CHAPTER 3

Roma in Higher Education
Access Denied

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Introduction

'God created school for the *gadje* [non-Roma]', a Romani student from Serbia recalls being told by her grandmother.[1] And indeed, the extremely low numbers of Romani graduates in Europe raise serious prima facie questions about the exclusion of Roma from higher education and, beyond that, about the quality and equity of Roma education at all levels. Across Central and Eastern Europe, less than 1 per cent of the Romani population have completed higher education (UNDP, 2011). For example, in the Western Balkans, less than 1 per cent of Romani youth are enrolled in tertiary education in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, while 3 per cent of Roma in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Kosovo attend higher educational institutions. In Albania, only 1 per cent of Roma have a higher education degree (Nelaj, Kaçiu, Dundo, & Dervishi, 2012: 54) in comparison to 27 per cent of non-Roma (UNDP Regional Roma Survey, 2017). In Serbia, only 0.7 per cent of Roma have a university degree (Serbian National Strategy for Roma Inclusion, 2016), compared to a 23 per cent rate of tertiary education completion by Serbians as a whole (UNDP Regional Roma Survey, 2017).

It is this low number of Romani graduates that drives us to probe the factors that generate the underprivilege of this section of the population and the broader circumstances that influence Roma's access to higher education. In so doing, we reject the damaging but pervasive racecraft[2]

[1] Interview Romani student in Belgrade, September 2016. Harvard FXB's 'Romani Champions' Project. Additional information about the research project can be found here: https://fxb.harvard.edu/research/adolescent-empowerment/roma-program/rights- and-participation/#champions

[2] Term borrowed from Karen Fields and Barbara Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, Verso, 2012.

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that holds Romani culture responsible for devaluing education and insist, instead, on exploring the roots and false 'justifications' for the enduring and systematic exclusion of Roma from education, including at the level of higher education. (For an analogous argument about indigenous populations, see Garland et al. in this volume.)

The fact that only one in every hundred Romani youth compared to one in every 2.5 non-Roma European youth in the European Union (EUROSTAT, 2019) enters higher education is a troubling marker of structural racism across the continent. Romani students at all levels of education fall behind their non-Roma peers in rates of educational enrolment, attendance and attainment. These discrepancies are the product of both overt and covert forms of exclusion, cumulatively generated by structural and historical inequity, and pervasive economic and political inequalities. And a century-old policy and/or practice of school segregation of Romani children stands as a clear example of overt exclusion.

The legacy of discrimination and inequity generates enduring and pervasive disadvantages – material, social, psychological and symbolic – with daily impacts on Romani children, youth and their families (Matache, 2017). But, as we argue in this chapter, these processes also generate and perpetuate racist ideologies and a belief in Roma 'inferiority', which continue to influence policymaking as well as the behaviours and attitudes of both non-Roma and Roma populations.

Throughout the history of public education, policymakers, scholars and social practitioners have reproduced the same racecraft about Roma: they form part of an inferior culture, and they do not value education. Because of this overriding preconception that has fed a false moral justification for the disparities, the dramatic underrepresentation of Roma in higher education has not generated the appropriate sense of concern and urgency among policymakers charged with realising non-discriminatory educational rights and attainment.

Instead, since the advent of universal public education, there have been continuing accounts of Romani children and youth being rejected, ignored or neglected in schools. For instance, in the early days of public education, in 1881 in London, 'Trinity Cooper, a daughter of this Gypsy family, who was about thirteen years of age, applied to be instructed at the school; but, in consequence of the obloquy affixed to that description of persons, she was repeatedly refused . . . ' (Hoyland, 1816). In 1927, the government of Czechoslovakia adopted a law that 'condemned the Roma as asocial citizens, limited their personal liberty, introduced Gypsy identity cards, and decreed that Romani children under 18 be placed in special

institutions' (Barany cited in M Stewart, M Rovid, MRR VID – 2011). In 1941, the Serbian government ordered 'that schools must stop enrolling children of Jewish and "Gypsy" background'. School segregation, a more institutional form of discrimination, has been a reality for Romani children across Europe for almost a century.[3]

In this chapter, we argue that public education has historically been an institution designed for *gadje* (although less so for *gadjo* girls and the poor), while Romani children and youth, seen as 'inferior and nomadic others', have had no functional option for education and even less for higher education. We explore patterns of exclusion, fear, racism and racialised poverty. We look at historical and present-day instances of state-sponsored injustices, and the so-called moral justifications and reinforcements that have been advanced to support them, in the context of their contemporary consequences for Romani youths' opportunities for higher education.

We argue that schools and universities today, as in the past, remain highly unwelcoming for Romani children and youth, failing in large measure to address pervasive structural racism or to advance inclusion and equity (FRA, 2018). Over the past decades, state efforts, including affirmative action, have been made to correct these failures, efforts that have led to higher education opportunities for some, though not the most marginalised Roma. Thus, in the ensuing pages, we discuss triggers and factors that have been considered particularly beneficial by Romani youth.

We use Serbia as a case study to discuss anti-Romani policies that endure up to the present day. We have chosen to focus on Serbia for several reasons. Serbia is a small country (around 7 million people) with a reasonably large Romani population. Also, the authors have conducted extensive research in Serbia, and one of us is a Serbian Roma.[4]

We rely on data from surveys by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency and other groups. We also draw on quantitative and qualitative data collected in the course of our own research projects in Serbia. These projects include the Harvard FXB Centre's project,

[3] In 1927, Czechoslovakia started to assign Romani children to special schools, allegedly because they exhibited mental disabilities, as shown by Yaron Matras (2015) *I Met Lucky People: The Story of the Romani Gypsies* (Penguin 715 Random House UK).

[4] According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the Roma population numbered 147, 604 in 2011 (the latest census, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2011). Other estimates put the figure of Roma in Serbia at about 500,000 (UNICEF (b) (2007, p. 9). The discrepancy in population size is, in part, a reflection of the fact that many Roma lack personal documents, but also that they frequently have to live in unregistered houses, and feel compelled to conceal their ethnicity from official entities whom they consider oppressive or untrustworthy (Joksic, 2015; Milankovic et al., 2015; Jovanovic, 2018).

Reclaiming Adolescence: Roma Transitions to Adulthood, a participatory action study that explored opportunities and obstacles facing Romani youth trying to access higher education, training and jobs; the FXB Centre's Romani Champions project and One in One Hundred study, which aimed to understand the triggers of success and resilience among the 1 per cent of Roma youth who make it to College (Harvard FXB, 2018); and Tanja Jovanovic's University of Sussex PhD thesis (2018) that examines the influence of socio-political and socio-cultural practices and barriers on Romani youths' access to higher education.

The State of Education for Roma Today

Across the world, the quality of education and skills young people acquire continue to depend on the advantages and opportunities they inherit at birth.[5] The 'Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators' report underlines several critical factors that determine inequity in education, including social and economic status. These include *the level of parental education, immigrant background* and *gender* (OECD, 2018). Thus, although overall all children and youth are legally guaranteed the right to education, reality does not mirror this theoretical entitlement: high-quality education remains a privilege enjoyed mainly by members of families that are relatively wealthy, native-born, educated and non-minority. This is particularly true in the case of higher education.

The quality of education and access to skill training continue to vary both across and within states. Over the past ten years, in most OECD countries, levels of enrolment in educational institutions have risen. In 2016, across OECD countries, an average of 90 per cent of children and youth aged 4–17 were enrolled in education. However, equity in attainment has not improved, with enduring impacts among disadvantaged children and youth and in poorer countries. Parents' education level continues to have a large impact on the educational progress made by their children, too (OECD, 2012).

The school achievement of Romani children and youth across Europe in the past decade underscores these observations and the more general claim that states have yet to ensure equity, inclusion and non-discrimination in education. Evaluations of the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan

[5] Margareta Matache and Simona Barbu wrote the second and fourth sections of this chapter for an unpublished background paper entitled 'Guaranteeing Access to Quality Education for Roma and Sinti Children in the OSCE Area: Obstacles, Practices, and Solutions' in 2018. The text has been improved and updated.

(OSCE/ODIHR, 2013; European Union, 2016), the EU framework (European Commission, 2012) and the Decade of Roma Inclusion (Rorke, Matache and Friedman, 2015), along with recent studies concerning Romani education, show that Roma enrolment in compulsory schooling is improving too but not yet equivalent to that of the majority population overall (FRA, 2018; OSCE/ODIHR, 2013; European Union, 2016). According to the Fundamental Rights Agency, enrolment rates of Romani children increased in several EU countries between 2011 and 2016: '9 out of 10 Roma of compulsory schooling age are enrolled in education, converging towards the general population's enrollment rate' (FRA, 2018). However, in Greece and Romania, enrolment still lags behind: only 7 and 8 out of 10 Roma, respectively, are enrolled in education (FRA, 2018). In Serbia, while 99 per cent of children attend primary school nationwide, this is only the case for 85 per cent of Romani children (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, 2014).

Moreover, despite this notable progress in primary school enrolment, alarming numbers of young Roma continue to be pushed out of school early. In 7 EU countries – Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Spain, Hungary, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia – though the average rate of early dropout fell from 87 per cent to 68 per cent between 2011 and 2016 (FRA Statements in European Commission, 2018), 7 out of 10 Roma aged 18–24 still left school early (FRA, 2018). The dropout and completion rates are even more problematic in the Western Balkans; in Serbia, 36 per cent of Romani children do not finish primary school, compared to only 7 per cent of non-Romani children (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, 2014). As a European Commission (2014) report underlines, 'beyond compulsory schooling, enrollment differences between Roma and non-Roma become even larger'.

The effects of exclusion are highly visible if one compares the data on Roma and non-Roma populations. In the case of Serbia, the Regional Roma survey conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and the European Commission in 2011 found that Roma attend school for five years less on average than non-Roma. The preschool enrolment rate of children in the age group 3–6 years differs by as much as 30 per cent between Roma (18 per cent) and non-Roma (48 per cent). For compulsory education, only 80 per cent of Roma compared to 95 per cent of non-Roma children aged 7–15 in Serbia attend school. These differences increase through children's educational careers: only 22 per cent of Romani children compared to 89 per cent of non-Romani children enrol in secondary education (Statistical Office of the

Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, 2014). Also, for the 16–24 age group, only 25 per cent of Roma are enrolled in education, compared to 71 per cent of their non-Romani peers (Jovanovic, 2018). The participation of Roma in higher education is thus 16 times smaller than their Serbian peers (EQUI-ED, 2012). In sum, Romani enrolment in high school and College in Serbia remains extremely low and disproportionately so when compared to the majority population (Danvers, Smith, Jovanovic, 2017; FRA, 2012).

These alarming numbers and trends regarding Roma participation in secondary and tertiary education reflect realities and policy design at the European level. The disparities noted for Serbia apply across Europe: only 12 per cent complete secondary education and only 1 per cent are enrolled in higher education[6] (FRA, 2014).

The Serbian government has attempted to address these disparities by introducing measures designed to increase the numbers of Roma enrolled in higher education (Jovanovic, 2018). The 2003 affirmative action policy included reserved seats for Romani youth in universities and tuition-free places; the Secretariat for Roma National Strategy was charged with forwarding a list of Romani candidates who had passed relevant qualifying exams to the Ministry of Education, which in turn had the power to authorise free access to higher education institutions. This affirmative policy concentrated on one outcome of cumulative discrimination, the question of physical access to higher education. While a critical issue, changing physical access alone is not sufficient to address the multifaceted effects of racism, including the persistent and fundamental issue of discrimination and stigmatisation in compulsory Serbian education, and alongside that racism the culture of racist impunity that persists throughout Serbian higher education institutions. These accumulated legacies of oppressive behaviour have not been addressed and thus continue to negatively impact Romani students' journeys throughout their studies (Jovanovic, 2018). This approach to affirmative action is what Ahmed (2012) has called the 'tick box' approach to inclusion policy implementation, where insufficient attention is paid to the actual implementation of inclusion (Jovanovic, 2018).

What is more, even the well-intentioned affirmative action policy has been retrenched over the past year, with the number of available reserved

[6] Survey conducted in eleven EU countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Spain, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia) with Roma respondents between 18 and 24 years.

seats in universities decreased and entry conditions increased, making access increasingly difficult for Romani students.

The challenge of improving Roma higher education enrolment numbers and attainment remains, while many policymakers and academics continue to draw on the racist imagery of an 'inferior' Roma culture to inform the measures they design for Roma education (Matache, 2017). The EU Roma Framework merely aimed to 'encourage' the Roma to 'also' participate in secondary and tertiary education, instead of setting clear benchmarks for governments, with the predictable result that only minimal enrolment changes occurred (Matache, 2017).

These numbers, challenges and factors unveil a complex web of root causes, starting with the long history of racialised marginalisation and exclusion and racialised rights intersecting with economic exploitation and consequently with deep poverty, ideological hatred and institutional racism. We discuss some of these factors in the following sections.

The Racecraft of a Culture that 'Does Not Value Education': A Case Study of the History of Public Education in Serbia

Across the centuries, anti-Romani racist ideologies, policies and practices have, in various ways, justified the rejection of Roma from school systems. Along with the institutions themselves, European scholars have shaped or contributed to the racialisation of the Roma that underpins and justifies this exclusion (Matache, 2017). For instance, in 1927, the creation of special schools for Romani children in Czechoslovakia (Matras, 2014) was justified through the lens of scientific racism. By using 'science' to label Roma as 'inferior', specialists offered 'moral reinforcement' for school segregation, perpetuating the deeply held collective belief that 'Roma culture does not value education'. This racecraft presented 'itself to the mind and imagination as a vivid truth' (Fields and Fields, 2012). Romani children were considered inferior and undesirable, and the same arguments have been used to justify the continuation of school segregation to the present day in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Serbia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Thus, the racecraft of an 'uneducated people' continues to have the power to reinforce and 'morally' justify the exclusion and rejection of Roma from schools and universities up to the present day. And indeed, race and racism 'arise historically', and as Karen Fields and Barbara Fields argue, racecraft is 'imagined, acted upon, and re-imagined, the action and imagining inextricably intertwined' (Fields and Fields, 2012).

At the same time, education is a product of the cultural practices and the history in which it is rooted. As Altbach et al. have noted, the content and structure of educational institutions are socially constructed realities, which are influenced by external socio-cultural factors and traditions (Altbach et al., 1996). Educational institutions are thus deeply rooted in the historical experience of a particular country and community and are the result of accumulated historical changes.

In the case of the Roma in Serbia, we argue that the racecraft of the Roma as an 'inferior, uneducated people', combined with racialised poverty and rights and a history of state-sponsored injustice, has contributed to the situation that exists today: an educational caste system, with Romani children segregated, bullied or mistreated in schools, and, consequently and predictably, dramatically low higher education outcomes for Romani youth.

For centuries, Serbian Roma have been met with violence and rejection, from the cruelty of enslavement[7] and the violence of deportations and killings during the Holocaust to the assimilationist policies and educational caste system still in force today.

Public education in Serbia proved to be hard to establish. Monasteries were the earliest sites of education and literacy, starting with the Middle Ages when the clergy acted as teachers for the children of noblemen. The critical role of religion and of the church in spreading education is evident in Serbia, where 'conditions for literacy development among the Serbs were created by accepting Christianity' (Spasenovic, Petrovic and Maksic, 2015) from the nineteenth century onwards. In 1844, the first law on public education was adopted ('Law of school establishment') (Karanovich, 1979). And although laws, policies and efforts to increase the educational network throughout the country continued, towards the end of the nineteenth century only one-fifth of Serbian children were in school.

Serbia's public school system only grew substantially in the first half of the twentieth century (Spasenovic, Petrovic and Maksic, 2015), more or less at the same time as the belief in Roma's 'racial inferiority' was being reinforced 'scientifically'. This period coincided with an increase in Roma murders, anti-Romani sentiments and Roma rejection from schools.

During the Holocaust, Roma experienced systematic genocide. Once the German occupation was established, Serbia submitted to the order to

[7] The literature documents instances of the enslavement of Roma in Serbia as early as 1348, when a document noted that Serbian emperor Stefan Dušan donated a number of *gypsy slaves* to a monastery in Prizren (now in Kosovo) (Djordjević, 1924).

work towards the *final solution* and applied this to both the Roma and the Jews, considered equally inferior (Pisarri, 2014). In the former Yugoslavia, legislators made it legal to discriminate against Roma. A series of measures towards Roma and Jews called the 'twenty-two articles' were adopted between 1941 and 1942. One article required both Roma and Jews to wear yellow armbands, to distinguish themselves in public: for Jews, the armband read 'Jevrejin', and for 'gypsies' it read 'Ciganin'. Both groups were also forbidden from working as public servants or as lawyers, doctors, dentists, veterinarians or pharmacists and were not allowed in public places such as theatres and cinemas. Another article stated that Serbian authorities were obliged to keep Jews and Roma separated from the majority of the population.

In September 1941, a notorious act of institutional racism, built on the racecraft of Roma and Jew racial inferiority, took place: the Ministry of Education ordered schools not to enrol Romani and Jewish children, 'if they belong to the territory of the Military Commander in Serbia'. On 21 October 1941, another order read, 'quisling authorities issued the Main directive about the University, within which article 27 stipulated that "Jews and Gypsies cannot attend University [Colleges]"' (Pisarri, 2014).

While the situation of Roma in communist Yugoslavia was regarded as more acceptable than in the other communist countries, after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, although the Roma were a recognised national, ethnic minority, their conditions of life in Serbia have still been extremely harsh. Some live 'displaced, subsisting in camps, shacks and metal containers, facing the constant threat of forced evictions; harried and harassed, enduring ethnic profiling, police violence and racist intimidation' (Rorke, 2016), with little practical recognition or effort from the state to improve their lives.

One policy measure in particular disproportionately hurt Roma access to education: the government reduced the numbers of rural schools. The so-called rationalisation of the school network meant the closing of small schools and the merging of classes; this increased the number of students per school, mostly in the rural marginal areas where many Roma live. With little or no transportation, many children had no way to reach school or higher educational institutions. As a 2003 study found, 23 per cent of children had no access to transportation and children in some communities had to walk between 4 and 15 km to reach a school (Bogojević et al., 2003). Even in 2010, 'less than 40% of Roma settlements' had a preschool institution within a 1 km radius, and 'for 20% of the settlements, even elementary school is inaccessible' (Government of Serbia, 2010).

Segregation has also constituted an alarming practice of public schools, schoolmasters and teachers in Serbia. A 2010 study underlined 'widespread discrimination in the educational system' and confirmed that 'approximately 30 percent of children within special education in the Republic of Serbia are Roma', although Roma represented only between 2 per cent (official data) and 8 per cent (estimated) of the total Serbian population. World Bank data from 2004 estimated that 50 to 80 per cent of the children enrolled in special schools in Serbia were Roma. (Open Society Foundations, 2010).

Among other factors, these examples of institutional racism, executed across these key political regimes, have had dramatic and enduring impacts on Roma as targets and Serbians as perpetrators or bystanders of discrimination. A 2018 study by the Harvard FXB Centre and the Belgrade Centre for Interactive Pedagogy found that in Serbia, Romani youths, whether or not enrolled in College, face ongoing hardships and discrimination. Most adolescents belong to low-income families and have experienced poverty. Discrimination and stigmatisation in schools and biased teachers and peers continue to prevent Romani children and youth from fulfilling their actual educational potential. Some of the Romani youth participating in the study had internalised mainstream anti-Romani racism (Bhabha et al., 2018) – racism does convey itself not only through ideologies, institutions and dominant societies but also through the internalisation of stigma and racism.

Thus, when Roma believe that school is made for *gadje*, they are not pointing to the values of their own culture. They are reactive to a structural system of oppression and an education system that has cast out Roma from the start.

Present-Day Factors Affecting Roma Access to Higher Education

A multiplicity of intersecting societal and institutional present-day factors also prevent Romani children and youth from acquiring higher education. The following are some of the key elements.

Racialised Poverty and Politics that Punish Poverty

The social and economic environments in which children grow are strong determinants of inequalities and opportunity gaps in education and the labour market. The intergenerational transmission of poverty compounds the impact of those factors (Walker, Sinfield & Walker, 2011). The UNDP

Regional Roma survey found that in Serbia, 10 per cent of Romani people live in households with a per capita income under US$2.15 per day (Dotcho, 2012); 30 per cent of Roma in Serbia live on an income of US$4.30 per day or less. The generalised and racialised poverty of Romani people means that parents cannot provide the basic preconditions for their children to continue school or even to live decently. Given this situation, many Romani parents cannot afford the preschool education critical for child development and eventual enrolment in higher education.

Kindergarten Experience

Early childhood services lay the foundation not only for attainment in education but also more broadly for future learning, achievement and professional and social life. In some Romani communities, especially in rural areas, kindergarten facilities either do not exist or are seriously underdeveloped, 'often located under bridges, squeezed between factories, in the dump areas, or other degraded sites' (Milovanovic, 2013).

As the OECD data show, the kindergarten experience shapes the level of education for children across the OECD countries. Preschool education experiences provide children with the skills and abilities they need to perform well in school and advance successfully through the education system. This is as true of Romani children as of any other group. A recent study found that a significantly larger share of Roma College students in Serbia (63 per cent) had attended kindergarten compared to a comparable group of Romani non-student respondents (44 per cent) (Bhabha et al., 2018).

The Levels of Parents' Education

As the OECD data show, the level of parental education also provides a strong predictor of children's level of education. Among Romani children and youth, the likelihood of having a family member who has completed higher education is very low: in the past decade, across countries, the enrolment of Roma in higher education has remained at around 1 per cent in College and 12 per cent in high school. A 2018 Harvard and Center for Interactive Pedagogy study found that in Serbia, the lower level of education among their parents and close relatives wounded Roma youths' educational attainment and trajectory. Primary education constituted the highest level of education for 35 per cent of the parents of Romani youth non-students. The parents of Romani College students, by contrast,

had higher levels of education, with only 17 per cent of them reporting primary education as their final educational attainment (Bhabha et al., 2018). The report also found that 'the College students had more close relatives attending or who had graduated from College: 64% in the Romani student group, compared with only 43% in the comparison Romani non-student group' (Bhabha et al., 2018).

Unwelcoming Mixed Schools

The combination of deep-rooted anti-Roma racism and discrimination in the school environment persists as a reality for Romani children and youth in Serbia. Of the Romani students who are enrolled in regular schools as part of the compulsory education system and attend classes in mixed (Roma and non-Roma Serbian) classrooms, between 10 per cent and 30 per cent report exposure to peer harassment experiences that seriously disadvantage them and leave them, and their families, questioning whether to continue attending school (Jovanovic, 2018). Peer harassment can be viewed as an 'uncompromising clash', including physical and verbal violence, mistreatment, oppression and social manipulation – involving social exclusion, itself a form of what Johan Galtung has called 'structural violence'.[8]

Negative peer relations can lead to negative outcomes such as psychological difficulties and dropping out of school (Rubin, Both and Wilkinson, 1990; Jovanovic, 2018). Bullying is a constant in many classrooms. In Serbia, 75 per cent of the Romani pupils interviewed by the European Roma Rights Centre in 2014 answered that they are bullied in mainstream schools because of their ethnicity (ERRC, 2016b), confirming the more general finding that in ethnically diverse classrooms, students who are in a statistical minority are more likely to be exposed to harassment and vulnerability than their majority peers (Phillips, 2011). What is more, children who are victims of peer harassment or rejection frequently experience problems later in life, including a lack of confidence, feelings of isolation, social anxiety and depression (Jovanovic, 2018; Juvonen and Graham, 2001; Olweus, 2003, 2007). Such phenomena affect Romani children's participation and performance in education and can disturb their social and emotional development. In 2014, the Fundamental Rights Agency found that a 'hostile school environment' and 'safety

[8] Johan Galtung was referring to a form of violence wherein some social structure or social institution may harm people by deliberately preventing them from meeting their most basic needs.

concerns' were issues that Roma expected to encounter in school. School attainment, along with enrolment and attendance, is heavily influenced by the experience of discrimination and anti-Roma racism at school.

In a 2017 article, the Harvard FXB team demonstrated a correlation between Roma youths' experience with discrimination and career aspirations: as discrimination grows, Romani youth become less confident and more pragmatic about their aspirations and desired careers (Bhabha et al., 2018). Even those Romani students who make it to College report earlier experiences with discrimination: 58 per cent of Romani College students interviewed for a study in Serbia said they had experienced discrimination in either primary or secondary school (Bhabha et al., 2018). Students shared experiences when they were met with dehumanising and racialised verbal messages by peers in school:

> 'Little Gypsy girl' was the only way they described me in class. I just felt humiliated, I was fifteen, and I just felt miserable and humiliated.
>
> They called me a Roma, said I lived in a garbage container and these are some of the reasons why I withdrew into myself . . . (Bhabha et al., 2018)

But by contrast with Romani non-students, the College attendees had had the fortune of mentorship by teachers who had not based their expectations or support on skin colour and class. These students also reported close contacts with friendly non-Roma peers who had supported their Romani peers against discrimination (Bhabha et al., 2018).

Moreover, in nearly all schools, the vast majority of teachers are non-Roma. Along with the bias against or neglect of Romani people in the syllabus, this sets up the attitude that it is normative to be white European.

A Caste System in Schools

Although public policies related to Romani children include ideas of justice and equity in education, these ideals are often not applied or achieved in practice. The segregated educational institutions where Romani children are placed feature classrooms which, though described as 'inclusive', routinely relegate Romani children to the back rows, whereteachers ignore them (ERRC, 2017). At best, these spaces and practices focus on preventing illiteracy; they do not encourage Roma children to succeed.

In the Serbian context, because of isolation, some Romani children start school with poor comprehension of Serbian, an obstacle that is used to create barriers to enrolment and learning in mainstream schools. School

representatives have highlighted the language difficulties of Romani children in Serbia whose families originate from Kosovo, but frequently Serbian-born Romani children are also forced to learn separately from their Serbian peers (ERRC, 2003). Some Romani children do not perform well in entry testing, because of inadequate prior exposure to preschool and, related to this, poor Serbian language competence (Bhabha et al., 2018). Yet, as the European Court of Human Rights jurisprudence shows, 'language deficiency cannot serve as a pretext for racial segregation' (James A. Goldston in ERRC, 2010).

Overrepresentation of Roma in special schools in Serbia is high (Open Society Institute, 2010). In 2009, UNICEF estimated that 50–80 per cent of the children placed in the 80 special schools across Serbia were Roma (UNICEF, 2009), while the Strategy of the Serbian Government showed that '30% of all children in 'special schools' are of Romani ethnicity' (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2016). This discriminatory practice of consigning Romani children to so-called special schools provides a substandard education that inhibits educational progression or future gainful employment.

Increased segregation of Romani children in separate classes within the 'mainstream education facilities' is striking, too (Civil Rights Defenders, 2017). Some school representatives justify the segregation of Romani children by citing a lack of space (ERRC, 2016a). In 2007, reports mentioned 'satellite facilities close to Roma settlements'; in other words, schools had built separate buildings for Romani children (OSI, 2017). These practices perpetuate the sense that Romani children are inferior and undermine the rights, dignity, motivation and self-esteem essential for educational success.

Poor Quality of Education

Researchers have found that teachers tend to encourage and work more with higher-performing students (Henricsson and Rydell, 2004) and to favour children from families with higher socio-economic status (Brophy, 1998). Children who achieve less often do not benefit from positive interactions with teachers. As a result, the school can become a space where they are uncomfortable, which often leads them to drop out. Teacher expectations might also differ based on the children's gender.

Such discouraging behaviour among teachers has a particular effect on children belonging to marginalised and minority groups (McKown & Weinstein, 2002). In particular, it has had a boomerang effect on the

attainment of Romani children. All too often, teachers approach their interactions with Romani children, parents and community members with minimal expectations and with prejudice based on their perception that Romani families and the culture reject education. Children absorb their teachers' expectations when they should be developing their sense of self-esteem and their motivation to continue in education.

Moreover, schools with a higher portion of Romani children often lack qualified personnel; skilled teachers are more likely to move to more urban, non-Roma and wealthy schools. Also, as in Romania, absenteeism among teachers is higher in educational establishments where Romani children study (Romani CRISS, CURS, REF, 2012). But in Serbia, a practical problem with teaching competences is that the teachers often ignore the absences of Romani children; they hold lower expectations and lesser educational objectives for them, and schools rarely include Romani students in extracurricular activities (Jovanovic, 2013). Similarly, Baucal observed that teachers tend to place more Romani than non-Romani students into classes with the lowest quality of teaching; in these settings, students are not encouraged adequately and typically receive 'shortened' or 'simplified' curricula (Jovanovic, 2013).

The training of Serbian teachers may also be problematic. It is mainly focused on subject knowledge and neglects components that are essential for an inclusive education practice, including trans-cultural educational and communication skills (Zgaga, 2006). Inclusive education and anti-racist skills should be factored into initial teacher education as an integral and organic part of the core curriculum, rather than included merely as an optional add-on component (Jovanovic, 2013).

A White Curriculum

In the schools that Romani and other minority and marginalised children attend, the curricula continue to neglect or misrepresent the history, realities or culture of these people. Teachers in Serbia regularly fail to adopt curriculum topics that relate to the life experiences of all children in their classrooms (Jovanovic, 2013). A variety of 'innocent' teaching strategies used by teachers have the effect (whether intended or not) of completely excluding some children from classroom discussion (Macura-Milovanović, 2008b). For example, it is common for teachers to give children homework essay topics such as 'A view from my room' or 'My holiday . . .'. For children who live in tin or wooden shacks, and who rarely go outside their neighbourhood, let alone on holiday, these topics are likely

to provoke feelings of pain and lack of belonging. Not only would these students be unable to relate to these assignments meaningfully, but more insidiously, they might well experience humiliation and embarrassment as their poverty and exclusion from the rest of the class are highlighted (Macura-Milovanović, 2008b).

Ethnocentric, chauvinistic and parochial attitudes to education on the part of the Serbian authorities reproduce discriminatory, nationalistic social norms and institutionalise racism and prejudice (Jovanovic, 2013). They deny Romani and other minority and marginalised children positive role models and instead project onto them feelings of 'othering' and exclusion. In turn, these factors and other aspects of exclusivist, white curricula reduce the chances that Romani and other minority and marginalised children will proceed with their education and accumulate the pedagogical experiences required to attend higher education.

All the factors mentioned above that are informed and fed by the racecraft of 'inferior people' have contributed and continue to this day to contribute to Romani children's negative school experience and to the indifference of societies and policymakers towards the urgent imperative of generating substantive educational change.

It is this toxic mixture of historical and present-day factors that also leads Roma to internalise the self-image of a group who 'do not want to integrate' or 'do not value education'. Recent studies have shown that an extremely low number of Roma manage to enrol in and graduate from higher education, across Europe. In this context, one of the most relevant questions is: *what makes the difference for the 1 per cent who succeed and achieve a higher level in education*?

Few researchers have focused on the elements of success and resilience to understand how to overcome challenges. One such study is the Harvard FXB and Center for Interactive Pedagogy study 'One in One Hundred' (Bhabha et al., 2018), which analysed the success triggers influencing the educational outcomes of the outliers among the Romani youth[9] who, despite all the odds, succeeded in securing a university education. Among the factors identified by the study, one of the most salient was the influence of an inclusive environment that provides students with confidence in themselves.

Other factors highlighted by the study reflect the points made above. They include access to early childhood education services, financial aid,

[9] Two groups of children have been involved in the research, one of 89 Romani adolescents attending College and a comparison group of 100 adolescents who were not students.

moral support from families and teachers, prior role models within the family, mentorship and friendship of non-Romani allies, including both teachers and peers. More than 60 per cent of Romani youth who received a higher education had attended kindergarten, compared to only 44 per cent of Romani youth who only had reached secondary education. Almost half of the College group compared to 18 per cent in the other group also received some form of financial support during secondary school. Also, 64 per cent of the College group, compared with only 43 per cent of the comparison group, had close relatives who attended or graduated from higher education (Bhabha et al., 2018).

The Harvard FXB and Center for Interactive Pedagogy study found that an additional contributory factor to Roma higher education enrolment was the involvement of teachers with a belief in Romani students' intellectual potential and an active commitment to countering discrimination: 'They believed in my potential and always wanted to find out whether there was any problem underneath what was happening' (Bhabha et al., 2018).

As the study concluded, '[w]hat Romani children most need for educational success is what all children need: good schools, characterized by equity and inclusion, with unbiased, supportive, and well-prepared teachers' (Bhabha et al., 2018).

Reflections and Conclusions

For too long, a collective belief in Romani laziness, criminality, illiteracy and inferiority has been used as 'moral reinforcement' for justifying racialised poverty, racialised neighbourhoods, racialised education and, more generally, racialised access to rights in Europe.

For generations, Romani families have struggled to overcome obstacles to ensure their children have access to a good education. They have been told that school was not for Roma, and many believed it. Rejection by schools from the early stages of education but also a toxic, unwelcoming or culturally insensitive school environment made Roma believe that schools were only for the *gadje*. The racecraft of 'inferiority' has enforced, reinforced, justified, imagined and reimagined ideas, policies and measures that have kept Romani children away from high schools and universities. Structural racism, social and economic obstacles, and other intersectional factors (discussed above) have been the means to achieve these ends.

Identifying tools to dismantle the racecraft of a 'backward culture that does not value education' is essential to success in achieving better

educational outcomes for Romani children. There will still be families that will not enrol their children in school or value school because of previous negative experiences and internalised apprehension about the educational environment. But regardless, inclusive and anti-racist education and the belief in Romani children's potential are a must for all teachers, as such steps make an essential difference in enabling Romani children to attend and thrive within an educational system. Those Romani students who succeeded in getting a higher education in Serbia pointed to the support from non-racist and anti-racist teachers who did not look at them as inferior and who believed in their capacity to learn. They also emphasised the importance of a welcoming school environment and non-racist peers (Bhabha et al., 2018). Thus, teacher training and support are critical. To facilitate inclusive education, teachers need to have practical experience of promoting it, and they need support in introducing higher educational standards and expectations across the school population.

The fact that many more Romani children now have access to primary school than they did is a most welcome development but one that cannot stand on its own. As enrolment ratios grow, so does the number of Romani children learning in segregated and low-quality school environments. Segregation persists in mainstream schools. Romani children across Europe continue to be placed in separate classes or not allowed into common areas. In such classes, the quality of education is much lower, and teachers expect less from the students. These enduring inequities vitiate the potentially beneficial impact of expanded educational access. Negative results will only perpetuate the racist belief of Roma failure and educational incompetence.

Despite policies and practices aimed at removing historical barriers to rights, racism – in all its forms from ideological to structural, and from interpersonal to internalised – persists on multiple levels. Racism also intersects with a range of factors that include gender and class, constantly thwarting the progressive intent of inclusivist educational policy and practice (Mirza, 2006). This combination of factors continues to push Romani children and youth out of school and deny them their right to higher education, even as educational institutions and governmental agencies attempt to promote more inclusivist agendas.

Gadjoness,[10] like whiteness, has been privileged and institutionalised and can only be effectively countered and deconstructed if educators,

[10] As defined by Matache here: https://fxb.harvard.edu/2016/10/05/word-image-and-thought-creating-the-romani-other/

activists and broader state institutions recognise the reality and the effects of anti-Roma racism, stigmatisation and discrimination. Education reform needs to start by dismantling the racecraft of 'inferiority' from ideology, policies and practice and by promoting anti-racism and inclusion in education.

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