

Racism and Romani Studies

concept

Since the establishment of the Gypsy Lore Society and especially of its journal in 1888, which might be regarded as the beginning of the Romani Studies as a field of study, Roma became increasingly an object of study of anthropologists, linguists, historians, and other scholars. The raise of eugenics and racial sciences, especially during the interwar period, have paved the way for Roma exclusion and extermination in concentration camps. The denazification did not take place in social sciences. On the contrary, those that were at the forefront of the racial sciences became respectable scientists or policy makers after the II World War, as it was the case of Sabin Manuila¹ in Romania, or Hermann Arnold² in Germany.

In the last three decades, geneticists have used DNA samples collected from Romani individuals to conduct research. As a recent op-ed published by Nature revealed, most if these papers misused the genetic information gathered through unethical and scientifically questionable methods. For example, in Hungary in 1981, DNA was collected from incarcerated Romani individuals based solely on their appearance. In 1993, in another genetic research in Hungary, the researchers categorized the population in three groups – “genuine Hungarian ethnical groups”, “Jews” and “Gypsies” - a practice that might be regarded as racist. The op-ed argues that based on the analysis of the forensic genetic journal articles over the past three decades, Roma are the most intensely studied population in Europe.

Over the last three decades, Romani Studies advanced at high speed. There are books written on Roma published every year, there are two book series on Romani studies – CEU Press and Berghahn Books –, there are five Romani Studies journals -

¹ Sabin Manuila was a Romanian sociologist who headed the Central Statistical Institute and a promoter of eugenics. Under the Antonescu's Government, Manuila became an enthusiastic supporter of Nazi racial policies and assisting the Government implementation of the deportations to Transnistria of the Jewish and Roma populations. Manuila regarded Roma as the "Romania's racial issue" and described them as "dysgenic", subversive, and exogamous, endorsing their compulsory sterilization. After the IIWW, Manuila served as Undersecretary of State and head of the Central Statistical Institute, before defecting to United States of America where he became an employee of Stanford University and, later, Counselor for the United States Census Bureau.

² Hermann Arnold, was a German medical officer during the IIWW, who became an academic and a “Gypsy” expert for the Federal Government, basing his work on the archives of the Racial Hygiene Research Center (RHF) headed by Robert Ritter. In a 1961 article and in his main work “The Gypsies” (1965), Arnold claimed that a so-called “Gypsy gene” is responsible for the asocial behavior of Roma and their laziness, and that Roma lack intellectual abilities. As an expert on Roma, he exonerated Nazi “Gypsy” researchers and presented the deportations of Roma and Sinti as criminal policies or racial hygiene. He served as a “Gypsy expert” for different ministries of the federal Government until the social protests of German Roma and Sinti civil rights movement for the recognition of Roma Holocaust in 1979.

Romani Studies (formerly *the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*), *Romano Džaniben* founded in 1994 in Prague, *Journal of Gypsy Studies* published in London since 2016, *Critical Romani Studies* launched in 2018 in Budapest, and *the International Journal of Roma Studies* founded in 2019 in Barcelona. In addition, there are Romani Studies programs and specialized courses on Roma, including summer schools, mainly in Central and Eastern Europe. There is an increasing number of articles published on Roma and, some scholars have called for a changed in paradigm in approaching the Roma predicament.

In terms of policies, over the past three decades, an unprecedented process has been taken place: head of states and governments came together to discuss the situation of Roma in Europe. Nowadays, most of the European countries have adopted policies towards Roma. Even the European Commission departed from its ethnically neutral approach to policies to adopt an EU Framework for Roma in 2011 and a renewed strategic framework in 2020. However, in spite of the expectations, the Roma situation did not improve significantly. Many continue to live in poverty, to be subjected to all forms of violence and racism.

In 2014, after intense pressure from Roma NGOS and civil society, the European Commission acknowledged antigypsyism – the special form of racism toward Roma - as the root cause of Roma exclusion. A group of Roma NGOs proposed a working paper on antigypsyism, and the European Commission has set combating antigypsyism as one of the main policy objectives of the EU Strategic Framework for Equality, Participation and Inclusion 2021-2030. In spite of these developments in acknowledging the role of racism in the exclusion of Roma, academic inquiry on the racism faced by Roma in their everyday life is in an incipient phase.

There are still disagreements regarding the terminology used to describe the historical experiences of Roma interacting with non-Roma – should it be called Romaphobia, antigypsyism, anti-Romaism or anti-Roma racism? Confusions also appear regarding the use of the concept, as some scholars see the use of the specific term describing racism against Roma in the last two decades while others link it with the raise of Romani movement in Germany and their struggle for recognition of Roma as Holocaust victims in Germany during the 1970's and 1980's. Even more importantly, the writings about antigypsyism/anti-Roma racism rarely propose solutions on how to combat it, thus the confusions on how to deal with antigypsyism/anti-Roma racism.

There is a large spectrum of manifestations of the racism against Roma. Scholars have focused on those highly visible such as police practices, poverty, discrimination in education and labor market. There is a risk that some manifestations remain unexplored such is the case of discrimination within the administration of justice or the practices of evicting and/or placing Roma families and communities in locations that are harmful for their health and wellbeing, what is usually called environmental racism. The individual motivations behind Roma exclusion might be regarded as the root of

the phenomena while institutional practices and procedures and the inter-institutional arrangements and interactions might remain hidden. Another risk is that by insisting on the role of the state and others in the Roma exclusion, Roma remain passive to the societal changes instead of being the agents of change. Thus, a discourse overemphasizing anti-Roma racism might bear the risk of disempowering Roma as the change is expected to come from the state or other groups.

Roma women and Roma LGBTIQ are too often ignored as part of scholarly research on Roma. While racism represents a system form of oppression of Roma, one should not ignore what happens at the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, class and disability. In fact, while using the discourse of oppression and domination, it is imperative to look also within the Roma communities and analyze those practices that further oppress some sub-groups such as Roma women, Roma LGBTIQ or Roma with disabilities.

Another important risk is to further victimize Roma by overemphasizing the long history of exclusion, discrimination and violence inflicted on Roma since their arrival into Europe. To avoid such a risk, scholars aiming at rediscovering and reinterpreting Romani history might also suggest ways on how to ensure that such a discourse would not hurt the victims and will not further victimize the Roma.

Call for papers

International Academic Conference “Racism and Romani Studies”

September 14-15, 2023

West University of Timisoara

Despite the recent recognition of the role racism plays in the exclusion of Roma and the relatively large consensus that combating anti-Roma racism/antigypsyism is key for achieving equality, the academic contributions to the topic remain at an incipient phase. The role of the scientists and their ideas on everyday life of Roma still has to be critically reviewed. While manifestations of racism are covering a broad spectrum and are important in identifying the mechanism that makes them possible, the importance of the strategies, discourses and practices to combat racism against Roma should not be overlooked.

The **European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERiac)** in partnership with the **Intercultural Institute of Timisoara** and the **West University of Timisoara** invite scholars to submit abstracts for the conference *Racism and Romani Studies*. The conference will be taking place in **September 14-15, 2023, in Timisoara** at the premises of the West University and is part of the European Capital of Culture program funded by the Municipality of Timisoara and the European Union.

The aim of the conference is to contribute to the scholarly debates on the role of racism in shaping the interactions between Roma and majority population and institutions by exploring the manifestations of anti-Roma racism and by proposing strategies, discourses, and innovative approaches in countering anti-Roma racism/ antigypsyism.

The organizers invite scholars to submit abstracts and proposals for panels on topics related to the aim of the conference. The papers could deal with various layers of analysis - local, national, and international. Some topics that might guide the possible contributions are:

- Romani resistance to oppression
- Memory and memorialization of Romani history
- Roma women struggles for equality from feminist theories to inclusive practices
- Roma LGBTQI and their struggle for recognition
- Exploring the way researchers and scholars could contribute to combat racism against Roma
- Using arts and culture to combat antigypsyism
- Critical social theories and their relevance for Romani Studies

- Manifestations of antigypsyism in arts and culture and/or the role of cultural production in shaping and stabilizing stereotypes and antigypsyist representations of Roma
- Forms of institutional discrimination in the arts and culture
- Capacity of arts and cultural practices, and approaches through education (ie. teaching Roma history in schools), as preventive approaches to challenge antigypsyism
- Cultural appropriation
- Roma representation vs. Roma self-representation in culture and academia

Papers covering other topics connected with the aim of the conference might also be submitted.

The organizers are proposing the following calendar:

- Deadline for Abstracts May 7, 2023
- Selection of abstracts May 8-12, 2023
- Invitations to submit full papers May 12, 2023
- Deadline for submission of full papers August 1, 2023

Scholars are requested to submit original and unpublished papers. Researchers at all stages of their careers (including MA graduates and PhD students) are invited to submit proposals. Scholars of Romani origin are particularly encouraged to apply.

Submissions should include the author's name, title, a 500-word-long abstract, and a 100-word long biography. Panel proposals should include three paper-givers. Panels should be designed to regard ethnicity and gender.

All proposal should be sent to eriac@eriac.org with the subject line "Racism and Romani Studies" by **May 7, 2023**.

There are several scholarships available to cover the travel, accommodation, and meals of the participants. Only those submitting full papers will be eligible for scholarships. As a rule, selected papers would have to be presented by authors in person. Only in exceptional cases, papers would be presented remotely.

Selected papers will be published in an edited volume and the organizers will explore the possibilities to publish some selected papers as a special issue of an internationally indexed journal.

The Scientific Committee of the conference is composed of Dr. Iulius Rostas, Dr. Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Dr. Calin Rus, Dr. Oana Neșțian Sandu, Dr. Ciprian Necula, Dr. Melinda Dinca and Dr. Theofild Lazar.