

ABOUT NATIONALISM AND THE ROMA-GYPSY DISPUTE

Națiunea este o construcție

Nationalism is a way for individuals to identify with a certain nation. Both nationalism and the nation are social-political constructions created in the 18th and the 19th centuries. In Europe, before the emergence of nationalism people were, in general, loyal to a religion or a monarch. The development of nationalism is closely tied to the creation of modern states and the public space, with nationalism incorporating in its ideology the old loyalties, so that the national identity, from its very beginnings, was built on the exclusion of those who are different, on everything that the nation state leaves outside of its definition.

The borders, the language and the culture are the elements that form the basis of a nation, but all these three elements are themselves constructions. (For instance, France unified various languages and dialects to obtain an official language; during the French Revolution, only half of the french were speaking a version of French.)

The most obvious impact of nation states, compared to their non-national predecessors, was the creation of a uniform and uniformity-inducing national culture through state policies. The nation state model assumes that its population constitutes a united nation having common descendents, a common language and a number of shared forms of culture. When the assumed unity was absent, the nation state often tried to create it, promoting a uniform national language through linguistic policies. The creation of national systems of compulsory primary education and a relatively uniform middle school curriculum has been the most efficient instrument in spreading the official national language. The language and cultural policies sometimes had negative aspects intended to suppress the non-national elements. The prohibition of some languages was sometimes a method used to speed up the adoption of a national language and the decline of minority languages.

The history taught in schools continues to be the national history, a mythological version employing a propagandist tone. All nations are based on the concept of national identity, which is intrinsically related to myths. In other words, a complex of myths forms the basis of any ethnic identity. These myths were shaped by a need to belong that reduces one's anxieties through a self-definition referencing fixed, generally accepted values. Such a myth is the myth of the permanence of the community (or the eternal nation) or the myth of a

About "Romania's image abroad". The Roma-Gypsy dispute

Since the first World Romani Congress, in 1971, the usage of the term "Roma" has become more and more common, as this is a generic term meaning "man" and it covers the diversity of Roma groups.

Every once in a while, disputes regarding the right of Roma people to call themselves this name reappear in the Romanian public space. The last such dispute was in 2011, when the Committee for Human Rights and the Committee for Equal Opportunities in the Romanian Senate voted favorably (seven votes "for", three votes "against" and one abstention) on the legislative proposal initiated by the Liberal Democrat Party representative Silviu Prigoana, through which the name "Roma" would be replaced with "gypsy". The law was not passed, but this direction that denies Romas their right to self-definition remains strong in the public sphere.

The Roma-Gypsy debate has at its center a self-colonizing fear of Romanians that they are not sufficiently "European", that they will be mistaken in Europe with an ethnic group that represents "absolute otherness" in a context in which Romania continues to be considered a second hand member state of the European Union.

The racist measures inside the Union (several countries in the European Union, such as France and Germany, kicked out Romanian citizens who were ethnic Romas, since 2008 Italy collects digital fingerprints of all Romas, including children, etc.) as well as the news reported by mass-media in Romania and in other European countries about "Roma criminality" feed both the anti-Roma sentiments and the fear that Romas "damage Romania's image in Europe". In this context, the legislative project that justifies changing the name of the Roma ethnicity based also on the similarity of the word "Roma" to the word "Romanian", similarity which would create confusion, shows a general framework of the anti-Roma attitudes both inside and outside Romania, framework that dictates that people who belong to the majority should delimit themselves from Romas in order to regain their dignity.

In the context of Romania's proposed joining of the Schengen Area as well as the economic crisis, several older European member-states have sent out a warning to Romania again through its "gypsies": not only have they sent them home, but through the confusion created between



common genealogy, where this shared genealogy will never involve the whole of humanity but only a certain group with certain characteristic traits, while other groups are excluded. Thus, in addition to their quieting role, these myths are used also to channel the energies stirred by the agitation, incoherence and injustice that accompany the lives of the majority of people, energies that could prove dangerous for the status quo, towards excluding others.

In the 19th century, the nation state was redefined more and more in relation to the racial and ethnic origin of the nation. The relationship between racism and ethnic nationalism reached a climax in the fascism and Nazism of the 20th century.

Minorities were not considered to belong to the people and were denied any authentic and legitimate role as parts of such a state. The Jews and Roma people were always situated outside national identity projections, being considered undesirable groups whose origin and culture had been declared inferior, the ultimate example being Nazi Germany, when neither Jews nor Romas were considered to belong to the people and were particular targets of persecutions that later made the reality of the Holocaust possible.

Nationalism, which became one of the most significant social and political forces in history and which deeply influenced the mobilization in both world wars at ideological level, is still present in public discourse and in the legislation of European states, as it is visible also in transnational structures such as the European Union, whose policies of border control and those concerning immigration are based on nationalism and racism.

“Romanian” and “Roma” they have symbolically hurt the pride of the Romanians. The Romanian state replied to this insult via its “gypsies”: “the Roma problem is a European problem” and anyway “Romanians are not Romas”, and in fact even the Romas aren’t Romas, but gypsies. In the discussions about the right to free movement, the naming policy has also applied the label “gypsy = nomad”, suggesting that while honorable and modern European citizens make use of their right to move freely, Romas can enjoy at most a romantic welcome supported by romantic fantasies regarding nomadic gypsies (or “primitivity”).

Vincze Eniko- Român - rom - țigan,
<http://www.criticatac.ro/3795/roman-%E2%80%93-rom-%E2%80%93-tigan/>

În this discussion not only the right of people to distance themselves from the deeply pejorative meaning of the “gypsy” term and their right to self-definition is negated, but also the artificial nature of the idea of the nation is forgotten. At the time when Romania was formed as a nation state, the construction of the national identity as well as the name “Romanian” were not a natural process, it was rather an effort of constructing and self-definition, the same as the one involved in assuming the “Roma” identity. In the complex context of the tensions between national pride and

In a taxi, on the way to school, a comment on the radio regarding the “explosive” birthrate of the Roma ethnicity. The taxi driver, approvingly:

“Nobody can save us from these people... soon there will be more of them than us...”

I let him speak and when it was time to get out I told him that I am Roma and that his words saddened and insulted me. The guy, visibly surprised and ashamed, started to apologize that he was only speaking nonsense, after all he has Roma people in his family... a sister-in-law... and that, no, he did not intend to insult me in any way... In fact, I myself am not Roma.

feelings of inferiority towards the “west”, of the complicity between nationalism and the neoliberal control of borders and immigration, the right to self-definition is denied Roma people in order for the “natural” essence of the identity of “Romanian” to keep its mythical power.

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