CHAPTER 7

PRO-ROMA GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY: ACTING FOR, WITH OR INSTEAD OF ROMA?

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Over the past two decades, in the wake of post-communist transition, the emergence of Romani activism has been an important development accompanying political changes in Central and Eastern Europe. Alongside the emergence of Romani associations, international NGOs have been increasingly involved in the struggle against the discrimination of Roma. A special microcosm has developed within global civil society that is specialised in the so-called 'Roma issue', comprising non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations, expert bodies, foundations, activists and politicians.

Who the Roma are, and how many they are, is a matter of considerable debate (see Map 7.1 and Box 7.1). In this chapter we refer to 'Roma' as a category of ethnopolitical practice. We analyse the processes through which it has become institutionalised and entrenched in a segment of global civil society – in the descriptive sense of the term, that is 'the emerging sphere of social and political participation in which citizen groups, social movements and individuals engage in dialogue, debate, confrontation, and negotiation with each other and with various governmental actors as well as the business world' (Anheier et al. 2001: 3).

Activists and scholars alike commonly argue that persons perceived as 'Gypsy' (cigány, cikan, and so on) face a range of prejudices and racism in contemporary Europe and beyond. Physical, symbolic, and epistemic[1] forms of anti-Roma violence are persistent in both Eastern and Western Europe and have deep historical roots (Clark 2004, Hancock 2002, Heuss 2000, Kóczé 2011).

It is similarly widely accepted and documented that the transition from state socialism to capitalism had dramatic consequences for most Roma (Ringold et al. 2005, Ivanov 2003, Szelényi and Ladányi 2006). With the collapse or privatisation of state companies, masses of Roma lost their legal and stable source of income and sank from working-class living conditions (with secure jobs, access to education and other social services) to the margins of society. Their impoverishment was coupled with the strengthening of anti-Roma sentiments, further increasing their segregation in education and housing, and even resulting in physical violence.

Pro-Roma civil society developed over the past 20 years in response to this extraordinary deterioration of the social situation of Roma. This chapter discusses the emergence of the pro-Roma global civil society, its divisions and controversies, and, finally, draws theoretical lessons from the case study.

Emergence of the Pro-Roma Microcosm

The roots of Roma political activism can be traced back to the early twentieth century. By the 1920s and 1930s, Romani organisations started to function in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia,[2] Romania and Greece. These organisations published their own periodicals, offered mutual assistance in sickness and death, or promoted the education of Gypsy youth (Marushiakova and Popov 2004, Klimova 2002). Generally the founding moment of the international Romani movement is considered to be the first World Romani Congress, held in 1971 in London.

Three phases in the emergence of the pro-Roma microcosm can be distinguished with three respective (dominant but not exclusive) focuses: (1) 1970s–1980s: self-determination; (2) 1990s–early 2000s: human rights violation; (3) from late 2000s: social and economic inclusion.

The Focus on Self-Determination

The origins of the international struggle for the self-determination of Roma can be traced back at least to the 1960s, when the United Nations inspired the creation of a number of international Romani umbrella organisations to promote the interests of the world's Roma through UN instruments and structures. These organisations worked towards the legitimisation of Roma as a nation with the right to a state by creating and promoting national culture. Although the goals of improving living standards and cultural and moral uplifting of the Roma were

usually declared, they have always remained secondary to nationalist aspirations (Klimova-Alexander 2005: 16).

By the 1970s, these attempts had crystallised into the First World Romani Congress, which attracted participants from Western, Central and Eastern Europe, as well as from Asia and North America.[3] The Congress was formally organised by the Comité International Rom (an organisation that had been founded in Paris in 1965), and was funded by the World Council of Churches[4] and the Indian government.

The delegates of the Congress adopted a national flag and a hymn, and agreed on the dissemination of a new ethnic label. Hence the term 'Roma' was constructed as the official name to encompass a variety of communal-based identities across different countries. The leading concept was the principle of *amaro Romano drom* (our Romani way), and the phrase adopted was 'our state is everywhere where there are Roma because Romanestan is in our hearts' – expressing a clear disaffiliation from earlier claims for a territorial state.

In addition, commissions for social affairs, war crimes, language standardisation and culture were established. It was also decided that 8 April, the date on which the Congress had opened, should become Roma Day, henceforth to be celebrated annually. A single slogan summed up the Congress: 'The Roma people have the right to seek out their own path towards progress' (Fosztó 2003, Liégeois 2007, Acton and Klimova-Alexander 2001).

Since 1971, another six World Romani Congresses have been held. Of particular importance is the Fourth Congress, held in Poland in 1990, which saw the adoption of the 'Declaration of Nation' manifesto. This confirmed and detailed the claim for non-territorial nationhood and international recognition. Moreover, the manifesto claimed that the Romani nation offers to the rest of humanity a new vision of stateless nationhood that is more suited to a globalised world than is the current affiliation to nation states.

The Focus on Human Rights

The 'Roma issue' boomed after the collapse of the state socialist regimes, which had limited rights of assembly and association. After 1989, Roma could themselves establish various associations, foundations, political parties (for example, in Romania), and minority self-governments (for example, in Hungary).

At the same time, pro-Roma NGOs, run by non-Roma but advocating on behalf of Roma, burgeoned. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, well-established NGOs such as Amnesty International[5] and Human Rights Watch[6] began publicising the violations of Romani people's human rights. By the mid 1990s, national human rights NGOs had emerged – such as the Human Rights Project in Bulgaria, the Citizen's Solidarity and Tolerance Movement in the Czech Republic, the Union for Peace and Human Rights in Slovakia, and the Office for the Protection of National and Ethnic Minorities in Hungary.

Many of these were founded by returning non-Roma dissidents who spoke English and could develop contacts with Western philanthropic organisations. Their determination to pursue legal cases has led to dismissals and criminal proceedings against corrupt or abusive policemen and other officials, to the prosecution of those responsible for attacks against Roma, and the like (Barany 2002b).

A key pro-Roma actor is the Open Society Institute (OSI). The OSI provides financial and institutional support for Roma-related activities and organisations, operates its own programmes aimed at directly building Romani representation and leadership, and plays a key role in such international initiatives as the Decade of Roma Inclusion and the EU Roma Framework Strategy (both discussed below).

The leading international NGO to specifically combat the human rights abuse of Roma, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), was founded with the financial support of OSI in 1996. Their activities comprise strategic litigation to reverse patterns of human rights abuse, organising various forms of human rights education, and submitting shadow reports to international bodies monitoring international conventions. In particular, ERRC submits shadow reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women within the UN, as well as to the European Commission, reviewing the progress of candidate countries with large Roma populations.

The US-based Project on Ethnic Relations (PER), operating in Eastern European countries, has organised roundtable discussions on key issues (self-government, governmental policies, migration, and so on), brought together activists, experts, and politicians, and thus played a vital role in the emergence of pro-Roma global civil society.

Due to both the advocacy activity of the strengthening pro-Roma microcosm and the fear of westward mass migration of Roma, international organisations have turned their attention to the 'plight of Roma' as well.

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First to take action, the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) produced reports and formulated recommendations from the early 1990s, and established special bodies to tackle the 'Roma issue'.

Initially so-called expert bodies were created, such as the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues within OSCE, and the Group of Specialists on Roma within the Council of Europe – both founded in 1995. Later attempts were made to create more 'representative' bodies comprising Roma themselves; thus the European Roma and Traveller Forum in 2004 was created under the auspices of the Council of Europe and the Platform for Roma Inclusion within the EU.

Local, national and international NGOs, alongside the special bodies, formed a transnational advocacy network aimed at influencing government policies vis-à-vis Roma. In the past 10–15 years, the engaged international organisations have produced myriad reports, declarations, recommendations and resolutions in relation to Roma (or nomads – as they were called until the 1990s) (Majtényi and Vizi 2006, Marchand 2001).

These often inconsistent[7] documents attempt to identify the specific problems that Romani communities face and make non-binding propositions and general recommendations to remedy these problems. However, one international organisation, the European Union, has had a more significant leverage on Eastern European governments, as it measured 'the progress' of Eastern European candidate countries against the Copenhagen criteria.[8]

NGOs prepared well-researched and focused submissions on the situation of Roma communities for the European Commission, which sometimes transposed verbatim passages from the NGO reports to the so-called EU country reports.[9] More importantly, the Commission explicitly formulated the improvement of the situation of Roma communities as criteria for joining the EU. As a response, the Eastern European governments produced medium- and long-term 'Roma strategies'[10] as a sign of political commitment; however, in the daily lives of Roma, little has changed.

Relying on the by-now classic schema of Risse-Ropp-Sikkink (1999), Figure 7.1 recapitulates the flow of norm socialisation in the case of Hungary.

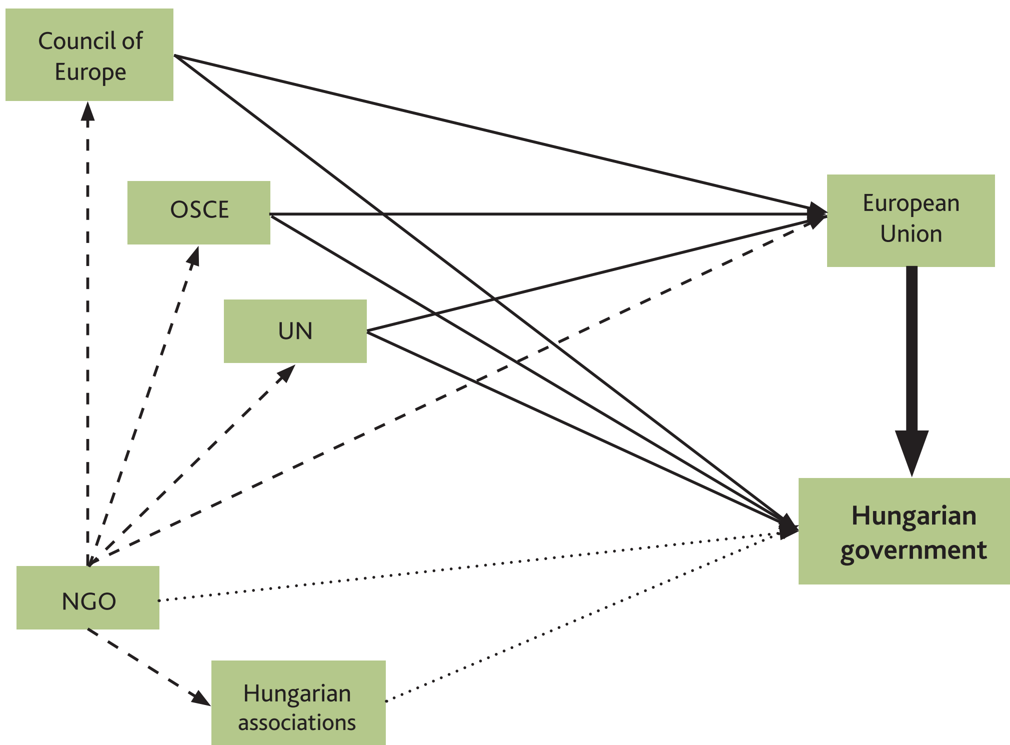

Figure 7.1 The Flow of Norm Socialisation From Civil Society to Government and Inter/Supranational Bodies, Using Hungary as an Example

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Box 7.1
Who are the Roma?

Who are the 'Roma'? Several scholars and activists argue that Romani people form a stateless dispersed nation, potentially embracing 9–12 million people from all over the world, who trace their origins (based on linguistic evidence) to the Indian Subcontinent (Gheorghe 1997; Guy 2001). Others dispute that Romani people form such a diaspora and argue that certain allegedly Roma groups (such as Egyptians, Sinti, Travellers and Gitano communities) do not belong to or identify with the Roma nation (Gay y Blasco 2002, Okely 1997).

The roots of the nation-building project unifying various ethnic groups under the label 'Roma' can be traced back to the first World Roma Congress held in 1971 near London. Although the term is not used – in general or in specific contexts – by several allegedly Roma groups, it still commonly employed by activists, politicians, and various institutions to replace such typically pejorative appellations as Cigány, Cikan, Gypsy, and so on.

Furthermore, the group of those who identify themselves as 'Roma' do not usually overlap with the group of those stigmatised with 'Gypsy'. In general, the number of persons *perceived* as Roma is much higher than the number of those who *self-identify* themselves as such (in the context of sociological research and official censuses). The ethnic boundaries are more rigid in certain countries: in Bulgaria almost three-quarters of those perceived as Roma also identify themselves as Roma, whereas in Hungary only one-third do so (Szelényi and Ladányi 2001).

It has to be noted that although in several countries Roma are still associated with an itinerant way of life, only 5 per cent of all 'Roma' have a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle. Furthermore, such administrative, occupational and legal categories as Travellers, Gens du Voyage, Camimanti, Nomadi who are ethnicised under the umbrella term of 'Roma' nowadays embrace sedentary communities as well. For instance, Italian authorities label immigrant (sedentary) Eastern European Roma 'nomads' and put them in caravans in so-called *campi nomadi.*

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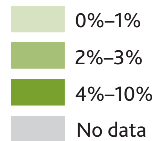
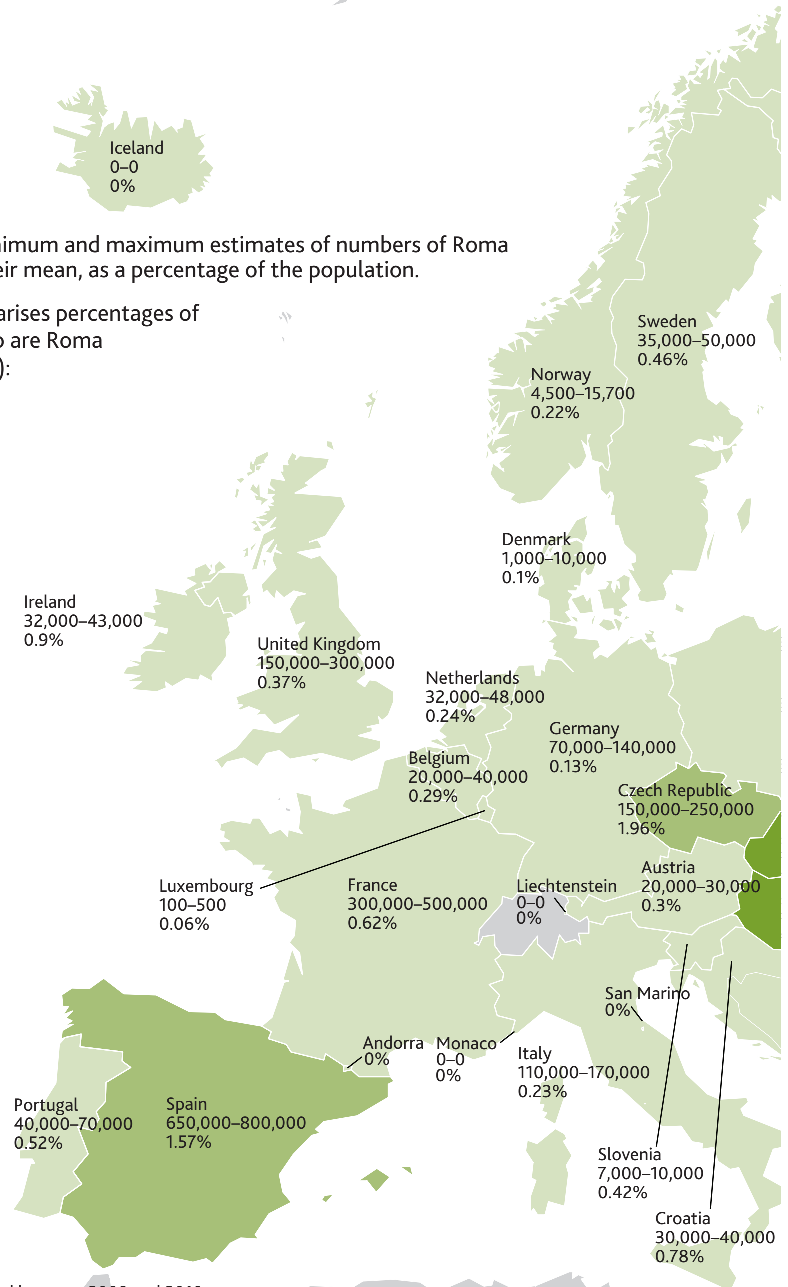
Map 7.1 Who are the Roma?

Map shows minimum and maximum estimates of numbers of Roma followed by their mean, as a percentage of the population.

Shading summarises percentages of population who are Roma (from averages):





Notes: Data collected between 2009 and 2010.

Sources: ESRI, Council of Europe Roma and Travellers Division: http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/default_en.asp

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Finland
10,000–12,000
0.21%

Russia
450,000–1,200,000
0.59%

Estonia
1,000–1,500
0.1%

Latvia
13,000–16,000
0.65%

Lithuania
2,000–4,000
0.08%

Belarus
10,000–70,000
0.41%

Poland
15,000–60,000
0.1%

Slovakia
400,000–600,000
9.17%

Hungary
400,000–1,000,000
7.05%

Moldova
15,000–200,000
2.49%

Azerbaijan
2,000–2,000
0.02%

Romania
1,200,000–2,500,000
8.32%

Georgia
2,000–2,500
0.05%

Armenia
2,000–2,000
0.07%

Montenegro
15,000–25,000
2.95%

Bosnia & Herzegovina
40,000–60,000
1.[illegible]9%

Bulgaria
700,000–800,000
10.33%

Kosovo
25,000–50,000
1.47%

Macedonia
135,500–260,000
9.59%

Greece
180,500–350,000
2.47%

Albania
80,000–150,000
3.18%

Cyprus
1,000–1,500
0.16%

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The Focus on Social and Economic Inclusion

In a paradoxical way, after their adhesion to the EU, the influence of pro-Roma global civil society on Eastern European governments decreased. To maintain governments' and international bodies' commitment, the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 programme (hereafter referred to as 'Decade') was launched by the OSI and the World Bank. The Decade is a unique international initiative formulated by the most important non-governmental and inter-governmental actors,[11] which states were encouraged to join on a voluntary basis.

Member states of Decade have to demonstrate their political commitment to improve the socio-economic status and social inclusion of Roma by developing their own national 'Decade Action Plans', specifying goals and indicators in four priority areas: education, employment, health and housing. Learning from the failures of the national Roma strategies that Eastern European governments had drafted in the enlargement period, the Decade incorporated a 'transparent and quantifiable' review of the progress of Decade Action Plans.

However, the Decade Secretariat realised halfway through the programme that 'the lack of data about Roma communities remains the biggest obstacle to conducting any thorough assessment of how governments are meeting their Decade commitments, despite widespread agreement among participating governments about the crucial need to generate data disaggregated for ethnicity in order to assess and guide policies'.[12] Moreover, research has revealed deterioration, not progress, in certain priority areas in Decade countries.[13]

By 2008–09 the very limited achievements of the Decade became apparent[14] (Popkostadinova 2011) and the pro-Roma microcosm turned its attention and hopes towards the EU once more. The most influential NGOs in this field[15] – with the support of the OSI – formed the European Roma Policy Coalition and called for more active involvement on the part of the EU.

The EU, as a sui generis international actor, possesses legal and financial means like no other international organisation to coordinate and facilitate common policies. After several resolutions and recommendations under the Hungarian EU presidency in 2011, the main EU bodies (the Parliament, the Commission and the Council) launched an EU Framework for National Integration Strategies up to 2020.

These recent efforts represent the third wave of Roma strategies developed by Eastern European governments under the pressure of pro-Roma global civil society and the EU. Similar to the first EU pre-accession phase, joining the recent initiative is quasi-mandatory of Eastern European states, but at the moment it seems unlikely

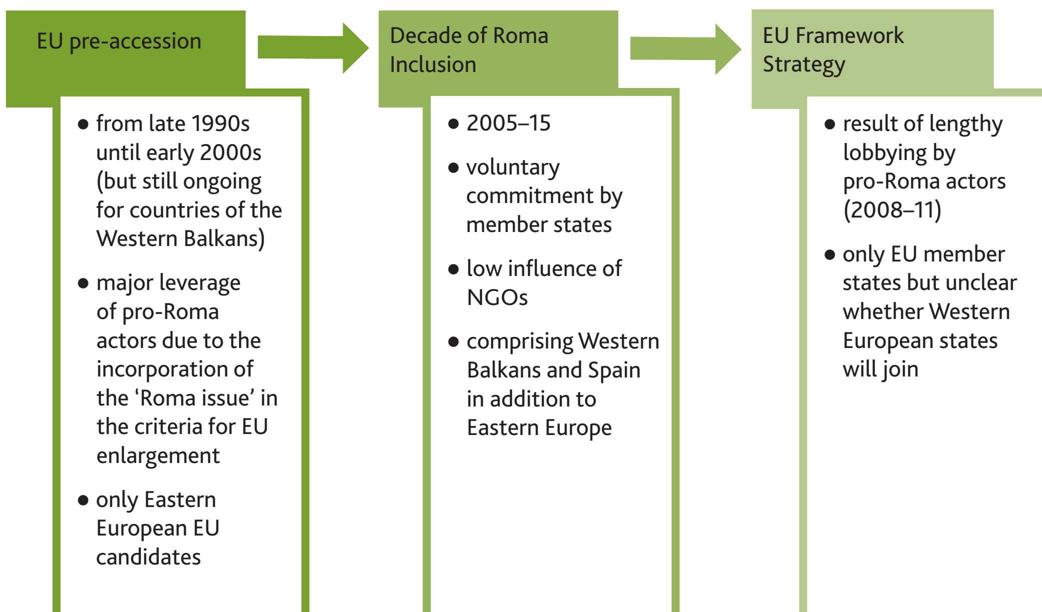

Figure 7.2 Putting Pressure on European Governments to Tackle the Plight of Roma – Three Strategies

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that Western European states with significant Roma populations (the UK, France, Italy, Spain) will get on board. The EU Framework strategy can be seen as a revival of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, which now will be transformed into an EU policy agenda (Rövid 2011).

Divisions and Controversies within the Pro-Roma Microcosm

As with other segments of global civil society, within the pro-Roma microcosm there are tensions between moderate service providers and radical activists, small grassroots associations and big international NGOs, formal political parties and civil actors that criticise the establishment.

However, such divisions take a different form in the case of the pro-Roma microcosm, since the major international actors (such as the ERRC and the OSI) are often labelled 'white' or 'gajo' (meaning non-Roma) by their critics. Accordingly, 'white civil society' is contrasted with the Romani subaltern (Trehan 2009). The former is criticised on at least three grounds:

1. 'White' NGOs are accused of promoting a hegemonic discourse on human rights, thus downplaying both macro-economic and macro-sociological processes (such as the enormous rise of unemployment after the fall of state socialism and the retrenchment of the welfare state), as well as the local sources and context of inequalities and conflicts.

   Focusing exclusively on discrimination imposes a very simplistic vision of social relations, blaming only the prejudiced majority. Such an approach is insensitive to the diversity of local inter-ethnic relations, as well as to human rights violations within Roma communities, such as domestic violence, human trafficking and usury. Furthermore, extreme (and even moderate) right wing political forces may exploit such simplifying approaches, turn it inside-out, and blame the Roma for increasing crime, aggression and other social ills.
2. International actors are accused of being accountable to their donors and not to the Roma communities that they work for. In particular, a good number of Roma and pro-Roma NGOs are financed by the OSI so they have to align to OSI's priorities. Membership-founded and voluntary-based Roma associations – especially in Eastern Europe – are almost non-existent.

   Moreover, international advocacy efforts are very remote from the daily struggles of many Roma. Professional NGOs are often perceived as technocratic and removed from such traditional civic values as altruism, community service and cooperation (Trehan 2001).

   In brief, pro-Roma actors often patronise Roma in their desire to help them and impose patterns of development which they consider the best for them. Such a patronage could 'in the long run kill the natural mechanisms of community preservation, thus turning the community into a constant social customer of professional benefactors' (Marushiakova and Popov 2004: 96).
3. International NGOs create a kind of brain-drain, offering high salaries and attracting the brightest Roma from local associations, further weakening grassroots initiatives. Several 'traditional' Roma activists or leaders argue that Roma working for international bodies are detached from their roots and live a 'gajo' way of life.

   However, such 'traditional Roma leaders' (*vajda*, *bulibasa*, and so on) have, in the past, been empowered by non-Roma leaders in order to control and tax Roma communities. Therefore, although they may be able to resolve some local conflicts, such authoritarian, non-elected leaders/mediators also are, to an extent, responsible for preventing Roma from becoming autonomous equal citizens.

We certainly agree with the importance of strengthening grassroots Roma associations. However, we also recognise the invaluable work NGOs undertake in specific fields of human rights violations, such as police abuse, domestic violence, educational segregation or the recent mass expulsion of Roma from France.

The hegemony of 'white' NGOs is not the only reason for the weakness of Romani grassroots mobilisation. At least three other factors can be mentioned: historical, organisational and socio-psychological.

Roma communities in most societies have been pushed to the margins of society. They have never been part of the community of equal citizens, and in certain epochs even faced systematic exclusion, slavery or extermination. The example of African-Americans demonstrates that such a historical disadvantage is gradually surmountable; however presently in most societies a Roma middle class (including not only activists and politicians but also engineers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and so on) exists only in embryonic form.

'Internal' organisational weaknesses also contribute to the fragility of Roma grassroots. Roma associations

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Box 7.2
Romani Women's Rights Activism

As integral parts of the human rights regime, women's rights and gender issues became gradually recognised and accepted by local NGOs and donor organisations in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. Romani women's activism gained impetus through the international gender discourse and emerging civil society in the region.

Romani women's issues first gained visibility in public discourse at the Congress on the EU Roma/Gypsies organised by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance in Seville, Spain, in 1994. One of the most striking results of this Congress was the publication of the 'Manifesto of Roma/Gypsy Women', the first publicly printed material which specifically referred to the situation of Romani women in Europe. One year later, in September 1995, the Council of Europe organised the 'Hearing of Roma/Gypsy Women' in Strasbourg as part of the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men. The purpose of this hearing was to identify problems and conflicts concerning equality and human rights encountered by Romani women. Although it was the first attempt by intergovernmental organisations to meet with Romani women activists and to bring visibility to their issues, the report issued by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) notes that the hearing emphasised economic hardship and educational discrimination against Roma in general, that is, it paid less attention to the specific concerns of Romani women.[1] Nevertheless, it was the first political recognition of Romani women's issues on an international level, and, as such, it allowed them to set up a network to exchange information and foster contacts with other women activists.

In 1998, the Open Society Institute (OSI) organised an International Conference of Romani Women in Budapest, Hungary, attended primarily by delegates from CEE. The meeting was unique because it focused on sensitive issues such the tradition of Roma culture versus women's rights. It is noteworthy that, at the conference, some Romani women challenged the existing male-dominated power structure in the Roma movement itself. In 1999, OSI established the Romani Women Initiative (RWI), which has since worked to develop, link and catalyse a core group of committed young Romani women leaders, in an effort to improve the human rights of Romani women. In 2003, with the assistance of the Council of Europe, Romani women activists from 18 European countries launched the International Romani Women's Network (IRWN), with a leadership that is older and more traditional, in terms of fetishising 'the Roma culture', than that of the RWI. The main focus of IRWN activities, and one that has been consistently encouraged by the Council of Europe, is the health of Romani women. Under the auspices of European Monitoring on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), IRWN produced the landmark report, 'Romani Women and Access to Public Health Care' in 2003 (Council of Europe 2003, Kóczé 2008).

On the transnational level, the presence of these Romani women's networks under the wing of international organisations created political leverage. Romani women activists developed a gender-based discourse within the Romani movement itself. However, those educated English-speaking Romani women who are active in developing this discourse may be detached from their local community and do not necessarily represent the local NGOs dealing with Romani women's issues.

In addition to influencing the male-dominated Romani movement, Romani women activists are also impacting the mainstream women's organisations. For example, several local Romani women organisations (SZIROM, Association of Roma Women of Szikszó, Hungary; Coloured Beads Association of Roma Women in Southern Hungary; Association of Roma Women in Public Life, Hungary; Romani CRISS, Romania; Federation of Kalé, Sinti and Manouche Women, France; Center Amalipe, Bulgaria; National Roma Centrum Manuse-Slovo21, Czech Republic; Kultúrne združenie Rómov Slovenska, Slovakia, Asociación Gitana de Mujeres Drom Kotar Mestipen, Spain) came together with the European Women's Lobby (EWL) and Hungarian Women's Lobby in a joint effort to organise a conference on Romani women's issues on 7 April 2011.

Angela Kóczé, excerpted from her PhD thesis, Central European University, Budapest (forthcoming).

[1] ECRI played a significant role in exposing the human rights situation of Roma in Europe; this report was instrumental. *Activities of the Council of Europe with Relevance to Combating Racism and Intolerance* (ECRI 2004).

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are criticised for lack of transparency and poor internal democracy. Their sources of funding, and details of the members of their boards are often not public. The organisational structure is typically highly hierarchical, dominated by an authoritarian leader who appoints family members or close friends (Rostas 2009).

Many of them 'tend to be rigid and unadaptable; have simple structure and few, often ill-defined, objectives; and are marked by disunity' (Barany 2002a: 292). The majority of Roma associations are 'poorly organised and have difficulty getting along with each other, let alone working together – in large part because of their intense competition for scarce resources' (Barany 2002: 294).

Consequently, it is no surprise that 'amongst Roma the level of trust in NGOs is generally low, a common opinion being that these organisations benefit of [*sic*] their difficulties' (Rostas 2009: 119).

The weakness of Romani mobilisation can also be attributed to the fragmented and stigmatised nature of Roma identity. On one hand, there is no strong overarching pan-Roma identity: individuals perceived as Roma/Gypsy belong to diverse groups (such as Kalo, Romungro, Boyash, Vlax, Kelderash, Gitano, Manoush, Romanichels, Traveller, Sinti, Caminante, and so on) speak different languages, belong to different religions, and have different citizenships (see Box 7.1).

On the other hand, being perceived as 'Gypsy' is in most contexts a stigma. Non-Roma frequently associate 'Gypsies' with crime, laziness, filth, shouting and aggression. Such stereotypes have deep historical roots, and are reproduced both by public education and the mass media. Extreme-right parties are joined by 'moderate' governing right-wing parties (think of Sarkozy's Union pour un Mouvement Populaire and Berlusconi's Il Popolo della Libertà) in stigmatising 'Gypsies.'

Consequently, the strong desire for (voluntary) assimilation amongst most Roma comes as no surprise. Leaving behind or hiding one's Roma origin[16] makes life a great deal easier: one has a better chance to get into decent schools, take up reasonable jobs, have access to standard health care or simply to do the shopping without being humiliated by security staff.

In brief, there is no strong and unified Roma identity on the basis of which a transnational ethnic movement may emerge.

The Hungarian Influence

In addition to the extensively criticised predominance of 'white' international NGOs, a less oft mentioned form of hegemony has to be discussed. The conception and design of the two above-mentioned flagship initiatives (the Decade and the EU Framework) was largely conceived and implemented by Hungarian or Budapest-based actors.

In particular, the OSI and its Hungarian founder George Soros played a central role in the launching of the Decade, and the only Roma Member of the European Parliament, Lívia Járóka, and the Hungarian Member of the European Commission, László Andor, initiated and gained support for the EU Framework Strategy by all the main EU bodies (Parliament, Commission, Council).

The hegemony and generalisation of the Hungarian perspective marginalises other, especially 'Western European' voices. Both the Decade and the EU Framework are insensitive to the difficulties of Traveller communities in finding stopping places in the UK, for example, or to the plight of immigrant Roma in *campi nomadi* in Italy.

In general, from the emergence of the 'Roma issue' in the 1990s, international actors have turned their attention to Eastern European Roma and assumed that their recommendations and declarations are also suitable for Western European Gypsies, Sinti, Travellers, Gitano, Manoush, Caminante, and other communities. By the early 2000s, the 'Roma' of Western Europe almost disappeared from the discussion on Roma in general. The whole stage was occupied by Eastern European Roma, with the issues of poverty and segregation in the centre (Simhandl 2006, Gheorghe forthcoming).

Conclusions and Theoretical Implications

The pro-Roma global civil society has a mixed record. On one hand, it has managed to raise the attention of international organisations and national governments to the plight of Roma communities; on the other hand, their social status has not improved significantly, with a large proportion of Roma still living at the margins of society.

Roma are increasingly seen as an avant-garde non-territorial stateless nation, offering the rest of humanity a model of political organisation that is more suited to a globalised world than affiliation to traditional nation states.[17] In reality, most Roma cultivate loyalty to the state in which they live, as well as to the specific alleged 'Roma subculture' to which they belong (such as the Boyash, Vlax and Romungro cultures in Hungary). The majority of Roma cannot afford to travel abroad, or even to visit the capital city of their country. The cosmopolitanism of Roma appears to be the class consciousness of the minuscule frequent traveller Roma elite (Calhoun 2002).

Professional NGOs dominate pro-Roma civil society, often speaking in the name of 'Roma', while grassroots Romani associations remain weak and fragmented. The case of the pro-Roma movement demonstrates that solidarity can easily turn into hegemony. A very thin layer of transnational Romani activists and professional elite has emerged, but an educated and well-off Roma middle class that could serve as the backbone of an autonomous Roma civil society is hardly perceptible.

On the basis of this case study, three common critiques of the concept of global civil society can be reflected upon in an attempt to develop a more nuanced understanding.

First, global civil society is frequently conceptualised as a progressive response to economic (neoliberal) globalisation and to the hegemony of the United States. Pro-Roma global civil society, in contrast, is often perceived as being under American influence (namely US foundations), supporting the neoliberal agenda by focusing on human rights violations and downplaying more complex social economic processes that have pushed a vast number of Roma to the margins of society.

However, by the early 2000s the human rights approach proved insufficient and even backfired as it reinforced anti-Roma prejudices. Pro-Roma global civil society and the involved international organisations recognised that the misery of large numbers of Roma could not entirely be explained by racism. Consequently, the most recent efforts of the EU[18] centre on the struggle against the economic and social marginalisation of *all* vulnerable and deprived groups.

The case study demonstrates that the agenda of a segment of global civil society is dynamic: it is not fixed on a one-dimensional, anti-neoliberal programme. The focus of pro-Roma global civil society shifted from a focus on self-determination to human rights violations, and finally to social and economic inclusion. Each reflects upon an important segment of reality; however, none of them are sufficient in themselves. For instance, the most recent focus on social exclusion identifies Roma exclusively with misery, thus – unintentionally – it reproduces stereotypes that hinder the social integration of Roma.

Second, global civil society is often conceived as political agency outside the mechanisms of state and international law. Accordingly, global civil society associations are criticised for running after problems and reacting to crises, although their ability to anticipate, plan, prevent and redistribute lags far behind that of the state (Walzer 2004: 181). Pro-Roma global civil society, by contrast, recognises its limits in terms of the redistribution and implementation of nationwide policies; that is why, instead of 'running after problems', they are the catalyst of change and attempt to influence national governments by – amongst other means – developing a regime of soft international law pertaining to Roma.

Third, the democratic credentials of global civil society actors are often questioned (Anderson and Rieff 2004). However, it seems, in general, that it is theorists who assign a representative function to such organisations, rather than the NGOs themselves. Amnesty International and Greenpeace never claimed to represent *anyone*; rather, by providing expertise as consultative members of various international organisations, they represent a *cause*.

The case of Roma is peculiar, as they can also be seen as a non-territorial stateless nation whose interests are not represented sufficiently by their respective states. The International Romani Union (IRU) does claim to represent all Roma of the world, and demands a seat in the UN General Assembly.

The self-appointed 'delegates' of IRU lack democratic legitimacy; however, their main message cannot be dismissed. The Roma are second-class citizens in their home countries and within the EU: they are not equal before the law as their human dignity and fundamental rights are violated on a daily basis without any sanctions; they are not equal members of the political community as their values and interests are not represented at either the local, national or international level; and the noble principle of an equally motivated and gifted Roma having the same chance of realising his or her life plans as non-Roma (in terms of profession, living conditions, leisure, and so on) remains a utopia.

Pro-Roma global civil society plays a crucial role in raising awareness of the legal, political and social marginalisation of Roma. However, Roma actors must lead the struggle for equality. Pro-Roma allies may support them in various ways, but replacing or outweighing Roma activists is counterproductive; it can only result in the further marginalisation and demobilisation of Roma.

Notes

1. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the post-colonial theorist, evoked the term 'epistemic violence' to refer to the domination of Western ways of understanding in contrast to non-Western ways of knowledge production. The destruction and marginalisation of one's way of understanding is always distorting the subaltern reality. Spivak's concept is based on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence, accounting for the tacit, almost unconscious, modes of cultural/social and gender domination or racism occurring within everyday social spaces (Spivak 1988).

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2. Officially the 'Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes' at that time.
3. According to Acton and Klimova-Alexander (2001), representatives of 14 countries participated, whereas Marushiakova and Popov (2004: 78) argue that 'documents of the congress listed delegates from 8 countries, 2 out of which from Eastern Europe (Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia) and observers'.
4. The first congresses were organised 'with the support of Evangelical churches working among the Gypsies, the Pentecostal church in particular. Later on the different Evangelical churches lost interest in the world Romani movement though they are still active among the Gypsies' (Marushiakova and Popov 2004: 79).
5. *Torture and Ill-treatment of Roma*, 1993; *Bulgaria: Turning the Blind Eye to Racism*, 1994; *Romania: Broken Commitments to Human Rights*, 1995.
6. S*truggling for Ethnic Identity: Czechoslovakia's Endangered Gypsies*, 1992; *Struggling for Ethnic Identity: The Gypsies of Hungary*, 1993.
7. Early documents, such as the 1995 Report for the Council of Europe, contained romantic and essentialist views such as 'the increasing mobility since 1990 … is merely a return to the normal mobility of Gypsies'. Later documents were more balanced, although they also talk about Roma in general (usually recognising their heterogeneity in only a footnote).
8. The Copenhagen criteria are the rules that define whether a country is eligible to join the European Union. The criteria require that a state has the institutions to preserve democratic governance and human rights, has a functioning market economy, and accepts the obligations and intent of the EU. These membership criteria were laid down at the June 1993 European Council in Copenhagen, Denmark, from which they take their name.
9. The ERRC continues to prepare submissions for the European Commission on the situation of Roma in EU candidate countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.
10. For instance, every Hungarian government since the democratic transition has produced such Roma strategies in the form of government resolutions setting up various coordinating mechanisms and bodies, and outlining action plans in priority areas.
11. Namely the Open Society Institute, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, the Council of Europe, Council of Europe Development Bank, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, the European Roma Information Office, the European Roma and Traveller Forum, and the European Roma Rights Centre.
12. *No Data – No Progress*, Open Society Foundations, 2010.
13. For instance, a survey carried out by the OSI in 2009 suggests that in some member states, only a limited number of Roma children complete primary school. According to the research Roma children tend to be over-represented in special education and segregated schools. *International Comparative Data Set on Roma Education*, Open Society Institute 2008.
14. Although George Soros, the founder of the OSI, and one of the initiators of the Decade, identified the following achievements of the Decade in 2011: 'It has elevated the importance of tackling the interrelated problems of poverty and discrimination. The Decade has involved the Roma communities and provided a forum to discuss what works and what doesn't. It has encouraged civil society to provide independent evaluation. And it has attracted other states and international organisations to join' (Speech at the International Steering Committee of the Roma Decade held in Prague, 27 June 2011).
15. Amnesty International, European Roma Rights Centre, European Roma Information Office, Open Society Foundations, European Network Against Racism, Minority Rights Group International, European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network, Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, Roma Education Fund, Fundación Secretariado Gitano.
16. In different societies, non-Roma identify 'Gypsies' in different ways. In most (but not all!) countries, darker skin colour is considered as an important marker limiting the possibilities of voluntary assimilation. Furthermore the boundaries between Roma and non-Roma are more rigid in some countries than in others. For instance, in Hungary only about one-third of those perceived as Roma identify themselves as Roma, whereas in Bulgaria the figure is nearly three-quarters (Szelényi and Ladányi 2001).
17. This claim is formulated in the manifesto 'Declaration of Nation' that was circulated in the First World Romani Congress in 2000. The concept of Roma being a non-territorial stateless nation has gradually been adopted by all major international actors.
18. The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 was accepted by all EU bodies (Parliament, Commission, Council) in 2011.

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