches, is dominated by a few epistemologies and academic voices, has a limited nucleus of academic excellence, and lacks a comparative perspectives that would include different geographic areas, inter-ethnic contexts and relations, or which would tackle new avenues of research such as Roma and post-colonialism, critical race theory, feminism, intersectionality, inter-continental comparative perspectives etc. New scholarship on Roma timidly enters these new avenues but still remains marginal to the mainstream currents within Romani Studies.

Furthermore, some scholars are wary of scientism¹⁸ or indeed of scientific racism¹⁹ within Romani Studies, which increasingly signals the need for a critical revision of the body of knowledge produced on Roma or the very foundations on which Romani Studies as a discipline has been based. Such critical engagement with the legacy of Romani Studies can be provided, although not exclusively, by Romani scholars. From a historical perspective, it may be asserted that Romani Studies has been, for a variety of reasons, dominated by non-Romani voices. Not that Romani scholars may claim greater legitimacy over the knowledge produced on Roma. Nonetheless, Romani Studies lacks a critical perspective from within this community, which can

be provided by scholars of a Romani background. Can we imagine Women Studies dominated by men? Or Jewish Studies without Jewish contributors?

Today, with the increasing number of Romani scholars, there is a growing challenge to accommodate them within the existing panorama of Romani Studies. Nonetheless, scholars with a Romani background still remain a minority. The marginality of scholars of Romani background has been made evident most clearly with the establishment of EANRS. In the elections to the Scientific Committee of EANRS no Romani scholar has been elected, resulting in the resignation of Professor Thomas Acton (since then, two other Scientific Committee members have also resigned).²⁰

At the same time, Romani scholars have also been marginal in shaping dominant narratives on Roma in key nuclei of academic excellence with regards to Romani Studies. For example, the Central European University (CEU), which brings together a large number of Romani students thanks to its programmes (Roma Access Programmes and scholarships offered to Romani students), has been running a summer school on Roma since 1998. In these summer schools, distinguished scholars have been repeatedly invited as lecturers – among them only a handful of scholars of Romani background. The low number of students of Romani origin participating in these summer schools has also been a feature of these events. It wasn't until the 2015 CEU Summer School²¹ that the approach shifted to include a majority Romani faculty (9 out of 11 lecturers are Roma) under the leadership of a Romani course director, and with half of the students of Romani origin.

Emerging Romani scholars – “the outsiders within”²²

Heated debates on the status of Romani scholars, or more broadly, the relationship between ethnicity and academic

17 In the Gypsy Lore Society Annual Conference 2014, only one paper concentrated on the aspect of Roma participation in national histories, namely the paper of Eugenia Ivanova and Velco Krastev “The Gypsies in the Bulgarian Army during World War II (1939-1945)”.

18 Ryder, *Co-producing Knowledge with below the radar communities*.

19 Thomas Acton, “Scientific Racism, Popular Racism, and the Discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society” (Lecture during Gypsy Lore Society Annual Conference 2013 in Glasgow, Scotland: forthcoming).

20 Ryder, *Co-producing knowledge with below the radar communities*.

21 2015 CEU Summer School “Performing Romani Identities: Strategy and Critique”, available at: <http://summer.ceu.hu/romani-2015>.

22 “The outsider within” is a concept developed by Patricia Hill Collins.

performance, have recently been taking place. In this debate about the status of Romani scholars, too often ethnic background has been juxtaposed with academic merit, as if these too were mutually exclusive. Rather, these should be treated as complementary qualities, which are relevant to the researcher but not necessarily to the quality of the academic performance. The status of a Roma and a non-Roma scholar, especially when conducting research, is clearly different but shouldn't be put on a scale of 'more/less' or 'better/worse'. In this regard, ethnicity should be regarded as an added value in research, but should not overshadow the quality of academic production.

Debates regarding the importance which ethnic background bears on researchers have been taking place for some time among other minority or 'subaltern' groups across the world (for example, in the US, Canada, Australia and numerous countries of Latin America). The ascendancy of Indigenous, Aboriginal or Afro-American individuals, to name a few, to ranks of academic distinction has provoked reflections regarding the relationship between the researcher and the researched and the importance of the voice 'from within'. Post-colonialist and feminist paradigms, among others, provide an adequate theoretical background for these reflections. Looking into the experiences of other minority groups and their participation in knowledge production may prove instructive for understanding the emerging Romani scholarship within Romani Studies and its importance for the discipline.

Indigenous scholarship emerged "as an alternative mode of engagement with knowledge to the dominant mode of Western research."²³ It sought to tell "the history of Western research through the eyes of the colonized."²⁴ In doing so, the researchers "must reflect indigenous, rather than the Western, ontologies and epistemologies."²⁵ The development of an Indigenous academic agenda aimed to challenge and critically reflect on the knowledge produced about them by Western researchers or under Western scientific influence. Similar agendas are being or have been

developed by academics belonging to other minority or "colonised" groups and "the continuation of Indigenous scholars' engagement with the intellectual traditions of their cultures draws upon the emergence of a broader global intellectual movement through which the 'colonised' and the 'marginal' speak back to the 'centre'".²⁶

Furthermore, the development of 'subaltern' scholarship is not only a process in which the "the marginal speak back to the centre" but also in which scholars increasingly turn inwards, exploring their own ways of knowing. Indigenous knowledge, for example, is increasingly becoming an academic field of inquiry, especially with regards to educational systems. According to Battiste:

The task for Indigenous academics has been to affirm and activate the holistic paradigm of Indigenous knowledge to reveal the wealth and richness of Indigenous languages, worldviews, teachings, and experiences, all of which have been systematically excluded from contemporary educational institutions and from Eurocentric knowledge systems.²⁷

The emergence of Indigenous scholarship as well as the acknowledgment of the existence of Indigenous knowledge are perceived as "acts of intellectual self-determination" through which Indigenous scholars develop "new analyses and methodologies to decolonize themselves, their communities and their institutions."²⁸ Similar processes of 'intellectual decolonization' are taking place among other 'subaltern' groups and may too become part of Romani scholars' agendas.

On the other hand, the status of a researcher who belongs to the 'subaltern' group is often ambivalent, complex and challenging but also full of potential. Such researchers often struggle for recognition of their credibility both as academics *and* as members of the group. Rigney, himself a Narungaa man, points out that: "we Indigenous scholars have always had to justify not only our humanness and our Aboriginality, but also the fact that our intellects are

23 Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, eds., *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2014), 430.

24 Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 2.

25 Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, eds., *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research*, 430.

26 Rigney, "A first perspective of Indigenous Australian participation in science", 7.

27 Marie Battiste, "Indigenous knowledge: Foundations for First Nations", *World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) Journal* (2005), 1.

28 *Ibid.*

‘rational’ and that we have a right to take our legitimate place in the academy of research.”²⁹ Similarly, such scholars frequently feel pressured to distance themselves from their communities in order to ensure “objectivity” and credibility. Patricia Hill Collins, an influential scholar of Black feminist thought, writes of her own experience of trying to dismantle this notion, seeing it as an added value:

Much of my formal academic training has been designed to show me that I must alienate myself from my communities, my family, and even my own self in order to produce credible intellectual work. Instead of viewing the everyday as a negative influence on my theorizing, I tried to see how the everyday actions and ideas of the Black women in my life reflected the theoretical issues I claimed were so important to them.³⁰

The status of such researchers is often ambiguous - combining an insider/outsider perspective and fluidity. Numerous researchers have pointed out this dual perspective. On the one hand, such researchers are insiders within a particular paradigm or research model, and at the same time they are perceived as outsiders because of their ‘subaltern’ background. On the other hand, they work as insiders within their community but at the same time they are outsiders to it because of their educational background or because they often work across clan, linguistic, age or gender boundaries.³¹ Patricia Hill Collins refers to the “outsider within” status of such scholars.³² The struggle to maintain a healthy balance may be challenging to such researchers. But at the same time, such an “outsider within” perspective is of incomparable value for research itself and for the development of academic scholarship as such. “Outsiders within” possess tools, knowledge and critical training to be able to re-examine their own personal and cultural experiences, and at the same time to illuminate some of the existing academic anomalies, shortcomings and gaps.³³ They also gain access and an entrance to first-hand information more easily. Such scholars have the academic legitimacy to

tackle the distortions between their own experiences and the way the same phenomena are described in academic literature. Their “outsider within” status may help to identify patterns, dynamics and phenomena which may be difficult to perceive by others trained in academic inquiry. Furthermore, those “barriers” which typically for other scholars may be considered as difficulties (such as values, beliefs, or cultural practices a researcher needs to be sensitive to while in the field) are not an issue for the “outsiders within”: they “tend to approach cultural protocols, values and beliefs as integral part of methodology.”³⁴ Arguably, many scholars of Romani background face some of these ambivalences themselves and have learned to approach their dual status as an added value in their academic production.

The emergence of such scholarship, promoted by scholars who have typically been treated as objects of study, does not necessarily have to be confrontational. Rather, dialogue between exogenous and endogenous voices helps to refine methodologies, establish synergies of approaches, and contribute to the development of academic discipline by establishing a body of knowledge based on complementarity and a plurality of voices. Regarding these development in Indigenous Studies, Rigney writes:

The development of contemporary Indigenist research approaches, whilst in its infancy, has contributed to a quiet methodological revolution. [...] In seeking progressive approaches to knowledge production, Indigenist critiques of social science seek to locate tensions, conflicts and contradictions within investigative methods. This will help to overcome the ‘epistemic violence’ forced upon Indigenous peoples. [...] These new approaches by Indigenous scholars provide alternative conceptual and analytical strategies for contemporary Indigenous Studies.³⁵

That may be the case for Romani Studies as well with the progressive development of Romani scholars, the

29 Rigney, “A first perspective of Indigenous Australian participation in science”, 5.

30 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), VIII.

31 Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 5.

32 Patricia Hill Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological significance of black feminist thought”, *Social Problems* Vol. 33 No. 6 (1986): 14-32.

33 *Ibid.*, 17.

34 Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 15.

35 Rigney, “A first perspective of Indigenous Australian participation in science”, 7.

inclusion of their voices in the mainstream currents of scientific debates, and their critical engagement with the legacy of Romani Studies as it has developed over the years. The opening up of Romani Studies to new, alternative discourses may help to establish approaches for Romani intellectuals to write and speak about each other, combining their outsider and insider status and founded on principles of academic rigour and quality.

A way forward

In recent years there has been an increasing demand for participation and the direct involvement of Roma, in accordance with the principle “For Roma, with Roma”,³⁶ not only in policy making and implementation but also within academia. Consequently, scholars were obliged to alter their protocols to include Roma informants in different stages of research. The popular keywords of the past decade – participation and empowerment – have entered academic jargon too, making these two elements necessary in research (especially if looking for funding). But often these terms have been used and applied superficially, serving more to legitimise the academic knowledge produced, rather than engaging in meaningful partnerships between the researcher and the researched. In this regard, Roma participation in the academic production process becomes tokenistic and symbolic (“rituals of participation”) and in the best case, is expressed in paternalism.

The emergence of Romani scholarship certainly presents an opportunity for the development of Romani Studies as a discipline. Until now, with limited exceptions, Romani Studies lacked voices from within which would position Romani individuals in equality to their non-Roma counterparts in knowledge production. The absence of Romani scholarship has been a major weakness of Romani Studies as a scientific discipline because it lacked the much-needed plurality of perspectives and voices, and a constructive dialogue between them. Today, as we witness the emancipation of Romani scholarship as an academic strand in its own right, Romani Studies will necessarily have to open up and accommodate this diversity and plurality.

This heterogeneity of voices should result in a dialogue based on equality and complementarity of knowledge,

approaches and methodologies. Romani scholars cannot claim greater legitimacy over the knowledge they produce on Roma, but neither can their non-Romani colleagues. This artificial dichotomy should be overcome as both Romani and non-Romani scholars are, in fact, legitimate voices. To realise this, there is an increasing need for creating spaces for scholarly debate and exchange, based on mutual respect and equality of opinions.

Nonetheless, it is also important to acknowledge the marginality of Romani scholars, the tensions arising from their “outsiders within” status and often the lack of self-esteem which some Romani scholars may experience. Mentoring and support of early-career scholars of Romani background is a priority. The experiences of emerging ‘subaltern’ voices among other groups in the academic world can become a useful guideline for finding effective ways to foster and promote Romani scholarship.

The development of minority scholarship, as in the case of Indigenous or Black Scholarship, in many cases is illustrative of the challenges and opportunities of emerging Romani scholarship. The tensions arising from this dichotomy based on ethnic background, and the perceived ambivalent status of Romani scholars as well as their marginality within Romani Studies, are arguably part of a process of accommodating Romani voices within the academic realm. Similar challenges can be traced in the development of other ‘subaltern’ studies. Native, Indigenous, First Nations or Afro-American Studies have experienced similar transformations and were able, at least to some extent, to overcome some of these difficulties. Today, in the US and Canada, for example, First Nations Studies are well established, as reflected by the numerous departments located within universities; First Nations scholars, too, have ascended to the ranks of academic importance as professors and faculty members. With the increasing number of scholars of Romani background and their gradual inclusion in academic mainstream currents, this may also be the path of development of Romani Studies.

The ascendance of authoritative Romani voices within scientific debates will help to unravel internal tensions, gaps and incongruences within Romani Studies. On the other hand, it will also open up Romani Studies to new approaches, different inquiries and innovative avenues

36 “For Roma, with Roma” became a motto of the OSCE’s Action Plan on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE. Later on this principle became a guiding principle for subsequent policies targeting Roma, both nationally and internationally.

of research, in accordance with the ethical guidelines necessary for inclusive and respectful research with Roma communities. With the growing popularity of ‘the Roma issue’ in the academic world, it is increasingly necessary to develop such ethical guidelines and adequate research protocols in Romani Studies. Furthermore, as Romani scholars, but also increasingly their non-Roma colleagues, confront the legacy of Romani Studies developed over the decades, we observe a gradual revision

of the body of knowledge developed on Roma, exposing its limitations, incongruences and, occasionally, scientific racism.³⁷ This critical engagement with Romani Studies and increasing use of post-colonialist or feminist approaches, among many others, may indeed lead to the crystallisation of Critical Romani Studies as a separate academic strand of its own.³⁸ These developments should be perceived as an opportunity and an added value to the discipline.

³⁷ Thomas Acton, “Scientific Racism, Popular Racism, and the Discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society”, (in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2015, 2- 18), available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01419870.2015.1105988>.

³⁸ A similar process can be witnessed in the evolution of Indigenous, Afro-American or Latino Studies leading to the establishment of Critical Indigenous Studies, Critical Latino Studies or Critical Black Studies.